Seminar for Humanities & Religious Studies majors. Examines myths, theories, and perceptions of death and afterlife in cross-cultural and historical perspective through analysis of literature, the visual arts, and music. The course will employ a modified seminar format, emphasizing analysis of primary and secondary material mainly by way of discussion. This term’s version of the course will feature special consideration of warfare, drawing on the Sacramento Public Library’s One Book 2014: *What It Is Like To Go To War*.

**Course Learning Objectives**

Students who successfully complete HRS 190D will be able to:

- Explain the distinguishing values and prominent forms of literary and artistic expression relating to death and afterlife of the various cultures studied.
- Analyze cultural transformations through time, recognizing both persistent aspects and innovations, and proposing well reasoned explanations for such.
- Compare the various cultures, identifying common themes or issues relating to death and afterlife along with those that are distinctive.
- Explore a topic in depth, yielding insight and information indicating special interest in the subject.
- Make explicit references to previous learning and apply in an innovative way that knowledge and those skills to demonstrate comprehension regarding new subjects pertaining to this course.
- Express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others’ perspectives.
- Conduct thorough research germane to studying the humanities and religion using library resources.
- Develop the Department’s five learning outcomes pertaining to intellectual and communication skills:
  - Analytical reading skills: Demonstrate ability simultaneously to extract and construct meaning when reading diverse texts.
  - Critical thinking skills: Demonstrate comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
  - Information competence: Demonstrate knowledge regarding when there is a need for information, and identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.
  - Written communication skills: Use appropriate structure, development, usage, and reference sources to write clear, purposeful, analytical prose.
  - Oral communication skills: Present information orally in a persuasive, logical, and organized manner that draws effectively on relevant evidence.

**Texts**

The Bible (any translation)
*The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (trans. Faulkner)
Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like To Go to War*
Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*
Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (trans. Ranum)
Various readings provided via SacCT
*The Seventh Seal* (film to be accessed via Netflix, DVD rental, etc.)
Requirements and Grading

Each student will write a term paper (of approximately 15 pages) requiring substantial research and analysis. Each student also will complete several short (app. 500-word) informal essays in response to readings. Especially because of our modified seminar format, active participation in class is expected. Contact the professor beforehand if ever there is need to miss class. All reading assignments are to be completed prior to the class sessions for which they are listed (see “Schedule and Assignments”). Course grades will be based on the following (detailed instructions regarding response papers, oral presentation, and term paper will be provided):

- Quality of engagement in class sessions: 15%
- Five response papers to readings: 25%
- Oral presentation on term paper topic: 10%
- Term paper (and review of another’s draft): 50%

The response papers are to be approximately 500 words (typed, double-spaced) and are to be prepared in advance of the session at which they are due. Students are required to turn in five response papers over the course of the semester. Students have the option of turning in a sixth paper, in which case the best five grades will be counted when determining the course grade. An opportunity to write a response paper will occur each week from September 16 through November 18, and so students will have some choice regarding their subject matter. As indicated in the “Schedule and Assignments” section of the syllabus, at least one response paper is due every other session during this period. While there is not necessarily a “right” or “wrong” way to respond to the prompt, a good response will invariably be based on a good reading and thoughtful interpretation of the relevant text(s). It is recommended that some specific references to passages be included, but be careful not to go overboard. Citations can be made as simply as possible in parentheses; there is no need to include foot/endnotes or a bibliography. Grading will be based primarily on understanding of the material as demonstrated through sound analysis and relevant choices of ideas and references. Some consideration will be given to overall presentation quality.

Use in class of laptop computers must be approved by the instructor. Use of cell phones, including texting, is unacceptable in HRS classrooms and is prohibited. Compliance with rules prohibiting cheating and plagiarism is required (for the University’s policy on plagiarism, see: http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353). If you have a disability and require accommodations, you need to provide disability documentation to SSWD, Lassen Hall 1008; 278-6955. Please discuss your accommodation needs with the instructor after class or during office hours early in the semester.

Schedule and Assignments (all assignments are underlined)

9/2  
Introductions

9/9  
Homer, Vergil, Dante: poetic transformations of the underworld. Biblical perspectives on death and afterlife. Plato’s “Myth of Er”; Vergil’s Aeneid, Bk. VI (SacCT). Biblical texts: Psalms 88 and 116; Ezekiel 37.1–14; Daniel 12; 1 Thessalonians 4; Matthew 24–25; Revelation 20–21

9/16  

9/23  

9/30  
10/7 *6:30 p.m. at the Sacramento Public Library* “A Conversation With Author Karl Marlantes.” Karl Marlantes, What It Is Like to Go to War

10/14 Death and afterlife in warfare. A Native American perspective on war and eschatology. (Review Marlantes, What It Is Like to Go to War, focusing on aspects of the book that explore subjects germane to Humanities & Religious Studies. Alice Beck Kehoe, The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization, Foreword (pp. xi–xiii), Preface (pp. xv–xviii) and chs. 1–3 (pp. 2–42). Third response paper, 10/7 or 10/14

10/21 A Native American perspective on war and eschatology (cont.). Kehoe, The Ghost Dance, chs. 4, 5, and 9 (pp. 43–72 and 123–131); John Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, chs. III and XXII (SacCT). Due: Initial statement of paper topic(s)

10/28 The medieval otherworld journey narrative. Carol Zaleski, Otherworld Journeys, Introduction and Parts I and II (i.e., through ch. 5). Fourth response paper, 10/21 or 10/28

11/4 The modern near-death experience narrative. Zaleski, Otherworld Journeys, Parts III and IV (i.e., chs. 6–11). Due: Final statement of paper topic and preliminary bibliography

(11/11 is Veterans Day; campus closed)

11/18 Death in medieval and early-modern Western culture. Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present, chs. I and II. Fifth response paper, 11/4 or 11/18

11/25 Evolving perspectives on death in the West. Ariès, chs. III and IV. Due: Draft of term paper (two copies)

12/2 The existential dilemma of death. Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death, pp. 1–30 and 276–285 (SacCT). Due: Peer review

12/9 Oral presentations. Death and modern consciousness. Film: The Seventh Seal

12/16 Oral presentations. Reflections. Due: Revised draft of term paper and first draft with peer review

(Note: Because this is Final Exam week, technically on this date we have rights to MND 1024 from 5:15 to 7:15. But very likely the room will be available for us to meet per usual from 6:00 to 8:50. The plan will be determined as soon as possible during the semester.)