

Anthropology 4426G/9104B

Mortuary Archaeology

Department of Anthropology

Fall term, 2021-2022

Preliminary Course Outline

Version date: July 6, 2021

Class time: Monday 1:30 to 4:30 pm
Classroom: SSC-3227

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Nelson
Email: anelson@uwo.ca
Office: Social Science Centre 3410
Office Hours: TBD
Phone: 519-661-2111 x85101

Credit Value: 0.5 credit

Prerequisites: Registration in fourth year in Anthropology and permission of the instructor via application. The application can be accessed through the [Course List page on our website](#).

Antirequisites: None

Course Syllabus: "...Tis impossible to be sure of anything but *Death and Taxes*" (Christopher Bullock, 1716, *The Cobbler of Preston*). There are myriad ways in which societies have dealt with this stark reality, and the rituals they construct shed important light on the society at large. In mainstream North America, we have a very uniform, hygienic and medicalized view of death and burial, while the range beliefs and practices of other contemporary and ancient cultures is quite remarkable.

This course takes a cross-cultural and deep temporal perspective on how different societies have dealt with the loss of one of their members. Mortuary archaeology draws on many different threads in Anthropology, including ethnography, cultural theory, bioarchaeology, archaeological theory, forensic analysis to name only a few. It also reaches beyond the bounds of Anthropology to draw on research in Sociology, Biology and other disciplines to take a truly interdisciplinary approach to how societies deal with death.

This is a lecture/seminar course open to senior undergraduate students. Weekly meetings will start with a short lecture, outlining the major points for discussion, and then the seminar will include student presentations and class discussions. Class participation is mandatory. The critical evaluation of the literature will be emphasized.

An updated course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL site before the first day of class.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- describe how societal structures and beliefs shape ritual behavior (observed through ethnographies), particularly in the mortuary context
- recognize how archaeology has contributed to our understanding of variability in societies' responses to death
- integrate perspectives from several disciplines in the analysis of an archaeological mortuary context
- reflect on how modern beliefs and norms shape how we act and react in the face of the death of a loved one
- work with your peers in a collaborative framework

Readings:

Readings will be available on the course OWL site. Students will provide additional readings as part of the weekly discussion. There is no textbook.

Evaluation:

- Weekly reflection papers/Class participation – 20%
- Assignment #1 – ethnographic example of a mortuary ritual – 20 % - Powerpoint presentation on March 24th
- Assignment #2 – research paper on the analysis of an archaeological mortuary context – ca. 2500 words (undergraduate students) or 3500 words (graduate students) – 20% - due March 7th
- Assignment #3 – group project on a local cemetery – 40% - due April 6th
- there is no final exam
- graduate students write a longer research paper than the undergraduate students and are responsible for the assembly of the group project

Details of the Assignments:

- Weekly assignments/Participation - write a 500 word reflection paper on the week's readings and one additional paper that you find. What is the key point of the readings? How are they relevant to you and to the week's theme? Bring the paper to class and be prepared to present your papers to the class and to discuss the papers brought by the other students.
- Assignment #1 – find an ethnographic account of a contemporary (or penecontemporaneous) society that describes and discusses a mortuary ritual. Craft a detailed description of this ritual and then analyze it using principles discussed in class. Important components of the analysis will include: does the ritual fit with the general structure of rites of passage rituals outlined by Van Gennep? Does the ritual reflect the sociopolitical complexity of the culture?
 - the results of this assignment will be presented to the class as a power point presentation in week 4 (January 24th).

- Assignment #2 – write a 2,500 (undergraduates) or 3,500 (graduate students) word research paper on an archaeological mortuary context not discussed in class. You will need to present a short description of what is known of the archaeological culture and the specific context in order to undertake an analysis of how the mortuary context reflects the society as a whole. Draw on all appropriate ethnographic analogies, archaeological theories and anthropological models in your analysis.
 - the results of this research will be presents as a manuscript for submission to the journal *Antiquity*. Please see the [instructions for authors page](#) found on this site.
 - This assignment is due in week 9 (March 7th)
- Assignment #3 – the final assignment will be a group project. This year’s topic has yet to be determined. You will find the [final report of the 2020 course list](#) on this site. Each student will have a unique topic that is related to the overall topic and the graduate students will be in charge of assembling the final product. This will be due April 7th (the date is dictated by the requirement to submit undergraduate grades for courses with no final exam within a week of the end of classes)

Course Specific Statements and Policies:

The essays will 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. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Late Assignments: Extensions on assignments will only be given in the case of major medical or personal emergencies as first approved by the academic counselling office. Without an approved extension each day past due (including weekends) will result in the deduction of 5% off the grade for that assignment. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted, and the student will receive a grade of zero for that assignment.

Western’s Academic Policies:

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current academic policies regarding accessibility, mental wellbeing, accommodation for medical illness, and plagiarism and scholastic offences. These policies are outlined in Western’s academic policies by clicking on this link: [Western’s academic policies](#)

Weekly Discussion Topics and Example Readings (subject to revision)

<u>Week</u>	<u>General Topic</u>	<u>Specific Topics</u>	<u>Example Readings</u>
week 1 Jan 3 rd	Introduction – discussion of the definition and evolution of Mortuary Archaeology	Mortuary Archaeology; Archaeoethanatology	Binford (1971) Mortuary practices: Their study and potential; Knusel (2014) Crouching in fear: Terms of engagement for funerary remains
week 2 Jan 10 th	Ethnographic studies of mortuary rituals; Broad anthropological/ sociological analyses of mortuary rituals	Tripartite structure of rites of passage	Pearson (1982) Mortuary practices, society and ideology: an ethnoarchaeological study; Van Gennep (1909) Rites of passage; Huntington & Metcalf (1991) Celebrations of death
week 3 Jan 17 th	The mortuary ritual in the modern world	The North American funeral industry	Jackson (2009) “Death Becomes Them”; A funeral home ethnography
week 4 Jan 24 th	Presentations of assignment #1	Ethnographic studies of mortuary rituals	
week 5 Jan 31 st	Death and burial in the Neolithic	The first mortuary monuments – <i>Tombs for the Living</i>	Fleming (1973) Tombs for the living
week 6 Feb 7 th	Death and burial in the paleontological record	Contexts of discovery of fossil hominin remains; <i>Homo naledi</i> ; Neandertals	Gargett (1989) Grave shortcomings; the evidence for Neandertal burial
week 7 Feb 14 th	Cannibalism and mortuary ritual	The anthropology of anthropophagy	White (1992) Prehistoric cannibalism at Mancos
Feb 21 st	Reading Week		
week 8 Feb 28 th	Death and burial in Ancient Egypt	The Book of the Dead; Mummies and the industry of death	Meskel (2001) The Egyptian way of death
week 9 Mar 7 th	Death and burial in Classical Antiquity Assignment #2 due today	The use of mortuary ritual to reinforce fledgling states	Pollock (1991) Of priestesses, princes and poor relations: the dead in the Royal Cemetery of Ur
week 10 Mar 14 th	Death and burial in Pre-Columbian Peru	The venerated ancestors	Isbell (1997) Mummies and mortuary Rituals
week 11 Mar 21 st	Death and burial in Middle Age Europe	Mortuary rituals and mass death – The Black Plague(s)	Antoine (2008) The archaeology of the “plague”
Week 12 Apr 1 st	Death and burial in popular culture	Deviant burials; Hollywood and the undead	Durkin (2003). Death, dying and the dead in popular culture.

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