



**Thanatology/Religious Studies 2270F (570)
Religious Perspectives on Death and Dying
2026-2027**

Professor: Andrew Knight-Messenger

Email: aknigh28@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4:30 PM-5:30 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, 2026)
Research Paper	30%	November 20, 2026
Literature Circle	20% (4 worksheets worth 4% each; and 1 class led discussion worth 4%)	4 – Due throughout the Fall 2026 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 2026 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 23, October 7, November 4, and November 11 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 23, October 7, November 4, and November 11, 2026. You will bring an e-copy or a hard copy of the worksheets with you to class on September 23, October 7, November 4, and November 11 2026. The e-copies of these worksheets are due in the 'Assignments' area in our OWL course site by September 18, September 25, October 30, and November 6 2026 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 23, October 7, November 4, and November 11, 2026.

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 23, October 7, November 4, and November 11, 2026.) 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 20, 2026. 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 1-13. The Final Exam will be set during the university's Fall, 2026 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 9, 2026			Introduction
(Week 2) September 16, 2026	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 23, 2026	Rosen, Chapter 1, pp. 1-20	<i>Literature Circle 1 – Discussion (in-class on September 23, 2026)</i> <i>Literature Circle 2 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	Death and Dying in Contemporary Judaism
(Week 4) September 30, 2026			TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION DAY (NO CLASS)
(Week 5) October 7, 2026	Rosen, Chapter 2, pp. 21-58	<i>Literature Circle 2 – Discussion (in-class on October 7, 2026)</i>	Death and Dying in Christianity
October 14, 2026			FALL READING WEEK (NO CLASS)
(Week 6) October 21, 2026	Rosen, Chapter 3, pp. 59-82		Death and Dying in Islam
(Week 7) October 28, 2026	TBA	<i>Literature Circle 3 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	TBA
(Week 8) November 4, 2026	Rosen, Chapter 5, pp. 115-154	<i>Literature Circle 3 – Discussion (in-class on November 4, 2026)</i> <i>Literature Circle 4 - Worksheet (4%)</i>	Death and Dying in Hinduism

(Week 9) November 11, 2026	Rosen, Chapter 4, pp. 83-114	<i>Literature Circle 4 – Discussion (in-class on November 11, 2026)</i>	Death and Dying in Buddhism
(Week 10) November 18, 2026	Chryssides, G. D. (2012), “Heaven’s Gate” (N.B.: Available at: https://wrludreels.org/2013/04/04/heavens-gate-4/)	<i>Research Paper (30%)</i>	Death and Dying in New Religious Movements (Case Study on Heaven’s Gate)
(Week 11) November 25, 2026	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)		Immortality and the Soul
(Week 12) December 2, 2026	Bruce Greyson, “Western Scientific Approaches to Near-Death Experiences” (N.B.: Available via OWL)		Near Death Experiences (NDEs)
(Week 13) December 9, 2026	Rosen, Conclusion, pp.155-186		Treating Death and Dying as a Chaplaincy, and Conclusion
TBA		<i>Final Exam (TBA by the Registrar’s Office) (30%)</i>	



Religious Studies 2270f (570)
Religious perspectives and Death and Dying
Fall/ Winter 2026-2027

Instructor: A. Knight-Messenger

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.

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (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 at [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible, and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>.

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this which assessment has been designated as requiring documentation for consideration (that is, exempt from undocumented absences).
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

If an instructor has built flexibility into their assessments (e.g., “complete 8 of 10 quizzes”), this flexibility will already address consideration needs and thus academic consideration may be denied.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see

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

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

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

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

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

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

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

You can reach supports at King's 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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 https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.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 to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.