

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Subject Description Form

Please read the notes at the end of the table carefully before completing the form.

Subject Code	GEC1A03
Subject Title	Life and Death
Credit Value	3
Level	1
Pre-requisite / Co-requisite/ Exclusion	Nil
Objectives	<p>In this subject, the following cluster specific attributes will be emphasized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reflection on individual moral character <input type="checkbox"/> Informed citizenship <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reflection on one's own existence and search for meaning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Explore theories of Human Nature and development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relate to "The Other" <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Explore spirituality <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dimensions of wellness <p>This subject explores questions about life and death, aiming at enhancing students' critical thinking skills for making sound value judgments in the real life contexts, and to cultivate their empathy and compassion for fellow human beings. Students will be encouraged to construct a value system that is solid enough for them to deal with the moral challenges posed by the matters of life and death.</p>
Intended Learning Outcomes (Note 1)	<p>Upon completion of the subject, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) APPLY critical thinking and logical reasoning in making sound value judgments; (b) COMPARE the pros and cons of value systems different from one's own; (c) IDENTIFY the strengths and weaknesses of one's moral character when facing hardships and challenges of life and death; (d) RECOGNIZE and EMPATHIZE WITH others' sufferings and unfortunate experience related to life and death; (e) DESCRIBE the main lines of thought in the relevant literature and case-studies (f) READ with greater comprehension (<i>ER</i>) (g) WRITE a research paper effectively (<i>EW</i>) <p>Please explain how the stated learning outcomes relate to the following three essential features of GUR subjects: Literacy, Higher order thinking, and Life-long learning</p>

	<p><u>Literacy</u></p> <p>In this “Reading Intensive” subject (<i>ER</i>), students will be reading a book of 200 pages. They will be assessed with a quiz. The book serves as a touching, sustained case-study, to which students will respond with their hearts and souls moved.</p> <p>In addition, as a “Writing Intensive” subject (<i>EW</i>), students will write (and be guided in the process) a research paper of 2500 words in order to apply their skills of critical thinking learnt from this subject to controversial matters of life and death. [Outcomes (a), (b), (c), (d), (f) and (g) above]</p> <p><u>Higher order thinking</u></p> <p>Critical thinking skills (such as evaluation of the pros and cons, analysis of different perspectives over a certain issue, and application of basic logical principles) are viewed as fundamental to the students’ learning process. Upon completion of this course, students will be in command of the critical thinking skills, and be intellectually empowered by the broadened perspectives they have learnt to adopt. [Outcomes (a), (b) and (e) above]</p> <p><u>Life-long learning</u></p> <p>The value system to be developed by each of the students, in response to different trying case studies of life and death, will have a far-reaching impact on their outlook of life. With the critical thinking skills, students are able to make revisions and modifications of their moral positions on a life-long basis. The empathy and compassion for fellow human beings, as emphasized in this subject, are also crucial in motivating them in carrying on their life-long learning in this area. [Outcomes (a), (c), (d) and (f) above]</p>
<p>Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus</p> <p>(Note 2)</p>	<p>This subject aims at developing and enriching students’ critical understanding of the import of life-and-death issues, namely, from issues of personal growth, such as friendship, love and personal choices of happiness, to issues that touch on personal and others’ death, such as the nature of the fear of death; the dying process, various hopes for the afterlife and the nature of bereavement.</p> <p>(1) Friendship and Love Persons as self-sustaining beings and social animals; devotion and betrayal; egoism; altruism; passion; intimacy; commitment; unconditional love; jealousy; objectification of human beings; faith; infidelity; love affairs;</p> <p>(2) Happiness: Material vs. Spiritual Sense pleasure and mental satisfaction; morality; prudence; selfishness; self-interests; materialism; meanings of birth; significance of health; spiritual transcendence; transient vs. eternal existence</p> <p>(3) Meanings of Life and Death Theistic vs. non-theistic approaches; teleology; divine plan and humanism; rites of passages; I-thou relationship with the Ultimate; Russell’s free-man worship; Camus and absurdity of human existence; Nietzsche and becoming superman; Confucian fulfillment of moral values; Buddhist Nirvana; Taoist transcendence</p>

	<p>(4) Death and the Dying Process Facing one's own death and others; fear; anxiety; reincarnation; hopes for afterlife; ways of death and its controversy: suicide, death penalty, euthanasia, abortion; terminal illness; chronic disease; near-death experience; types of suffering</p> <p>(5) Bereavement and Transcendence of Fear of Death Psychotherapeutic, religious and philosophical approaches; phenomenological nature of grief and mourning; five stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance</p>
<p>Teaching/Learning Methodology</p> <p>(Note 3)</p>	<p><i>Note: The current subject has evolved, with modifications and updates for the present submission, from its predecessors (bearing 3 credits and 2 credits successively) under the same title. It is one of the most successful UGC-funded GE subjects at the PolyU ever since the inception of GE in the University, in terms of</i></p> <p>(a) <i>The high-demand from students, as it being one of the few GE subjects continuously offered in each semester over a decade, and possibly the only Broadening GE subject offered in parallel sessions attracting 200 students in enrollment in the same semester;</i></p> <p>(b) <i>The feedback it has obtained from students for years ranging over 4 out of 5 points; and</i></p> <p>(c) <i>Regularly high attendance rate per class through the semester.</i></p> <p><u>Progressive pedagogy</u></p> <p>The teaching format of this subject is composed of lectures, tutorials, two quizzes, an intensive reading requirement (ER) and a term paper (EW). Students will first be introduced with the critical thinking skills and learn that subjective value judgments should be constructively supported by rational judgments and logical reasoning.</p> <p>Once they have grasped the critical thinking skills, students will be provided with concrete case-studies, local and global, concerning matters of life and death for sharpening their moral awareness and for applying their rational judgments on moral issues.</p> <p>Then, clashing views and positions on matters of life and death will be broached. Students will be given ample opportunities, in class and in after-class writing, to explore and, in response, to choose a value system suitable for them as a rational construction of their moral positions.</p> <p><u>Reading and writing instructions (ER and EW)</u></p> <p>In this teaching and learning process, students will have finished reading a book on their own. A quiz worth 20 marks on the designated book will be conducted, fulfilling the ER requirement. In this manner, students proceed in their learning step by step, from thinking methods, to small-scale case-studies, up to the reading of a lengthy and concrete case of a value system for them to challenge, to reflect upon and to learn from. The book is 200 pages long, indicated in the Required Reading List below. Students will be encouraged to take part in the reading support activities organized by the ELC whenever available, while that part of participation will not be assessed.</p> <p>For the EW component, students will be required to submit their first draft not later than week 10, and their revised draft not later than week</p>

12. For the submission of their final version of 2500 words not later than week 15, they are required to attach their first and revised drafts to see their progress. ELC will provide the writing support activities (including lectures and small-group tutorials on the skills of writing a research paper in terms of the choice of diction, styles, formats and citing references), and be responsible for the marking of their language performance, worth 10 marks. The instructor of the subject will be responsible for the marking of the content of the term paper, worth 30 marks.

Close communication will be maintained with colleagues from ELC in order to secure effective implementation of the *ER* and the *EW* components.

Interactive teaching and learning methods

The lecturer will engage the students with interactive Q & A sessions during the lectures, using the skills such as passing around the microphones as a game in encouraging students to express their views, in conjunction with the lecturer walking around the lecture hall to maintain a close contact with the students.

In addition, a short reflective written exercise in the end of every other lecture will be conducted, whereby each student will have the chance of practicing independent thinking and enriching their literacy in terms of writing. Samples of excellent performance and pitfalls will be distributed in the beginning of the alternate lectures for the discussion between the lecturer and the students.

Peer interaction between students is also promoted in their group discussion in tutorials. Students will be divided into subgroups of 4 students each, responsible for leading a discussion on controversial questions about life and death, distributed by the lecturer in the very beginning of the subject. Peer interaction is considered as fundamental for the training of their logical reasoning and the development of their independent thinking.

Multi-media teaching tools

Relevant film extracts and documentaries will be used as initial foci for each of the topics, inviting students to be engaged in reflecting matters of life and death.

As a result, a variety of entry points (readings, dialogues, self-explorations, thinking through multi-media, writing reflective exercises and a term paper) are provided for students. They will appreciate the invitation from this subject to the reflective stance that is closely connected with their real-life situations.

Assessment Methods in Alignment with Intended Learning Outcomes

(Note 4)

Specific assessment methods/tasks	% weighting	Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed (Please tick as appropriate)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
1. In-class Exercises	30%	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. Final Quiz (including ER)	30%	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

	3. Term Paper (<i>EW</i>)	40%	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Total	100 %							
	<p style="background-color: #e0f0ff; padding: 5px;">In order to pass this subject, students must pass the writing component, i.e., attain a minimum grade “D” in the writing component.</p>								
Student Study Effort Expected	Class contact:								
	▪ Lecture		26 Hrs.						
	▪ Tutorial		13 Hrs.						
	Other student study effort:								
	▪ Self study		40 Hrs.						
	▪ Reading and writing		40 Hrs.						
	Total student study effort		119 Hrs.						
Reading List and References	<p>Please indicate clearly in this section if the subject should have an “R” designation. If so, subject proposers should also indicate clearly which items on the Reading List constitute the expected reading requirement and include the page numbers.</p> <p><u>Required Reading (as Additional Extensive Reading for <i>ER</i> requirement)</u></p> <p>Extracts will be selected from either of the following books:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Baggini, Julian. (2006). <i>What’s It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life</i>. Oxford University Press. (204 pages) <p><i>(Note: A study guide including reading review questions and a glossary will be provided. In this book, Baggini critically evaluates different theoretical approaches in anchoring one’s meaning of life and faith in the afterlife. In terms of the critical thinking skills introduced, the theoretical relevancy and the accessible language Baggini uses, it is very suitable to serve the purposes of the additional extensive reading.)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Albom, Mitch (1997). <i>Tuesday with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life’s Greatest Lesson</i>. London: Sphere. (210 pages) <p><u>Reference List (<i>EW</i>)</u></p> <p><i>Potential sources for a term paper as an <i>EW</i> subject, and suggested questions will be provided as a guide for the writing of the term paper.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Albom, Mitch. (2006). <i>The Five People You Meet in Heaven</i>. Hyperion. Battin, Margaret Pabst. (2005). <i>Ending Life: Ethics and the Way We Die</i>. Oxford University Press. Baumeister, Roy F. (1991). <i>Meanings of Life</i>. N.Y.: Guilford Press. de Botton, Alain. (2000). <i>The Consolations of Philosophy</i>, N.Y.: Vintage Books. Kastenbaum, Robert J. (2006). <i>Death, Society, and the Human Experience</i>. 9th Edition. NY: Allyn & Bacon. 								

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Nagel, Thomas. (1991). <i>Mortal Questions</i>, Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. 7. Pojman, Louis P. (1999). <i>Life and Death: Grappling with the Moral Dilemmas of Our Time</i>. 2nd Edition. NY: Wadsworth Publishing. 8. Ring, Kenneth and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino. (2006). <i>Lessons from the Light</i>. Moment Point Press. 9. Williams, Bernard. (1995). <i>Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Essays</i>, N.Y.: Cambridge U. Press.
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Note 1: Intended Learning Outcomes

Intended learning outcomes should state what students should be able to do or attain upon completion of the subject. Subject outcomes are expected to contribute to the attainment of the overall programme outcomes.

Note 2: Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus

The syllabus should adequately address the intended learning outcomes. At the same time over-crowding of the syllabus should be avoided.

Note 3: Teaching/Learning Methodology

This section should include a brief description of the teaching and learning methods to be employed to facilitate learning, and a justification of how the methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the subject.

Note 4: Assessment Method

This section should include the assessment method(s) to be used and its relative weighting, and indicate which of the subject intended learning outcomes that each method purports to assess. It should also provide a brief explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes.

Subject Offering Department	GEC
Cluster Area	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Nature, Relations and Development <input type="checkbox"/> Community, Organization and Globalisation <input type="checkbox"/> History, Cultures and World Views <input type="checkbox"/> Science, Technology and Environment
Medium of Instruction	English
Requirements intended to fulfil	<input type="checkbox"/> China-Study Requirement (CSR) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English Reading (ER) and English Writing (EW) <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese Reading (CR) and Chinese Writing (CW)