

**Department of Anthropology**  
**ANTHRO 4426G/9104-001: Mortuary Archaeology**  
**BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE**  
**Winter 2026**

*Date: July 6, 2025*

**Instructor and course information:**

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Nelson

Method of delivery: in person

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None.

Prerequisites: Registration in fourth year in Anthropology and permission of the instructor via application. Email [cschul3@uwo.ca](mailto:cschul3@uwo.ca) for the application form.

Please ensure you have the correct requisites by checking [the Academic Calendar](#).

**Course Description:**

"...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.

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

**Course Materials:**

No textbook

Required readings will be available through the Course Readings tool on the course site

**Evaluation:**

Grades will be based on the following:

- Weekly reflection papers/Class participation – 20%
- Assignment #1 – ethnographic example of a mortuary ritual – 20% - powerpoint presentation
- Assignment #2 – research paper on the analysis of an archaeological mortuary context – ca. 2500 words (undergraduate students) or 3500 words (graduate students) – 20%
- Assignment #3 – group project on a local cemetery – 40%
- 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

The final assignment will be a group project. This year's topic has yet to be determined. [Here is final report from 2 previous courses](#). 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)

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