This FIG focuses on how our beliefs about what death is, and whether it is good or bad, influence our attitudes towards death (both our own and that of others), and also our pursuits in life. We will consider these questions through reading influential philosophical texts from Ancient Greece, Rome, India and China, alongside contemporary reflections on death in philosophy and literature.

The FIG is aimed at students who are interested in exploring topics that are not merely of intellectual or academic interest, but are of fundamental importance for the way they live their lives. We are all mortal, and so one day, inevitably, each one of us will face death. Given this fact, it is worth thinking about death in a sustained and systematic way. The primary course is entitled "Facing Death" because it focuses on questions such as: Is death something that we should fear and if so, why? Death is inevitable, but is it better or worse, depending on when or how it comes? How are we affected by the death of others?

The learning goals of the course include (1) developing skills in reading and carefully analyzing texts, (2) articulating one's ideas effectively, in discussion and writing, and providing reasons to support one's claims, (3) responding to arguments (whether from the reading or another student) in a critical and yet respectful way and (4) writing clear, focused, thesis-driven papers. I will design the syllabus with the linked course in mind, in order to make explicit connections with the material they will be covering in the other class.

Main Course: Philosophy, 104, "Facing Death"

Linking Class: Religious Studies, 101, "Religion in a Global Perspective: Religion in Sickness and Health"

In RS 101, we will “face death” through the experience of those who strive to preserve life: concerned parents, doctors and nurses, traditional healers, “the sick” and “the dying” who make meaning through beliefs and practices that vary widely and yet are “religious.” From Southeast Asia to Africa and the Americas, we’ll approach questions about sickness and health, living and dying, spiritual and physical well-being using perspectives from anthropology, history, sociology, legal studies and the medical sciences, among others. Then we'll come home to Wisconsin to examine how ideas and practices translate here. In all this we'll not only face the difficult issue of death but also challenging and compelling issues around understanding religion.
This FIG is a total of 6 credits. Students will need to take a 12 credit minimum to be a full-time student.