IDS 205: Fall 2019
Science and the Nature of Evidence: Death, Dying, and Finding Meaning
TTh 10-11:15am, S-420 Callaway

Profs: Kim Loudermilk, ILA; Arri Eisen, Biology, ILA, Center for Ethics
TA: David Kulp, young professor in training

Texts

The point
Why do you believe what you believe? What are the roots of those beliefs? What kinds of evidence do you accept, consciously or not?
These are important questions that we often don’t explicitly consider. And, often when we do, we’re surprised at the answers.
This course takes you, students from diverse majors and backgrounds and, using science, death and dying, mixes all of you and your ideas up and forces you to think—and then even harder—to write about these questions and answers.
First, look at science as a social enterprise and then take that conversation as a way into examining a complex human issue or question—this semester it’ll be death, dying, and finding meaning—from your personal experiences and your diverse disciplinary backgrounds.

This course is part of a project sponsored by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation to Emory to develop ways of thinking about death, dying, and meaning among college students long before you have to think about such things. And to do this at one of the few institutions that can do it well, because we have a leading Palliative Care team at Emory and you guys right on the same campus. So, things we do and develop here will emerge as models for the rest of the nation.

Death warning: intentionally, this course is about difficult topics and material and thinking about them from many and diverse perspectives. This will be challenging.

Arri Eisen: I’m a scientist, PhD in Biochemistry, and I’ve been teaching here for nearly 30 years, starting in Biology and now also in Ethics and in Interdisciplinary Studies. I’m interested in looking at why we believe what we do and the overlapping areas that stab at answers to this: science and ethics, science and religion, science and art. I’m interested in getting you interested in this stuff and seeing what you think about it.

Kim Loudermilk: I am a humanist, with a PhD in interdisciplinary studies. I’ve been on the faculty here for about 20 years, with half of that time spent in administration, first as an assistant vice provost, then as a senior associate dean in Emory College. My interests lie in the relationship between social movements and the media, and, because of my work in
administration, in issues in higher ed. I love to bring together different perspectives to solve problems, both within the classroom and outside it.

David Kulp: I am a senior and aspiring physician and academic majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus in medical ethics and philosophy. I’m interested in the sociocultural implications and ethical quandaries at the end-of-life, specifically as related to pediatric patients and extremely premature neonates in intensive care units. I enjoy meshing the sciences and humanities together, and loved this class when I took it.

You’ll probably not again have another course taught by such a diverse team with so many smart students from so many disciplinary backgrounds. So, take advantage and learn from us and each other.

**How we’ll get there:**
This is a seminar class and a writing class. That means, *you* do the thinking, writing, and leading, and we simply facilitate. You will have a lot of responsibility for the success of this course, because, as outlined below, you will be leading and guiding a lot of the course. We’ll start (details below) with personal statements, much reading and discussion, and begin as early as we can, thinking about what you want to write a paper about.

**Personal statements**
Each of your classes at Emory is full of amazing experiences and wisdom, and I’m talking about the students not the professors. Usually, you never even are aware of who’s sitting next to you, or what those people are about. In this class, that changes. Each of us, starting with us teachers today, will read a 1-2 page statement to the class on the date noted below. You have 10 minutes total to do this and this will include some questions.

In this 1-2 pages, you will address your current thoughts on why you believe what you do, what are your underlying, foundational beliefs, where they come from, and what brings you to this class at this moment. You can do this in any way you want. Also, consider what brings you to this class at this moment and how death and dying might be part of finding your meaning so far. We will model this today.

**Discussion Leads**
You have been assigned a discussion session you’ll lead with a partner or two in the second half of the course.

Discussions are about and grow from the reading. Get your topic approved by us a week, at the latest, if not two before you lead. We can suggest resources.

In the first half of the course we will model leading discussions. The main things to know:

• Don’t present, *facilitate* a discussion
• Everyone will have done the reading/viewing, so don’t repeat it
• Use the reading as a taking off point
• Use small group discussions of questions, YouTube videos, your experiences
• Refer as much as you can and link to past discussions and readings.
• *Consider the expertise we have at Emory as resources*
Paper development
This is a writing class, so we have a formal structured format for your development of a good, well-written 5000 word paper by the end of the semester.

This paper will be/include three things:
• a research-paper review of your question;
• a synthesis of your ideas and thoughts;
• an original piece: an ‘experiment’, interview, or take photos or something.

Posters:
The last two days of class, you’ll present your project as a poster. We will discuss how to do this later.

Eng 223: Writing course accompaniment
This is a required co-requisite for IDS200-level courses. You should have been prompted to do this when you registered for this course. If you’ve taken Eng223 before, you don’t have to repeat, but let us know.

Important dates
TBA: One- time dinner and discussion over death & dying artefacts at Carlos Museum
Proposal: of paper and topic: Oct. 10
Paper Topic: Oct. 22, present topic to class:
Paper Outline: Nov. 7, 1-2 page outline, to present in class and send to us:
Paper Draft: Nov. 21, you can send us as many drafts as you want up ‘til Dec. 6, but everyone has to send us at least one draft to both profs by 11/21, 5 pm.
Paper Due: Dec 12, to us via email by 5pm

Evaluation
Paper project: 60% (35% paper, 15% poster, 10% proposal)
This project should be in the back of your mind from Day 1. What about this reading or that discussion or personal statement really got you thinking? What spark went off that you want to follow up? Who at Emory is an expert in this area you can talk to?
Short Writing Assignments: 10% (5% each for two)
Discussion leads: 10%
Work with your partner to facilitate discussion based on reading & expand into everyday life, etc.
Participation: 20%
The nature of this class is about engagement, thinking and writing at least, and contributing. In order to do these things in class, you have to be in class.

Calendar

I. Is science right?
Aug. 29: Introductions
Personal statements: Arri eisen, Kim loudermilk, David kulp
For next class: Jonah Lehrer, “The Truth Wears Off” (New Yorker, 12/13/10)

T Sep 3:
Discuss Lehrer
Personal statements: noam fields-meyer, nicole sadek, jiading zhu
For next time: Harrington intro and chapter 1

Th Sep 5
Discuss Harrington
Personal statements: jacqueline berci, azhar khanmohamed, gratia sullivan
For next time: Harrington chaps 2-4

T Sep 10
Discuss Harrington
Personal statements: alex zolla, yiwei shen, pushkar shinde
For next time: finish Harrington

Th Sep 12
Discuss Harrington
Personal statements: pareena sharma, matt schner, daniel hamm
For next time: Kalanathi Foreword and Part I

II. How we die; memoir
T Sep 17
Discuss Kalanathi
Personal Statements: lauren freidenrich, aneesha maini
For next time: Kalanathi through p. 167

Th sep 19
Discuss Kalanathi
Personal statements: taylor mcghee, susannah lara-gresty
For next time: finish Kalanathi

T Sep 24
Discuss Kalanathi
For next time: Gawande Intro, chaps 1&2

Th sep 26 guests, palliative care docs: Drs. Quest, O’Neill, & Soodalter
For next time: Gawande: 3&4

T Oct 1
Discuss Gawande
For next time: Gawande: 5&6
Th Oct 3
Discuss Gawande
For next time: Gawande: finish

T Oct 8
Discuss Gawande
For next time: work on proposals

Th Oct 10 **Proposals due, email all three instructors**, synthesis day

T Oct. 15: Fall Break

**III. Dying Different: across cultures**

Oct 17 **Tibetan Buddhism and reincarnation guest: Geshe Damdul**

**IV. The biology of death [assign first 3 topics or do ourselves]**

Oct 22
Does life require consciousness/sentience? Pig head experiment
Tukdum

Oct 24
Is death physiologically different in different cultures (a la Harrington’s thesis)?

Oct 29
Evolution and death: de Waal elephants and mourning

Oct 31 -
Student-led discussion 1: noam fields-meyer, nicole sadek, jiading zhu

Nov 5
Student-led discussion 2: jacqueline berci, azhar khanmohamed, gratia sullivan

Nov 7: **Outlines due**
Student-led discussion 3: alex zolla, yiwei shen, pushkar shinde

Nov 12
Student-led discussion 4: pareena sharma, matt schner, daniel hamm

Nov 14
Synthesis day

Nov 19
Student-led discussion 6: lauren freidenrich, aneesha maini

Nov 21 **Paper first draft due**
Student-led discussion 7: taylor mcghee, susannah lara-gresty

Nov 26
Student-led discussion 8:

Nov 28 Thanksgiving

Dec 3: Synthesis day

Dec. 5: Poster session
Dec. 10: Poster session

Dec 12 Paper due by email by 5pm to both profs