



Thanatology 1025B
Winter 2026
Introduction to Thanatology

Course Information:

Calendar Description: An interdisciplinary overview of major themes and attitudes regarding death, loss, grief, and bereavement. Topics include the Death System, personal death awareness, ethical issues, end of life care, supporting individuals, funeral practices, and cultural issues in the field.

Prerequisite(s):

Anti-requisite(s): The former Thanatology 2200

Extra Information: 3 lecture hours

Course Weight: 0.50 **Breadth:** Category A

Subject Code: THANAT

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 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 pre-requisites.

Kings University College at Western University
Thanatology 1025B (570): Introduction to Thanatology
Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Adrienne Sauder
Email: asauder5@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Virtually by appointment

Course Description

This introductory course will provide an overview of foundational topics in the field of Thanatology, including attitudes about death, historical and sociological perspectives, hospice/palliative care, bereavement/grief, supporting bereaved individuals, and funerals and funeral planning.

Course Objectives

1. To identify and discuss foundational topics in thanatology.
2. To describe the historical and sociological influences on current thinking about death, grief, and loss.
3. To examine the purpose and role of funerals in the contemporary world.
4. To identify the basic principles, practices, and contexts of palliative and hospice care.
5. To articulate current theoretical perspectives in grief and bereavement.
6. To provide examples of effective support to people who are dying and/or bereaved.

Class Format IN-PERSON

Structure of the Course

This course begins on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, and continues until Tuesday, April 7, 2026, honouring all important dates derived from University approved guidelines and academic policies (<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/academic-dates-and-events/>).

This course incorporates both lectures and dialogic discourse and is designed to promote engaged critical thinking. It is important to **complete all required readings, videos, and any other materials BEFORE CLASS** in order to best engage your colleagues in a discussion of various topics relating to the field of Thanatology. Students are expected to participate by asking relevant questions and/or by providing appropriate critiques and examples. The responsibility for a successful learning experience is shared by all the participants – students and professor alike. I am trusting that you will share in the responsibility in making this a successful learning experience for everyone.

Classes may include lectures, films, case study discussion, interactive exercises, etc. and will include material not contained in the text. Supplementary reading material will also be assigned and will be posted on OWL. *No attempt will be made to cover all the assigned readings in class time. Students are responsible for reading and understanding the assigned readings, even if this material is not covered in the class lectures.*

Texts and Readings

Required:

1. Northcott, H. C., & Wilson, D. M. (2017). *Dying and death in Canada* (4th ed.). University of Toronto Press. (Cost: \$30-50 depending on format. Used text is acceptable.)

2. Doughty, C. (2014). *Smoke gets in your eyes & other lessons from the crematory*. W. W. Norton. (Cost: \$10-25 depending on format. Used text is acceptable.)

Additional required readings, as per the schedule below, are accessible via the OWL Brightspace course website.

Strongly Recommended Text (*used in all Thanatology courses*)

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). (Cost: \$40-65 depending on format. Used text is acceptable.)

Evaluation

1. Participation and Attendance	15%
2. Midterm Exam	30%
3. Grief and Death Literacy Essay	25%
4. Final Exam	30%

Participation and Attendance

Students are expected to attend class having read assigned readings and prepared to engage in discussion. Attendance will be monitored via sign-in sheet before the end of every class. Students will be responsible for making sure that they have signed the attendance sheet each week. If you need to leave class early, please speak with the instructor before class or during the break.

In-class written activities will be used periodically throughout the term to provide additional opportunities for participation and engagement. These activities are designed to encourage critical thinking, support course learning objectives, and allow students to reflect on key concepts in real time. While not formally graded, completion and thoughtful engagement with these tasks will contribute to your participation mark.

There will be opportunities to present personal experiences and feelings to the class. We must respect each person's contribution of what may often be painful experiences (at the same time appropriate limits to self-disclosure or to the time allotted to individuals will be upheld when personal narratives are shared) and agree to hold each other's contributions **strictly confidential**. This is an academic course, and all participants are required to complete the course requirements to a high standard to receive credit. One's strong feelings or experiences will not substitute for effort, scholarly engagement, and academic achievement.

Midterm Exam (in-class, 2 hours in length; February 10, 2026)

The midterm exam will consist of 100 multiple choice questions and will cover all material presented in the course so far, including lectures, assigned chapters in the textbook, all supplementary readings on OWL, and important in-class discussions.

Grief and Death Literacy Essay (due March 24, 2026 by 2:30pm)

This participatory assignment requires you to 'find death in your immediate environment' (Joralemon, 2016, p. 109). You will visit a cemetery or public memorial to reflect on how these spaces function as sites of cultural engagement with loss, memory, and mortality. Drawing on observations from your visit, you will analyze how these sites reflect or challenge societal attitudes toward death and grief, using the concepts of grief literacy and/or death literacy as a framework. The assignment is intended to be both experiential (you will go out in search of memorials) and scholarly (you will connect your observations with what we are

learning in class and in the textbooks). Please review the assignment instructions for more information. Your completed essay will be uploaded to the Assignments tab in OWL.

Final Exam (date TBD; 3 hours in length)

This exam will be scheduled and written during the April exam period. This exam will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and an essay question and will cover material presented from the mid-term exam forward. It is not cumulative. Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures, the assigned chapters in the textbook, all supplementary readings on OWL, and important in-class discussions.

Bonus Assignment 5% – Thanatology TikTok (due Tuesday February 3, 2026 by 2:30pm)

Select any thanatological concept discussed in class during Weeks 1-4 and create a short TikTok video that explains the concept and provides a real-world example. Detailed instructions available on OWL.

****Tokens****

All students have one (1) “token” which can be used to have a 2-day extension on any regular assignment (not including the midterm or final exam) as long as Dr. Sauder is notified by email before the deadline, no later than the day the assignment is due (no explanation or documentation required).

***Instructions regarding assignments** - Evaluation for all assignments will include professionalism, academic integrity, and adherence to APA formatting (7th ed.). Regular assignments are due by 2:30pm on the date indicated unless an extension is granted **prior** to the deadline. All written assignments turned into OWL via the assignment tab **must be in Word or PDF format (not any other format)**. If submitted in any other format, it will be marked as late and the student will be asked to resubmit.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

A+	90–100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80–89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70–79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60–69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50–59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Late Penalties

Normally, the only acceptable reasons for late or missed assignments are illness (for which a doctor’s note may be required) or extreme compassionate circumstances. Unexcused late assignments will be penalized as follows: Assignments handed in after 2:30pm but no later than 11:55pm on the due date will lose 2%. Assignments handed in a day late will lose an additional 3%. After that, an additional 5% per day penalty will apply and assignments will not be accepted more than 7 days after the due date unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.

Policy Re: Make-Up Exams and Extensions of Deadlines

If, on medical or compassionate grounds, you are unable to write a midterm test or final examination or complete course work by the due date, you should follow the instructions below. In addition, you must demonstrate that there are compelling medical or compassionate grounds that can be documented **before** academic accommodation will be considered.

You should understand that **academic accommodation will not be granted automatically on request**. Instructors are under no obligation to offer more than one opportunity to write a make-up exam. Please note that any requests for discretion by the instructor will be decided on the basis of the issue that is brought to the instructor's attention and the instructor's obligation to ensure fairness to all students in the classroom. The instructor will not agree to any concessions or accommodations that would be unfair to the other students in the class.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

AI and Chat GPT. King's is committed to fostering a culture of professionalism, honesty, and academic integrity, and all members of our community—faculty, staff, and students—have a role to play in promoting an ethical learning environment. Furthermore, through the work they submit for academic evaluation, students develop important habits of critical thinking, independent inquiry, and creativity. Thus, 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.

Within this course, use of any artificial intelligence (AI) tools [such as Chat GPT] is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Western's scholastic discipline policy can be found [here](#).

Classroom Etiquette. It will be expected that all cell phones will be silenced during class time. **Any student found texting or using his/her/their cell phone during class time will be asked to leave the class.**

Tardiness and Early Departure from Class. We all contribute to the integrity of our learning environment and therefore it is important to arrive on time and to be fully present for the entire class time. Although it is understandable that occasionally circumstances can result in a few minutes' delay, **it is unacceptable (and rude) to habitually arrive late or leave earlier than the class is dismissed by the instructor.** Students with extenuating circumstances may advise the instructor in advance of these circumstances to request occasional accommodation if necessary. **Any accommodations requested will be granted on the basis of fairness to all students in the class.**

Email Etiquette. Email is for short answers or setting up appointments. If you have content- or course-based problems, please email me to set up an appointment. In the **email subject line**, please include the course that you are emailing about (THAN 1025B).

Please consider how you address me in your salutation. This is an academic class and I am your professor. Also, consider the tone of your email. I will respond to your email **within 2 business days**. If you have not heard from me **after 2 business days**, then please feel free to contact me again. I will not respond to emails over the weekend.

To ensure you have thoroughly reviewed the course syllabus and are familiar with its contents, please complete the following task: Before the start of our second class (on Jan 13, 2026), please send an email to Dr. Sauder (asauder5@uwo.ca) that includes the title and artist of your favourite song from the 1990s and explains why it is your fav song. Ensure your name and the course code is in the email subject line. This brief task serves both as confirmation of your engagement with the syllabus and as an introduction to me about you and your musical preferences and will earn you a 2% bonus to your final grade. Failure to complete this task by the stated deadline will not result in any penalty.

Note on Changing Marks. Marks will not be changed (tests only: unless there is an addition error).

If a student seeks to change their grade without legitimate ground for such changes they will be directed to the Academic Dean's Office.

I know students are in the habit of sharing and comparing marks. I don't encourage this because it just causes problems and competition between one another. Do not worry about what grades other students receive. Your work is not being graded against the quality of work that is presented by other students. Please do not tell the instructor how to grade other students. I will only discuss your marks with you, not another student's marks.

Drop Date

The final date to drop a half course without academic penalty is **March 30, 2026**.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 - January 6, 2026: What is Thanatology? Exploring Death in Everyday Life

Readings: Northcott & Wilson, Preface (pp. xvii-xviii) & Chapter 2 (pp. 27-51)

Week 2 - January 13, 2026: Death and Canadian Social Institutions

Readings: Northcott & Wilson, Chapter 3 (pp. 55-87)

Lehto, R. H., & Stein, K. F. (2009). Death anxiety: An analysis of an evolving concept. *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice: An International Journal*, 23(1), 23-41.

<https://doi.org/10.1891/1541-6577.23.1.23>

The Current. (2022, Oct 18). *Why one doctor says modern medicine has disrupted our relationship with death*. [Podcast, 23:36 mins]. CBC Radio. <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-63-the-current/clip/15943036-why-one-doctor-says-modern-medicine-disrupted-relationship>

Week 3 - January 20, 2026: Culture and Thanatology

Readings: Northcott & Wilson, Chapter 4 (pp. 88-130)

Bordere, T. C. (2009). Culturally conscious thanatology. *The Forum* 35(2), 1-4.

Gire, J. (2014). How death imitates life: Cultural influences on conceptions of death and dying. *Online readings in psychology and culture*, 6(2).

Week 4 – January 27, 2026: A History of Death and Loss & Colonialism in Canada

Readings: Northcott & Wilson, Chapter 1 (pp. 5-26)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). “Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939” in *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. McGill-Queen’s University Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 10-24).

Joseph, B. (2018). *21 things you may not know about the Indian Act: Helping Canadians make reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a reality*. Indigenous Relations Press. (Introduction, The Indian Act, Points 10-15, and Appendix 2)

Week 5 - February 3, 2026: Popular Culture and Death

Readings: Penfold-Mounce, R. (2018). *Death, the dead and popular culture*. Emerald Publishing Limited. Chapter 2. Posthumous Careers of Celebrities (pp. 9-39)

Penfold-Mounce, R. (2018). *Death, the dead and popular culture*. Emerald Publishing Limited. Chapter 6. Reflections on encountering death and the dead in popular culture (pp. 111-118)

Haley, E. (n/d). Death in Disney Movies: Making the Most of Teachable Movie Moments. *What’s Your Grief?* <https://whatsyourgrief.com/death-in-disney-movies/>

Week 6 - February 10, 2026: Midterm Exam (in-class)

The mid-term exam will take place during class time.

Reading Week – February 16-20, 2026 – NO CLASS

Week 7 – February 24, 2026: Memory, Memorialization, and Remembrance

Readings: Joralemon, D. (2011). *Mortal dilemmas: The troubled landscape of death in America*. Routledge. Chapter 7: Remember (pp. 109-122)

Clark, J., & Franzmann, M. (2006). Authority from grief, presence and place in the making of roadside memorials. *Death Studies*, 30, 579-599.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180600742574>

Cadell, S., Reid Lambert, M., Davidson, D., Greco, C., & Macdonald, M. E. (2022). Memorial tattoos: Advancing continuing bonds theory. *Death Studies*, 46(1), 132-139.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1716888>

Week 8 – March 3, 2026: Funerals and Funeral Planning

Readings: Castle, J., & Phillips, W. L. (2003). Grief rituals: Aspects that facilitate adjustment to bereavement. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, 8(1), 41-71.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020305876>

Waugh, E. (2017). Funeral practices in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/funeral-practices>

Agrawal, S. K., & Hathiyani, A. (2007). Funeral and burial sites, rites, and rights in multicultural Ontario. *Our Diverse Cities*, 4, 134-138. Government of Canada.

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2008/cic/Ci2-1-4-2007E.pdf

Week 9 - March 10, 2026: Models of Grief

Reading: Northcott & Wilson, Chapter 6 (pp. 189-245)

Week 10 - March 17, 2026: Individual Perspectives

Reading: Northcott & Wilson, Chapter 5 (pp. 133-188)

Week 11 - March 24, 2026: Non-death Loss and Grief.

Grief/Death Literacy Essay due

Readings: Harris, D. (2021). Living losses: Nonfinite loss, ambiguous loss, and chronic sorrow. In D. Harris & H. Winokuer (Eds.), *Principles and Practice of Grief Counselling*. (3rd ed.; pp. 121-137). Springer.

Davies, E., Kassiotis, E., & Quinn, K. (2019). Supporting the families of missing people: More than an investigation. In D. Harris (Ed.), *Non-death loss and grief: Context and clinical implications* (pp. 128-138). Routledge.

Wheat, L. S., & Thacker, N. E. (2019). LGBTQ loss experiences and the use of meaning reconstruction with clients, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counselling*, 13(3), 232–251.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2019.1627973>

Week 12 – March 31, 2026: Pet Loss and the Veterinary Profession

Reading: Matte, A. R., Khosa, D. K., Meehan, M. P., Coe, J. B., & Niel, L. (2019). An exploratory study of veterinary professionals' self-reported support of bereaved clients before, during, and after companion animal euthanasia in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 83(3), 352-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222819853924>

Testoni, I., De Cataldo, L., Ronconi, L., & Zamperini, A. (2017). Pet loss and representations of death, attachment, depression, and euthanasia. *Anthrozoos*, 30(1), 135-148.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2017.1270599>

Week 13 – April 7, 2026: Exam Review

April Final Exam

Date: To Be Scheduled

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 Consideration for Student Absence

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.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. 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.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.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.

For further information, please see:

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

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, 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 Exam).

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.

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/>

GBSV Support:

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/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <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 you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. 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/Originality Reports - 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 in 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.