ANTH2350/UGED2980   FALL 2020
MEANINGS OF LIFE

Lecture: Thursday 1:30-3:15
Tutorials: Various times to be decided
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In this course, you will learn about the processes through which individual meanings of life are formed and negotiated between individuals and their societies; you will learn this through reading and analysis of individual life stories in Japan and the United States. You will also learn about the evolution of senses of meaning in different societies across human history, from prehistory up until the present and future. These two areas of learning will enable you to think about societies past and present and about lives lived within these societies from a new perspective. You will also perhaps learn about how to think about your own life and meaning in a deeper and more conscious way; although this course is academic, it transcends the academic, to have a potential impact on your own thinking about your life.

Although this course examines meanings of life from an anthropological perspective, no prior knowledge of anthropology is required: you can apply what you learn in this course to a wide range of disciplines and endeavors.

Learning Outcomes
After taking this course, you will be able to
a) think analytically about meanings of life within your own and other societies, and understand the complex linkages between individuals and society in creating meaning,

b) comprehend the broad panorama of the evolution of meaning over the course of human history, and

c) (although this outcome cannot be graded) understand your own life in a more insightful way.

Grading
The course will be graded on the basis of:
1) Take-home mid-term examination (6-7 pages long: 30% of grade). This will be handed out on Oct. 22 and due Nov. 5
2) Take-home final examination (10-11 pages long: 50% of grade). This will be handed out on Nov. 26 and will be due Dec. 12.
3) Class participation (20% of grade)

Required readings are all available on Blackboard. Students are required by university policy to submit soft copies of all papers to VeriGuide. Check the website http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic honesty/ for how to submit papers through VeriGuide.
Grade Descriptors

A  Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes, through work that has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas, to the extent that you show a great depth of understanding. Your arguments in your work are logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. All relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work, and additional material as well has been used from your own research.

A- Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes, through work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas. Your arguments in your work are logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. All relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work, and perhaps additional material as well from your own research.

B+  Substantial performance on all learning outcomes. Your arguments in your work are largely logical and cohesive, the discussion is generally well-organized, and the writing is clear. Most relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence and using all course materials, but by and large you have turned in good, solid work.

B  Satisfactory performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall satisfactory performance. Your arguments in your work are somewhat logical and cohesive, the discussion is somewhat well-organized, and the writing is somewhat clear. Much relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

B- Adequate performance on all learning outcomes, OR satisfactory performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall largely adequate performance. Your arguments in your work are partially logical and cohesive, the discussion is partially organized, and the writing is somewhat clear. Some relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

C+ Adequate performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Your written work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing is not clear, and/or there is less than full evidence for statements and claims made. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

C, C- Barely adequate performance on a number of learning outcomes. These grade will be awarded to students who have missed a large number of classes and have failed to use course materials in their written answers.
Part One: Meanings of Life Between Self and Society

Sept. 10: Introduction to Course: Meanings of Life in Anthropological Perspective
--Thomas Nagel, What Does It All Mean?, p. 95-101

Sept. 17: Meanings of Life in Work and Family

Sept. 24: Youth, Age, and Meaning
--Mary Pipher, Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders, p. 39-56;

Oct. 1: Holiday

Oct. 8: Meaning in Creation and Religion

Oct. 15: Meanings of Death
--Mark Manson, The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F-ck, p. 184-204
--David Eagleman, Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlife, p. 23-25, 47-49, 52-53

Oct. 22: Self, Society, and Meaning
--Ernest Becker, The Birth and Death of Meaning, p. 65-74
--Sheldon Solomon, et al., The Worm at the Core, p. 100-123
--Roy Baumeister, Meanings of Life p. 360-367

I will hand out take-home mid-term on Oct. 22. It is due Nov. 5
Part Two: Meanings of Life in the Evolution of Human Societies

Oct. 29: Meanings of Life and Cultural Evolution
--Sheldon Solomon, et al., The Worm at the Core, p. 63-81

Nov. 5: The History of Meanings in Europe

Nov. 12: The History of Meaning in Japan and China (There is supposed to be no class this day because of graduation; this class will be on film on Blackboard if we cannot meet)

Nov. 19: Meanings of Life and Happiness Around the World

Nov. 26: Meanings of Life in Contemporary Societies

I will hand out the Take-Home Final Exam Nov. 26; it is due Dec. 12

Dec. 3: The Future of Meaning
--Yuval Noah Harari, “Education: Change is the Only Constant,” in 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, pp. 73-81
--Discussion of Take-Home Final Exam
**Assigned and Recommended Readings**


