



Religious Studies 2270F/G (570)
Religious Perspectives on Death and Dying
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: Knight-Messenger, Andrew

Email: aknigh28@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

A survey of beliefs about death and dying as articulated in the world's major religious and spiritual traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Indigenous and African spiritualities. Topics include beliefs about the afterlife and ritual practices.

Antirequisite(s): [Thanatology 2270F/G](#), [Religious Studies 2291F/G](#) if taken in 2021-22 and [Thanatology 2296F/G](#) if taken in 2021-22.

Extra Information: 3 hours; cross-listed with [Thanatology 2270F/G](#).

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.



**Thanatology/Religious Studies 2270F (570)
Religious Perspectives on Death and Dying
2025-2026**

Professor: Andrew Knight-Messenger

Email: aknigh28@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Fridays, 1:30 PM-2:30 PM via Zoom; or by appointment

Course Description:

A survey of beliefs about death and dying as articulated in the world's major religious and spiritual traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Indigenous and African spiritualities. Topics include beliefs about the afterlife and ritual practices.

Course Objectives:

Upon the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the differences between views on death and dying in the world's major religions;
2. Outline the basic history the development of understandings of death and dying in major world religions;
3. Consider the relationship between religious perspectives on death and dying with philosophical frameworks;
4. Critically evaluate disparate scholarly interpretations of contemporary issues in the academic study of death and dying in religious studies

Prerequisite(s): None

Antirequisite(s): Thanatology 2270F/G, and Religious Studies 2291F/G if taken in 2021-22 and Thanatology 2296F/G if taken in 2021-22.

Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course requisites have been successfully completed, and

that they are aware of any anti-requisite course(s) that they have taken. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that this course is not an anti-requisite to another course.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Required Readings:

The following materials are **required reading** for students in this course:

1. Steven J. Rosen. *Ultimate Journey: Death and Dying in the World's Major Religions*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008). Available for purchase at the Western University Bookstore.
Link: <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/product/9780313356087> Cost: \$82.15
2. Other readings, which are available on OWL and electronically.

Other Course Materials:

Additional material (news stories, videos, websites, etc.), available at no cost, will be posted online throughout the course. Engaging with these materials will be necessary in order to participate actively in the course.

Any assigned articles can be found through the Western library website, online or through links in OWL.

Online and Electronic Course Components:

OWL: In this course we will be using OWL for the online components of the course. Please refer to the course site on OWL for the most authoritative and up-to-date course outline, schedule, assignment guidelines, and other resources.

Digital Submissions: All written work in this course (i.e. the Research Paper, and Literature Discussion Circle worksheets) and must be submitted electronically to OWL before the due date. Written assignments will be submitted via the digital "Assignments" tab on OWL. Many file types are compatible with the submission system, including Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, PostScript, Adobe Acrobat (.pdf), or Rich Text (.rtf) files. If your word processing program uses a file type not listed here, please contact the instructor to check compatibility.

Written Assignments: All written assignments are to be typed and double-spaced, and written in 12p Times New Roman. Please include a title page with your name, student number and email address, the topic title of the assignment and the date submitted.

Submitting Assignments Electronically: Individual assignments submitted electronically must somehow include your last name in the filename, e.g. Smith_Assignment_5_Article_Assessments.pdf

Late Submissions: All written work is due at 11:59 PM on Fridays on OWL, unless other arrangements have been made in advance with the instructor. Late assignments will be penalized 3% a day (weekends [Saturday and Sunday] will count as one day).

The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course during the term. If modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her Western email and OWL weekly during the term and to note any changes

Disclaimer: Please note that, unless otherwise noted, the lectures, presentations, videos, and assignment descriptions in this course are the intellectual property of Andrew Knight-Messenger. Therefore, students should not share or disseminate class materials beyond the classroom.

Evaluation and Assignments

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date
Final Exam	30%	TBA (End of Fall Term, 2025)
Research Paper	30%	November 21, 2025
Literature Circle	20% (4 worksheets worth 4% each; and 1 class led discussion worth 4%)	4 – Due throughout the Fall 2025 Term (Please refer to Weekly Schedule for due dates)
Participation and Engagement (This includes: attendance, in-class group work, AND spontaneous submissions [Either Online or In-Class])	20%	Throughout the Fall 2025 Term

Class Participation, and Engagement – 20%: Class participation and engagement is an important component of this course. Therefore, it is expected that all students will be ‘active’ participants in this course. This means attending all classes, being actively involved in class activities and thoughtful discussion, and completing all assignments.

Your participation grade will be significantly influenced by your active involvement in class, and the quality of that involvement. Lack of participation, or ‘negative participation’, will also significantly influence your participation grade (but in a negative

way)! And just so you are aware of the types of activities or behaviours that will be considered 'negative' class participation, they include the following: missing classes, talking to classmates about things that are not a contribution to the class discussion, general nonparticipation in or disruption of class/class activities, sleeping during class, coming to class late or leaving early, and distracted use of any of the following electronic devices: cell phones, mp3 players, iPods, iPads, and other electronic devices. Computers may be used in class but ONLY for note taking purposes. Evidence of using the computer for anything other than note taking will be considered negative class participation.

The success of this course depends on you. The students who are most successful in this course fulfill these expectations, and engage in all aspects of the course.

Literature Circle Assignment – 20%: In preparation for our classes on September 22, September 29, October 20, and October 27 every student is required to:

- 1) Read *ALL* of the assigned sections of the text for *Ultimate Journey*, and other course readings.
- 2) Complete in appropriate detail the Literature Circle Worksheets (one for each Literature Circle week). The Worksheet will be provided on OWL. This is your preparation for the discussions for the upcoming in-class sessions on September 22, September 29, October 20, and October 27, 2025. You will bring an e-copy or a hard copy of the worksheets with you to class on September 22, September 29, October 20, and October 27, 2025. The e-copies of these worksheets are due in the 'Assignments' area in our OWL course site by September 19, September 26, October 10, and October 24, 2025 at 11:59 PM. A total of four worksheets will be submitted per person (one for each section listed below).

In addition, each student will be required to assume leadership of one Literature Circle discussion session on September 22, September 29, October 20, and October 27, 2025. **A list detailing which session each student has been assigned to lead can be found on OWL.** Leadership involves ensuring enough meaningful discussion is generated in your discussion group to keep members on-task and on-topic for 20 minutes. (N.B.: You will be put into a group of students who have been assigned a *different Literature Circle* than you in-class on September 22, September 29, October 20, and October 27, 2025.) No additional written preparation is necessary, other than the Discussion Leader's own Literature Circle worksheet; however, a discussion Leader may wish to have some 'back-up' questions prepared in case the discussion falters. (This is a very good idea.) For those groups that have only three members, the final discussion will be led collaboratively on the week where there is no set Discussion Leader.

Each Literature Circle worksheet is valued at 4%, and leading discussion in one session is worth 4%. Value 20% = 4% per worksheet (4 worksheets x 4% = 16%) + 4% for one group led session. Please note that attendance for each Literature Circle Discussion session is mandatory, and contributes to class participation and engagement.

Papers:

General Guidelines: Each submission should include a title page with your name, student number, e-mail address, the topic title of the assignment and the date upon which you submitted the assignment. All submissions should be double spaced and written in 12pt Times New Roman with 1" margins. Research Papers should be submitted to Assignments on OWL.

N.B.: Additional guidelines for papers will be given in class and are available on OWL.

Research Paper – 30%: Students will write a research paper. The paper must be 2500 words in length. The due date of the Research Paper is November 21, 2025. The Research Paper will be assessed according to clarity, depth and thoughtfulness of response, attention to detail, creativity, critical analysis, and quality of research. The Research Paper should employ at least six relevant, peer-reviewed sources (journal articles, essays and/or books). Additional instructions will be provided in-class.

Final Exam – 30%: This is a cumulative exam. Students are responsible for the breadth of information included in the readings and lectures from weeks 1-12. The Final Exam will be set during the university's Fall, 2025 examination period, and will be set by the Registrar's Office. Additional details about the Final Exam will be discussed in class.

Course Schedule

Date	Required Reading	Assignments Due (By 11:59 PM, Fridays)	Class Topics
	FALL	TERM	
(Week 1) September 8, 2025			Introduction
(Week 2) September 15, 2025	Rosen, Introduction; Ezekiel 37 (Available at biblegateway.com ; Daniel 12 (Available at: biblegateway.com); <i>The Testament of Abraham</i> (Available at: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1007.htm)	<i>Literature Circle 1 - Worksheet</i> (4%)	Death and Dying in Ancient Israelite Religion and Early Judaism

(Week 3) September 22, 2025	Rosen, Chapter 1, pp. 1-20	<i>Literature Circle 1 – Discussion (in-class on September 22, 2025)</i> <i>Literature Circle 2 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	Death and Dying in Contemporary Judaism
(Week 4) September 29, 2025	Rosen, Chapter 2, pp. 21-58	<i>Literature Circle 2 – Discussion (in-class on September 29, 2025)</i>	Death and Dying in Christianity
(Week 5) October 6, 2025	Rosen, Chapter 3, pp. 59-82	<i>Literature Circle 3 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	Death and Dying in Islam
October 13, 2025			THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)
(Week 6) October 20, 2025	Rosen, Chapter 5, pp. 115-154	<i>Literature Circle 3 – Discussion (in-class on October 20, 2025)</i> <i>Literature Circle 4 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	Death and Dying in Hinduism
(Week 7) October 27, 2025	Rosen, Chapter 4, pp. 83-114	<i>Literature Circle 4 – Discussion (in-class on October 27, 2025)</i>	Death and Dying in Buddhism
November 3, 2025			FALL READING WEEK (NO CLASS)

(Week 8) November 10, 2025	Chryssides, G. D. (2012), "Heaven's Gate" (N.B.: Available at: https://wrldreels.org/2016/02/25/heavens-gate-3/)		Death and Dying in New Religious Movements (Case Study on Heaven's Gate)
(Week 9) November 17, 2025	Matthew Watton, "A Platonic Argument for the Immortality of the Soul in Cicero", <i>Classical Quarterly</i> 72(2): 640-657 (N.B.: Available via Western Libraries)	<i>Research Paper (30%)</i>	Immortality and the Soul
(Week 10) November 24, 2025	Bruce Greyson, "Western Scientific Approaches to Near-Death Experiences" (N.B.: Available via OWL)		Near Death Experiences (NDEs)
(Week 11) December 1, 2025	Rosen, Conclusion, pp.155- 186		Treating Death and Dying as a Chaplaincy
(Week 12) December 8, 2025			Conclusion
TBA		<i>Final Exam (TBA by the Registrar's Office) (30%)</i>	

King's University College
General Course Policies
2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Considerations for Absence/Missed Assessments

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration using the extranet portal (www.extranet.uwo.ca). Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs and further consideration may be denied. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

Academic consideration for examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar always requires documentation.

The policy on academic consideration is found here:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the final examination, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup final examination).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

For policy on accommodation for religious holidays, see:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with your instructor on what tools are permitted in the course, including generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools). Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/TurnItIn.html>

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright of their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.