



Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

ARKN38, Anthropological and Archaeological Perspectives on Death and Burial, 7.5 credits

Antropologiska och arkeologiska perspektiv på död och begravning, 7,5

högskolepoäng

Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by The Pro Dean of First and Second Cycle Studies at The Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology on 2026-06-01 (U 2026/270). The syllabus comes into effect 2026-06-01 and is valid from the spring semester 2027.

General information

The course is offered as a free-standing course. It can normally be included in a general degree at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Language of instruction: English

Main field of study *Specialisation*

- A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, the student should

Knowledge and understanding

- be able to explain how rituals in different cultures, and across time and space, contribute to humanity's ability to cope with and understand death,
- be able to explain how various academic disciplines contribute to a comprehensive understanding of humanity's ability to cope with and understand death, and how these practices relate to other social and cultural values,

Competence and skills

- be able to apply relevant contemporary theoretical perspectives on rituals, death, and the human body to analyze ethnographic, archaeological, historical, and contemporary examples of death and burial rituals,

Judgement and approach

- be able to actively reflect on ethical considerations regarding studies of people's encounters with death,
- be able to critically reflect on the significance of rituals within human cultures, particularly in connection with crises such as death,
- be able to critically discuss the limitations and possibilities of various source materials and disciplines in our work to understand people's needs when encountering and dealing with death,
- be able to take a stance on ethical perspectives regarding the handling of human remains, for example in archaeology, museology, and ethnography.

Course content

This course provides an interdisciplinary introduction to how people throughout history and across cultures have related to and dealt with death. Drawing on cultural theory and a biocultural perspective on humanity, the course explores death as a biological and cultural process, the place of death in human culture, and the role of rituals in dealing with death across different cultures. Examples are drawn from archaeology, history, law, medicine, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Film, literature, and art are also used as course materials. Attention is given to ethical aspects of research on and the management of human remains.

The course explores theoretical approaches to cultural analysis with a particular focus on ritual theory, as well as action theory and theories of the human body ("body theory"). The course is explicitly interdisciplinary and structured around themes such as the process of dying, the dead body, grief, rituals, crisis (mass death), assisted dying, suicide, and research ethics. These themes are explored interdisciplinarily, with source material in the form of texts drawn from several different disciplines and enriched with other types of source material, such as film.

Course design

The course consists of 8 lectures followed by 8 student-led, structured seminars (see assessment below).

Attendance in at least 80% of the class sessions is mandatory. If total participation falls between 70% and 80%, a make-up assignment must be completed according to the instructor's instructions to receive a passing grade.

If attendance is less than 70%, no final grade will be awarded for the course. However, in cases where the student, through no fault of their own—due to, for example, an accident, sudden illness, or similar circumstances—has missed classes, they will be given the opportunity to complete one or more supplementary assignments as directed by the instructor to receive a passing grade.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of several components:

- An individual written assignment on a topic chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. (50% of the final grade)
- A poster summarizing the written assignment, to be displayed at the end of the course. (10% of the final grade)
- Participation in leading and contributing to the discussion seminars. The work is divided among groups of 4–5 students, with the discussion at each session led and prepared by one of the students. Each student will lead one seminar. Prior to each seminar, students read the assigned literature and share their comments with the seminar leader no later than the day before the seminar. The seminar leader uses these comments to prepare and lead the group discussion during the seminar, and then writes a summary after the seminar. The assessment is based on the comments on the texts prior to the seminar, participation in the seminar, and the summary after the seminar. The instructor participates in the seminar but takes a passive role. (40% of the final grade)

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: Fail, Pass, Pass with distinction

To receive a grade of Pass, this grade is required on all assessed assignments. To receive a grade of "Pass with Distinction," a student must receive a "Pass with Distinction" on the written assignment and at least a "Pass" on the other two assessed assignments.

Entry requirements

Bachelor course, including a bachelor's thesis, and English 6/English Level 2.

Further information

- The course is offered by the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University.
- For further information, please refer to the current registration and information materials.