

ANTH 397

THE ARCHEOLOGY OF DEATH

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Erin McGuire

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The dead are all around us. Yet they are not silent. They built the house I am sitting in now; they founded the university at which we study. The dead are constantly invoked and recycled in daily life, this much is true. And yet, what can the actual treatment of the dead tell us about the living? Some societies do not bury their dead: can an absence of evidence tell us anything about a society's beliefs? The first burials in the history of humanity are often said to herald the "origins of symbolism, ritual and religion" (Parker Pearson, 1999, p.147). But is burial any more than a practical means of getting rid of a body? This course explores themes and issues in the study of mortuary practices. Topics and case studies will include ethical issues, gender and identity, social organisation and structure, spirituality etc... The time range that we cover spans from the Neolithic to the 21st century, and numerous cultures from all parts of the globe will be our subject matter.

Aims

The aims of this course are:

- To investigate funerary practices through the use of cross-cultural case studies;
- To outline theoretical and interpretative approaches to mortuary archaeology; and
- To explore issues of ethics and respect in relation to the study of funerary remains.

Learning objectives and skills development

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Identify and discuss various types of funerary rituals and their archaeological expression;
2. Assess the contribution archaeology makes to interpreting the ways that societies respond to death;
3. Recognise, describe, apply, and analyze a range of different interpretative stances used in the archaeological study of funerary remains;
4. Apply anthropological terminology and methods to the written expression of an argument analysing archaeological approaches to the study of funerary remains;
5. Discuss the ethical considerations that apply to the archaeological study of funerary remains;
6. Critically evaluate a case study as a tool for analysing theoretical perspectives; and
7. Effectively utilise technological resources for presenting archaeological materials, including research, article reviews, mapping, and cemetery survey.