

Religious Studies Tier II Humanities Course Proposal
RELI 211: Life After Death in World Religions and Philosophies
Karen O. Borek, PhD

Description of Course: An examination of the afterlife in major world religions, intimations of life beyond death in contemporary human experience, and key scientific, theological, and philosophical challenges to both.

Locations and Times: Fall 2014, TTh 2-3:15, Psych 206

Instructor Information: Dr. Karen O. Borek, kborek@email.arizona.edu
Office hours: TTh 3:30-4pm, F 10-11:30 am, Harvill 339, Ph: 626-7938

Course Objectives: Death comes to all of us. For some, it marks the end of human existence. For others, there are intimations of life beyond death. In this course, we will examine the evidence and assumptions underlying the rich diversity of beliefs in life beyond death, the contexts giving rise to these beliefs, why these beliefs matter and have endured, and their impact on human civilization. During the course of the semester, students will:

- analyze and compare key beliefs of the afterlife in major world religions, their cultural and historical contexts, and the ramifications of their similarities and differences in today's global community;
- encounter historical challenges to afterlife beliefs, including the relationship between soul and body, issues associated with resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul, and the empirically grounded skepticism of secular and scientific thought;
- explore and assess how beliefs in the nature of afterlife (e.g., paradise, hell, nirvana, reincarnation) are culturally determined and how they impact positively or negatively on the choices people make in this life;
- examine recent studies of near death experiences, past life memories, and other intimations of life beyond death and consider how those findings support or contradict motifs of afterlife found in world religions.

Learner Outcomes: At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- identify and analyze the impact of cultural contexts and historical influences on the emergence of beliefs of afterlife in different religious traditions;
- assess the significance of overlapping beliefs and differences among these traditions;
- assess the accounts of the afterlife in the sacred texts of major world religions along with their interpretations in the secondary literature;
- engage the arguments of contemporary critics of afterlife beliefs, examining their evidence, assumptions; and conclusions;
- demonstrate the impact of these different traditions on human civilization; and,
- develop the ability to articulate these ideas cogently and sensitively in written and oral forums.

Learner outcomes will be measured in the following ways:

1. Ability to comprehend reading assignments (i.e., the goal of the reading, the author's assumptions, and the conclusions) - *daily quizzes, exams*
2. Ability to evaluate and assess scholarly claims (i.e., the strength of the evidence, the biases the author brings to the text, the implications of the readings and their relation to other readings we've covered) - *exams, research paper*
3. Ability to think critically about own assumptions vis-à-vis those of other peoples and/or other traditions (i.e., the assumptions, biases, and culturally-shaped lens that we bring to the texts and discussions)- *small group discussions, research paper*
4. Ability to communicate their positions clearly, persuasively, and substantively in group discussions and in the oral presentation of their final research project - *classroom discussions, oral presentation and Q&A session during presentation of final research paper*
5. Increased cultural sensitivity and respectful tolerance of different belief systems - *contributions to group and class discussions, exams, research paper*

Topics and Logical Flow of Course (see attached course schedule):

- I. Springboard: *Proof of Heaven* by Eban Alexander, the current best selling account of a neurosurgeon's own transforming near-death experience;
- II. Metaphysics of human nature, the nature of and relationship between body and soul as it has evolved over time and philosophical challenges to afterlife beliefs;
- III. Concepts of the afterlife in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, indigenous African religions and native American religions, and their basis in sacred texts;
- IV. Intimations of afterlife occurring in paranormal human experience: mediumship, apparitions, near-death and out-of-body experiences, and memories of past lives;
- V. Scientific, philosophical, and psychological challenges to afterlife beliefs and paranormal phenomena;
- VI. Conclusions: comparison of afterlife motifs in world religions and human experiences and how those impact on how we live in a global community; the ethical implications of afterlife beliefs on one's attitudes in this life toward others and toward life in this world.

Required Texts and Readings:

Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (Simon Schuster, 2012)

Christopher Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions* (Rowman and Littleford Publishers, 2008)

All other assigned readings are posted on D2L

D2L Readings (chronological):

- R.W.K. Paterson, *Philosophy and the Belief in Life after Death*, Ch. 2: "Problems of Post-Mortem Identity" (St. Martin's Press, 1995)
- S. P. Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, Ch.3: "Biblical Roots of Jewish Views of the Afterlife" (Rowman and Littlefield, 2009)
- P. and L. Badham, ed., *Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World*, Ch. 2: "Death and Immortality in the African Religious Heritage" (Paragon House, 1987)
- D. Leeming and J. Page, *The Mythology of Native North America*, Part 2: "Cosmos" (Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1998)
- A. Mills and R. Slobodin, *Amerind Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief among North American Indians and Inuit*, "Foreward: Reincarnation Eschatologies and the Comparative Study of Religions" (Univ of Toronto Press, 1994)
- J. E. Brown, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*, Ch. 6: "Relationship and Reciprocity: A Metaphysics of Nature" (Oxford Univ Press, 2001)
- Steve Wall, *To Become a Human Being: The Message of Tadodaho Chief Leon Shenandoah*, "Spirits" (Hampton Roads Publishing Co., 2001)
- Malidoma Some, *Of Water and the Spirit*, Ch. 23-25 (ARKANA, 1994)
- S. Parnia and J. Young, *Erasing Death: The Science That Is Rewriting the Boundaries Between Life and Death*, Ch. 7: "The Elephant in the Dark" (Harper One, 2013)
- Excerpts from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Q'uran, Pure Land of the Buddha, Tibetan Book of the Dead, Vedas, Upanishads

Course Requirements

1. *Daily quizzes* (20% of final grade) will cover each of the assigned readings. In order to do well on this portion, you must be able to recall the purpose of the reading, the author's assumptions and point of view, and the evidence the author uses to support his/her thesis. **A guideline to reading the assigned materials can be found on p. 7 of the syllabus.** Missed quizzes cannot be made up.
2. *Two exams* (20% each) will be based on the lectures and assigned readings. Careful reading and note-taking are critical to your success in this course. Exams will be composed of short answer and essay questions in which you will be asked to describe and evaluate the major concepts covered in class and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the authors' reasoning and points of view. Make-up exams are allowed **only** for certifiable emergencies.
3. *Paper #1: Brief analytical paper* (10%) comparing afterlife beliefs of any two religions in the Moreman text (3 pages). This paper must demonstrate that you can analyze a text, think synthetically, come up with original insights on the significance of how your chosen belief systems overlap or retain their uniqueness, and defend your position clearly and persuasively. **If this paper is returned without a grade, you must revise the paper and return it within two weeks to receive credit for the assignment. Papers will be returned ungraded if they do not follow the policies contained in the "Paper Policies and Guidelines" attachment found on pages 8-9 of the syllabus. in addition to the hard**

copy submitted to me, both paper #1 and paper #2 must be submitted to the D2L drop box on the date due (to insure scholarly integrity).

4. *Paper #2: Research paper and oral presentation (30%)* - Each student will choose a book or substantial chapter from a scholarly text on a topic relating to this class as the basis of a 5-7 page paper and a 3-minute oral presentation during the final weeks of class (guidelines forthcoming). The paper should be on a topic we have covered that is of special interest to you and use sources found in the UA library and/or peer-reviewed journals. All choices require pre-approval and a **preliminary draft of this paper, subject to re-write, is due on Nov. 13. The final paper is due the day you give the oral presentation (no exceptions).**

5. *Attendance* - Attendance is vital to the success of this course both for you and the other students. You are expected to come having read the assignments and prepared to engage in large and small group discussions on the materials. **After 4 absences, your final grade will be dropped one grade, beginning with the 5th absence.** An attendance sheet will be on my desk each day for you to sign in. If you come in late, sign the sheet before leaving class_so you get credit for attending that session; otherwise you're counted as absent. **Absences count double on all three student presentation days.**

6. Final grades will be calculated accordingly:
Daily quizzes on assigned readings (20) - 20%
Paper #1- 10%
Midterm exam - 20%
Final exam - 20%
Final research paper (paper #2)and oral presentation - 30%.

7. Letter grade values:

A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
E	below 60%

8. **Honors Credit** - Honors students are welcome to take this course for honors credit. Please contact Dr. Borek at the beginning of the semester to draw up an honors contract for this course.

Course Schedule (Tentative) - Fall 2014

	Topic	Assg
I. Intimations of Afterlife in Popular Culture		
Aug 26	Introduction, Prolegomena	Alexander, pp. 1-119
Aug 28	Near-death experiences and afterlife	Alexander, pp. 120-172
II. Metaphysics of Human Nature, Philosophical Challenges		
Sept 2	Problems of post-mortem identity	Paterson, Ch. 2
Sept 4	Ancient conceptions of afterlife	Moreman, Introduction, Ch. 1.
III. Afterlife Beliefs in World Religions		
Sept 9	Judaism	Moreman, Ch. 2
Sept 11	Jewish sacred texts (Guest speaker)	Raphael, pp. 51-75
Sept 16	Christianity	Moreman, Ch. 3
Sept 18	Christian sacred texts	Excerpts from New Testament
Sept 23	Islam	Moreman, Ch. 4
Sept 25	Muslim sacred texts	Excerpts from Q'uran
Sept 30	Buddhism	Moreman, Ch. 6
Oct 2	Buddhist sacred texts	Miscellaneous excerpts
Oct 9	Hinduism (Guest speaker)	Moreman, Ch. 5, misc. excerpts
Oct 11	Comparison of beliefs/Review	Moreman, Ch. 12, Paper 1 due
Oct 14	Exam (Week 8 Grades)*	
Oct 16	Indigenous African religions "Journey to the Underworld"	Badham, Ch. 2 Some, Ch. 23-25
<p>* Week #8 - Students will have 40% of their grade by now: Quizzes - 10% Paper #1 - 10% Exam #1 - 20%</p>		
Oct 21	Native American religions	Leeming and Page, pp. 114-44 Paper 1 rewrite due, if indicated
Oct 23	Amerindian reincarnation Teaching spirits "Spirits"	Mills and Slobodin, pp. xi-xxiv Brown, Ch. 6 Wall, pp. 46-55

IV. Paranormal Phenomena in Human Experience, Scientific Challenges

Oct 28	Mediums and mediumship	Moreman, Ch. 8
Oct 30	Apparitions and hauntings	Moreman, Ch. 9, Paper 2 outline due
Nov 4	Near-death, out-of-body experiences	Moreman, Ch. 10
Nov 6	Scientific response to NDE, OBE's	Parnia and Young, Ch. 7
Nov 11	Veteran's Day Holiday	
Nov 13	Past life memories	Moreman, Ch. 11, Paper 2 draft due

V. Conclusions: Assessing the Data

Nov 18	Analysis of paranormal phenomena	Moreman, Ch. 13
Nov 20	Conclusions/Review	Moreman, Ch. 14
Nov 25	Exam	
Nov 27	Thanksgiving Holiday	
Dec 2	Student Presentations and Q&A	Final paper due
Dec 4	Student Presentations and Q&A	Final paper due
Dec 6	Student Presentations and Q&A	Final paper due

All readings not found in Alexander book or Moreman text will be posted on D2L.

Assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the professor with advance notice.

Guidelines for Reading Assignments (based on *Elements of Thought*):

Purpose:

What is the purpose of this reading? Is it clearly stated or implied? What is the goal of the writer's line of thinking? Can you re-state the purpose in different words?

Question:

Is the question at issue clearly stated? Is the question significant? Does the question demonstrate a particular bias, and if so how? Does the question adequately address the complexity of the matter or issue? Is the question answerable? Are the question and purpose directly relevant to each other?

Concepts:

What concepts or theories guide the reasoning? Does the writer identify the theories or concepts s/he is using?

Assumptions:

What are the thinker's assumptions? How do these shape her/his thinking? Does the writer show sensitivity to what s/he is taking for granted or assuming? Does the writer use questionable assumptions without addressing problems associated with these?

Inferences or Interpretations:

To what extent does the data or information support the conclusions? What is the line of reasoning? How does he or she arrive at the conclusions?

Point of View:

What is the writer's point of view? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this point of view? Does the writer consider/respond to different points of view?

Implications/Consequences:

What are the consequences or implications of this line of reasoning? Does the writer consider the consequences or future implications?

Paper Policies and Guidelines

Overall Paper Guidelines

- **Format:** Papers must be typed, double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12 point font. The following are acceptable fonts: Arial, Times, or Times New Roman. Use a separate title page so paper can start at top of page 1.
- **Content:** Papers should not be merely descriptive. They should address a theory, point of view, text and render a cogent, coherent, and well-reasoned opinion that refers specifically to the materials used and be clearly quoted and documented with a bibliography.
- **Grammar/Spelling:** Papers must have proper grammar and spelling. Proofread your papers, and use "spell-check".
- **Assignments:** Both papers must follow the instructions found in Course Requirement Section.
- **Topic:** Your papers must focus on concepts of afterlife in world religions and/or paranormal experiences intimating belief in an afterlife and show evidence of having attended to the assigned readings in the course.

Research Paper Guidelines: 5-7 pages (8-10 pages for honors credit)

1. Clear **thesis** at the beginning that covers the primary point or argument you want to make and why this topic is important.
2. Organization of the paper:
 - a. Introduction: includes thesis of paper (the purpose you want to accomplish in your paper)
 - b. Body of paper:
 - 1) Convincing argument with evidence that supports your thesis (and arguments against, if relevant)
 - 2) Analysis of the evidence
 - c. Conclusion - based on the evidence and your analysis
 - d. Proper citation of sources - using *Chicago Manual of Style* or other academic manual (e.g., *AMA Manual of Style*)
3. Miscellaneous:
 - a. Proper spelling and grammar

- b. **Quoting and properly citing material taken directly from the sources (otherwise you risk plagiarizing)** For further information on how to avoid plagiarism, see: <http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>.

Presentation Guidelines:

1. Each person will be part of a 4 or 5 person panel. There will be a **3 minute** oral presentation for each person on panel (**5 minutes for honors paper**). Presenter **cannot** go over allotted time. (You will be cut off precisely at end of 3/5 minutes, so practice ahead of time.)
2. Students can use Power Points or very short film clips to make relevant points, but presentation cannot go over time limit. If you need to download a Power Point, be sure to come to class 10 minutes early to download it before class starts.
2. Q&A after all persons on panel have presented. Each presenter must take at least one question. Your grade includes how you answer your question/s.
3. During the presentations, each student should write down at least one question (analytical in nature) that they would ask the presenter about her/his paper topic. These questions will be handed in at the end of class on Nov 29.

General University Policies

General University Policies:

1) Attendance:

- Students are required to attend all classes.
- If extenuating circumstances such as illness force a student to miss one or more classes, the student remains responsible for the material covered during her/his absence.
- For absences due to illness, in each instance a faculty member may decide whether a physician's note (from UA Campus Health Service or elsewhere) is required. However, students who consult with Campus Health Service or with their private physician and are told to stay home until they are well, rather than coming in for a medical visit, should not make a special appointment in order to obtain a physician's note.
- Absences necessitated by religious observance will be honored, according to University policy. See: <http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/religiousobservanceandpractice>
- Absences pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean's designee) will be honored.
- The Dean of Students Office provides excused absences for university-sponsored events. See: <http://uhap.web.arizona.edu/chap7.html#7.04.02>
- Students who need to miss a class for personal reasons should let their professor know in advance of that absence, if possible. Although professors are not obligated to excuse student's personal absences, they may accommodate pre-arranged personal absences. The Dean of Students Office does not issue excuses for individual personal absences.

- For the UA's policy concerning Class Attendance and Administrative Drops, see: <http://catalog.arizona.edu/2010-11/policies/classatten.htm>

2) Disruptive behavior:

- Students may not use cell phones during class.
- Texting is prohibited.
- Students may not use computers during class time for any purpose other than for taking notes for this class.
- Students may not chat, read newspapers, listen to music or otherwise behave disruptively during class time.
- Students must abide by the UA policy concerning disruptive behavior: <http://web.arizona.edu/~policy/disruptive.pdf>

3) Threatening behavior:

- **THREATENING BEHAVIOR IS PROHIBITED.** "Threatening behavior" means any statement, communication, conduct or gesture, including those in written form, directed toward any member of the University community that causes a reasonable apprehension of physical harm to a person or property. A student can be guilty of threatening behavior even if the person who is the object of the threat does not observe or receive it, so long as a reasonable person would interpret the maker's statement, communication, conduct or gesture as a serious expression of intent to physically harm.
- Students must abide by the UA policy concerning threatening behavior. See: <http://web.arizona.edu/~policy/threatening.pdf>

4) Students with special needs:

- Students with special needs who are registered with the S.A.L.T. Center or the Disability Resource Center must submit appropriate documentation to the instructor, if they request special accommodations. See: <http://drc.arizona.edu/teach/syllabus-statement.html>

5) Changes to the syllabus:

- The information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the professor.

6) Student Policies, Procedures and Codes:

- For the UA Student Code of Conduct, see: <http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policiesandcodes/studentcodeofconduct>
- For the UA Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy, see: <http://equity.arizona.edu/oiefiles/Nondiscriminaton%20anti-harassment%20policy%20FINAL%2011-08.pdf>
- For UA Academic Policies and Procedures, see: <http://catalog.arizona.edu/2010-11/policies/aaindex.html>

- For Student Assistance and Advocacy, see:
<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/studentassistanceandadvocacy>

7) Academic Integrity

Students in this course must comply with the University "Code of Academic Integrity." They may not plagiarize or represent the work of others as their own, nor modify academic work for the purpose of obtaining additional credit. Plagiarism is defined as using the ideas and words of others without indicating whose ideas and whose words they are. Do not plagiarize, even inadvertently. If you quote as few as three words (sometimes only one word, if it is a major idea developed by the writer), use quotation marks and provide the reference. If you use someone's ideas but not their actual words, provide the reference but do not use quotation marks.

The penalty for cheating or plagiarism in this course is zero credit for any assignment in which it occurs and/or failing the course.

In addition, students who cheat will be reported to the Dean of Students. For the UA Code on Academic Integrity, see:

<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/codeofacademicintegrity>

For further information on how to avoid plagiarism, see:

<http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>

8) The Religious Studies Major and Minor

The University of Arizona's interdisciplinary Religious Studies Program, at <http://religious.arizona.edu/>, offers a major (B.A.) and a minor in Religious Studies. The faculty and associated faculty of the Religious Studies Program are committed to introducing students to global religions and cultures from multiple perspectives. The Religious Studies major provides students with a broad understanding of human diversity, the complexities of social and cultural systems of thought, and the human pursuit of meaning. Combined with core academic skills in written and oral communication, the Religious Studies major prepares students to become independent thinkers and problem solvers in the twenty-first century.

Religious Studies majors have pursued careers in a wide variety of fields, including business, government, medicine, law, education, and social services. The Religious Studies Program has many double majors, who combine Religious Studies with majors in a wide range of fields, in order to receive a comprehensive undergraduate education and to stand out when applying for jobs or graduate studies. If you are interested in declaring a Religious Studies major or minor, contact the Religious Studies Undergraduate Advisor, Professor Alex Nava, at nava@email.arizona.edu

9) Veterans

The University of Arizona has a Veterans Education and Transition Services program. For more information, see: <http://www.vets.arizona.edu/>