

WHAT ON EARTH IS RELIGION? Spring 2019

Instructor: Maxwell Kennel

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Lecture: Tues/Thurs 9:30AM-12:30PM.

Term: May 7th – June 21st 2019

Office: University Hall, Basement 123

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:00 PM

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Course Description

This course introduces the academic study of religion and religions by focusing on key themes and exploring diverse ways in which scholars approach religiosity, both historically and in contemporary global cultures. Topics may include truth and truth-claims, ritual and practice, myth and history, authority and power, community and conformity. This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion focusing on the history of the scholarly discipline, addressing ideas about what constitutes “religion” and “religions,” and exploring the ways in which religious worldviews affect individuals and communities both historically and globally.

Course Objectives

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

- Recognize similarities and differences between how human beings participate in religious communities and form religious identities.
- Understand fundamental problems in the academic study of religion.
- Appreciate the complexity and diversity of religious studies and make use of several of its major perspectives.

Required Materials and Texts

- Hillary Rodrigues & John S. Harding, *Introduction to The Study of Religion*. (ISR) London: Routledge, 2008. Available in the bookstore.

Class Format

Class will run for three hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and will involve lectures, discussion, Q&A, short video clips, and close reading of the textbook.

Course Evaluation

Course Evaluation is comprised of four online tests (Avenue) that will evaluate knowledge and comprehension of course content from both the lectures and the textbook, using both multiple choice and short answer questions.

Test 1 (20%), Available Friday May 17th 2019.

Major Topics: The Discipline of Religious Studies and Definitions of Religion

Test 2 (20%), Available Friday May 31st 2019.

Major Topics: Traditional and Recent Approaches to the Study of Religion

Test 3 (30%), Available Friday June 14th 2019.

Major Topics: Religious Experience and Phenomenology

Test 4 (30%), Available Friday June 21st 2019.

Major Topics: Judging Religion: Atheism and Feminism

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1.

Tues, May 7: Course Introduction: What is Religious Studies?

Readings: ISR, Chapter 1, 1-17.

Thurs, May 9: "Is-Ought Fallacy," *Critical Thinking Toolkit*, pp:149-152 (Avenue).

Week 2.

Tues, May 14: Definitions: What is Religion? What is religious identity?

Readings: ISR, Chapter 1, 1-17 (review).

Thurs, May 16: Introduction to "Identities – What are they good for?" *The Hedgehog Review*, Summer 2018 (Avenue).

Fri, May 17: Test #1. 20%

Week 3.

Tues, May 21 and 23: Beginnings: How has religion traditionally been studied? Readings: ISR, Chapter 2, 18-48.

Week 4.

Tues, May 28 and 30: Culture & Society: How has religion recently been studied? Readings: ISR, Chapter 3, 49-73.

Fri, May 31: Test #2. 30%

Week 5.

Tues, June 4 and 6: Phenomenology: How is religious experience studied?

Readings: ISR, Chapter 4, 74-103.

Week 6.

Tues, June 11: Judging Religion: How has religion been critiqued? (Part 1)

Readings: ISR, Chapter 5, 104-119.

Thurs, June 13: Judging Religion: How has religion been critiqued? (Part 2)

Readings: ISR, Chapter 5, 119-133.

Fri, June 14: Test #3. 30%

Week 7.

Tues, June 18: Method: What are recent issues in Religious Studies?

Readings: ISR, Chapter 6, 134-140.

Thurs, June 20: Review Class

Fri, June 21: Test #4. 30%

Course Policies

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Tests will be available online on Avenue for 24 hours on Friday May 10, 17, 24, and 31. If you are unable to write the test during this time you must speak with the instructor no less than three days in advance of the test date.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Although there are no formal participation grades for the course, each test will evaluate your knowledge of material covered in lecture. Absence from lecture for medical reasons should be discussed with the instructor.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, *must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account*. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.