INTERPRETING THE DEAD:
Anthropological Approaches to Mortuary Analysis

Course Description
This course will explore the various ways that we encounter the dead and the
dynamic relationship between the deceased and the community of the living. We will
work to bring together both ethnographic studies of how the living mourn, cope, bury and
generally “deal” with their dead and how archaeologists move from burials back
interpretations of living society. The course provides an introduction to the major
approaches and critiques in mortuary analysis as well as new lines of investigation. We
will thus examine classic texts that provide the theoretical framework for anthropological
interpretations of mortuary practices, as well as discuss some of the interpretive debates
and more controversial aspects of studying dead bodies.

Course Requirements and Grading:
Class Participation (10%)
Presentations & Response Papers (15%)
Midterm Essay 5 pages (25%) OR Field trip assignment
Research Paper 15 pages (50%)

A NOTE ON ATTENDANCE
This class is a seminar which means that we will explore the ideas and texts of the quarter
collectively through discussion and response. Attendance is thus mandatory; your grade will
suffer if you miss classes.

PARTICIPATION & DEBATE
This class is a seminar which means that we will explore the ideas and texts of the quarter
collectively through discussion and response. Active participation in the class discussion is
required of all students. Students are expected to be conversant with the assigned readings and
should be prepared to participate in class discussions by offering critical commentary on the texts,
raising questions and concerns, and engaging in dialogues with one another as we attempt to
analyze and make sense of the readings. I will be calling on students to elucidate portions of the
texts, so you will be expected to have not only read the assigned materials, but reflected on them
as well. As we will see, there are multiple ways to approach the questions listed in the course
description; therefore, there is never one correct answer. Discussion is intended to help us to
understand the texts.

RESPONSE PAPERS
4 response papers will count toward your final grade. Articles for responses will be posted on
chalk the Monday prior to class. They will be used for class discussion and will be turned in at
the end of class. Your responses should be short—¾ -1 page (single-spaced). In them, you
should respond to the article(s) and discuss them in light of the course readings. These responses should NOT summarize the readings; they will be evaluated according to the depth of insight and questioning they display.

**ORAL PRESENTATIONS**
Each student will be required to present on the reading once during the quarter. Presentations should be limited to 5-10 minutes. You should NOT spend your presentation summarizing the text nor should you go page by page through the reading. Instead I recommend focusing on the problem, method, argument, conclusion, and theoretical perspective. You may want to evaluate the readings in light of other course readings and bring up topics for discussion. We will have all read the material and do not need a recitation. If you miss your presentation without having been excused in advance, you will receive a zero.

**MIDTERM**
The midterm will be a take home essay on a topic that will be assigned in class. It should be a 5 page paper written in formal language that addresses the question by drawing on the course readings.

**FIELDTRIPS**
I will try to arrange 2 field trips outside of class. You may choose to replace the midterm with a fieldtrip assignment. More on this later…

**PAPERS**
Lastly, you will prepare a 15-20 page research paper. You will need to discuss your paper topics with me in office hours. I suggest by week 5. We will go over the paper requirements after the midterm.
Schedule of Classes

Week 1: Encountering the Dead in Popular Culture & Science
03/30  Reading

Week 2: Funerary Rituals: Death and Society
04/06  Reading:

Week 3: Emotion and Memory
04/13  Reading

Week 4: The Processual Approach, Social Persona, and Status
04/20  Reading

**Week 5: Post-Processual, Marxist, and Feminist Critiques**  
04/27 Reading


***Midterm due Monday, May 2, 5pm***

**Week 6: Kings, Ancestors, and Political Authority**  
05/04 Reading


Week 7: Mortuary Landscape: Structuralist and Phenomenological Perspectives
05/11 Reading

Week 8: Monuments, Cemeteries, and Identity
05/18 Reading
Week 9: Agency after Death: Ghosts, Vampires, and Ancestors
05/25 Reading

***Friday, May 27th, 5pm, Final Research Paper Due for Graduating Seniors***

Week 10: Dead Body Politics and Ethics
06/01 Reading

Week 11: Finals
***Wednesday, June 8th, 5pm, Final Research Paper Due***
**Additional Sources**

**Week 1**

Bass, W.

Pringle, H.

**Week 2**

Durkheim, Emile

Bell C.

Davies D. J.

Hubert, H. and M. Mauss

Laneri N.

**Week 3**

Halbwachs, M.
1992 *On Collective Memory.*

Verhoeven M.

Jonker G.

Week 4


Ucko P.

Brown, James A.

Chapman R. and K. Randsborg

Saxe, A. A.

Goldstein, Lynne

Morris, Ian*

Peebles, Christopher S. and Susan M. Kus

Palumbo G.

Pollock S. 1991

Renfrew, Colin


Schwartz G.

Schwartz G. et al.

Trinkaus, Kathryn Maurer

**Week 5**

Braun, D. P.

Brown

Carr, C.

Kroeber


Parker Pearson, Michael

**The Grasshopper Debate:**
Clark, G. A.  

Upham, S. and F. Plog  

Whittlesey, S.M.  

McGuire, R.H.  

**Week 6**  
Couture, Nicole  
2002  *The Construction of Power: Monumental Space and Elite Residence at Tiwanaku, Bolivia*. University of Chicago, Department of Anthropology.


Bloch, Maurice and Jonathan Parry  


Buikstra, Jane  

Frangipane M. et al.  
Steele S.  

Van den Hout T.P.J.  

**Week 7**

Eliade, Mircea  

Katz D.  
2003 *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources - Ch. 5 ‘General Summary and Conclusions.’* Bethesda, pp. 235-250.

Scurlock J. A.  

Gillespie, Susan  

Kolata, Alan  

Kolata, Alan and Carlos Ponce Sangines  

**Week 8**


Cannon, A.


**Week 9**


**Week 10**


*articles from *Mortality*