How do archaeologists study coffins, tombs, and human remains to learn about ancient societies? Death and mourning are unavoidable parts of the human experience. Every culture has unique ways that individuals experience grief, society handles the loss of a member, and funerary practitioners deal with the biological processes of decay after death. In many cases, those practices, have left behind physical remains that archaeologists recover in cemeteries, houses, and other locations which can be used to learn about past behavior, social structure, and belief systems.

In this course, students will:

- Appreciate anthropological understandings of death, funerary customs, and belief systems
- Consider how the unique character of archaeological remains affects our ability to reconstruct past mortuary practices
- Analyze published mortuary data to investigate identity, social structure, and social memory
- Compare the potential of a variety of excavation methods to recover mortuary data
- Appreciate the political and ethical implications of conducting burial archaeology globally

Reading materials and coursework

For all students

Readings

Course readings will draw heavily on three required textbooks (see below), as well as articles that are available on the course wiki (http://proteus.brown.edu/gravematters11private/home, password = gravesprivate).

Required texts (available at the Brown Bookstore)


Quiz

There will be a quiz on human skeletal anatomy to ensure students are able to engage with the readings and the practice of burial archaeology.
In-class activities
For each topic, students will practice applying the approaches from readings during in-class activities using real mortuary data from around the world. These activities are designed to reinforce points made in lecture and allow you to engage with materials using a particular approach before applying the approach to your own independent project. In-class activities will be graded credit/no credit. You must attend class to receive credit.

Independent project
During the course, each student will create an independent project that applies each of the approaches from the course to a mortuary sample of their choice from any time period or geographical location.

Dataset selection
Students are responsible for selecting their own dataset. You must have your dataset approved by the instructor by March 1.

Weekly written reports
Students will write and revise sections of this project throughout the course. Following each in-class activity, you will create a written report which applies the approach from the activity to the dataset you have selected for your independent project.

Peer review
At least 1 week after the in-class activity (see schedule for dates), each student will share their written report with another student for peer review. You must send your written report to your partner 24 hours before the class meeting. You are expected to read your partner’s report and prepare comments before coming to class.

One graded written report
Students will select one written report to be submitted for grading after they have made revisions based on critiques and comments from peer review. This will allow students to get feedback on their work from the instructor before the final project is completed. Suggested revisions should be incorporated into the final project. Due on or before April 28.

Final project
The final project will include all of the revised written reports as well as reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of each approach for interpretation of your dataset. Final projects are due May 11.

Presentation on the politics of burial archaeology
Small groups of students will research the political context for carrying out mortuary archaeology in a country of their choice. The group will present this information to the class on April 28.

Class participation
The class participation grade is meant to encourage an atmosphere of respect and active academic engagement. The majority of the participation grade will be based on attendance and participation in discussions and activities. In order to participate fully, you must come prepared to class. Therefore, this portion of your grade may include pop quizzes based on the readings. In addition, to minimize distractions, you may not use laptops, cell phones, or other devices for personal use during class (facebook, email, video games, reading the newspaper, etc.). If you do, one point will be subtracted from your participation grade for each occurrence.
For graduate students only
Case study presentation
Graduate students will complete additional work beyond that which is required for undergraduate students enrolled in the course. Graduate students will select and present one case study and lead class discussion of that article (see syllabus for choices).

Grading
Undergraduates
Human skeletal anatomy quiz 5%
Selection of mortuary dataset for independent project 5%
Peer review 10%
Graded written report 10%
Presentation on the politics of burial archaeology 10%
Participation in activities and discussion 20%
Final project 40%

Graduate students
Human skeletal anatomy quiz 5%
Selection of mortuary dataset for independent project 5%
Peer review 5%
Graded written report 10%
Presentation on the politics of burial archaeology 5%
Presentation and discussion of case study 10%
Participation in activities and discussion 20%
Final project 40%

Course schedule

Introductions
Th 1/27 Course introductions
Reading

Anthropological perspectives on death
Tu 2/1 The experience of death
Reading
Th 2/3  **In-class activity: Identifying mortuary practices that leave material remains**  
*Reading*

Students should **choose one** of the following to read and bring to class


Tu 2/8  **Can ethnography be used to build universal mortuary theory?**  
*Reading*


Th 2/10  **Library visit**  
*No reading*

The class will use this time to learn to select a good case study for the class project.

**The body**

Tu 2/15  **In class activity: The human body**  
*Reading*


Th 2/17  **Archaeothanatology - Part 1**  
*Reading*


**Quiz: The human skeleton**

Tu 2/22  **LONG WEEKEND – NO CLASS**
Th 2/24  **Archaeothanatology - Part 2**  
*Reading*  

Tu 3/1  **In class activity: Archaeothanatology and burials from Yuthu**  
*Reading*  

**Deadline for Instructor approval of dataset for Independent Project**

**Social differentiation**

Th 3/3  **Gender**  
*Reading*  

**Case study**  

Tu 3/8  **Age**  
*Reading*  

**Case study**  

Th 3/10  **In class activity: Age and gender**  
*Published data source*  

*Peer review: Archaeothanatology*

Tu 3/15  **Status, rank, and power**  
*Reading*  

**Case study**

**Th 3/17**

**In class activity: Status and inequality**

*Published data source*


*Peer review: Age and gender*

**Tu 3/22**

**Ethnicity**

*Reading*


**Case study**


**Th 3/24**

**In class activity: Ethnicity**

*Published data source*


*Peer review: Status and inequality*

**Tu 3/29**

**Tu 4/5**

**Placing the dead**

*Reading*


**Case study**

Th 4/7  In class activity: Landscape and territoriality
Published data source

Peer review: Ethnicity and group identity

Tu 4/12  Ancestors and the politics of the living
Reading

Case study

Th 4/14  In class activity: Ancestor veneration
Published data source

Peer review: Landscape and territoriality

Methods for recording mortuary contexts

Tu 4/19  How do excavation methods affect social analysis?
Reading

Th 4/21  Special lecture on digital data recording
Readings TBD

The political context for conducting burial archaeology

Tu 4/26  Political and ethical considerations
Reading

Peer review: Ancestor veneration

Th 4/28  Student presentations of political and legal concerns in selected countries
No reading

Tu 5/11  Final projects due