IPI5/717 (3) Spiritual Perspectives on Death and Dying

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan
Phone: 604-827-4742  Email: ldkaplan@vst.edu
Office hours during term: by appointment

Purpose: Over the last century, medical care has increasingly provided a key cultural framework for understanding death and dying. Technological innovation has prolonged life, but also hidden the reality and inevitability of death. In the process, wisdom about death and dying transmitted through spiritual traditions has been pushed to the margins. More recently, there have been calls to recover that wisdom, teach it widely, and understand its application to contemporary life.

Students in this course will sample that wisdom, surveying topics such as spiritual care for palliative patients and their families; evolving memorial customs and wishes; death scenes in sacred or popular literature and film; responses to a cultural denial of death; spiritual preparation for death; ethics of medically assisted death and the right to die.

Competence Objectives:
Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- Describe spiritual practices of preparing for and responding to death from at least two religious traditions
- Identify issues in spiritual care relating to death and dying
- Respond to these issues from a theological, psychological, literary or philosophical perspective
- Develop personal insight into their own attitudes towards death and dying
- Offer objective summary and critical assessment of scholarly papers

Format: Summer term 2018, 30 hours total. Attendance at Inter-religious Studies Conference, May 22 (evening), May 23 (day and evening), May 24 (day), for a total of 20 hours, plus one pre-conference class session, (May 11) and one post-conference class session (June 1) for a total of 10 hours. Off-site students can attend the two additional class times on May 11 and June 1 via Adobe connect, but must be in full attendance for the conference.

Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

Required reading:
Available on Amazon.ca in paperback and kindle format:


Posted on moodle:
Selected papers presented at the conference.
Assignments:

For all students:
(1) Full attendance at all events, as described above in “format.” Attendance should be in accordance with VST policies; thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion, course activities, and conference.
(2) Completion of assigned readings.
(3) One two-hour volunteer shift at the conference, e.g., greeting, registration, logistical support.
(4) One short oral presentation to the class on a selected conference paper, assigned to you by the instructor no later than May 11 (due in class, June 1).
(4) A 750-word written response to your assigned conference paper, to be reviewed by the instructor, revised if necessary, and after instructor approval, emailed to the paper’s author (Due June 1.)

Additional for certificate students only:
A 750 word reflection paper on one important idea, theme, or presentation from the conference, due no later than August 31, via email to ldkaplan@vst.edu.

Additional or basic-level students only:
A 3000-word paper, exploring interests related to the conference theme, referencing at least 5 conference papers, due no later than August 31, via email to ldkaplan@vst.edu.

Additional for advanced-level students only:
A 4000-word paper, exploring interests related to the conference theme, referencing at least 5 conference papers and at least 5 additional sources due no later than August 31, via email to ldkaplan@vst.edu.

Prerequisites: None.

Selected Bibliography:


Levine, Steven. *One Year to Live: How to Live This Year as If It Were Your Last*. New York: Harmony, 1998.


