

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of Psychology
PSYCH 231
Psychology of Religious Experience
Winter 2021

Instructor Information

Instructor: Christopher T. Burris, Ph.D.

Online Office Hours: by appointment

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Updates: check “announcements” on LEARN frequently for course-related info and news

Course Description

The official course description reads: “Approaches of traditional psychological theories toward phenomena of religious experience, mysticism, and prayer are examined. The psychological process of creating and naming ‘gods’ is considered as well as comparisons among altered states of consciousness including some forms of prayer.”

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Armed with the assumptions and tools of psychological research, I hope you’ll walk away from this course with a greater understanding and appreciation of the “human” side of religious/spiritual experience – specifically, its origin(s), development over time, and consequences. This course is intended to be *descriptive* and *interpretive*, not prescriptive. In other words, its focus is on making psychological sense of religious phenomena, and not on what people *should* or *shouldn't* believe or practice.

Required Readings and Course Schedule

Paloutzian, R. F. (2017). *Invitation to the psychology of religion* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford.

Note: An e-book text version is available for multi-user checkout through the UW library. A Kindle edition is available from booksellers such as Amazon if you prefer your own e-copy. *Please make sure that you have secured access to the text well in advance of the first test date.*

Week of...	Topics	Paloutzian Reading	Tests (topics/readings _(CB1))
Jan 11	Introduction; Foundations I	Chapter 1	
Jan 18	Foundations II	Chapter 2	
Jan 25	Religious Development	Chapter 5	
Feb 01	Personality	Chapter 6	Test #1 (Jan 11-25) Thu Feb 4, 7pm EST
Feb 08	Intense Religious Experience I	Chapter 8	
Feb 15	<i>reading week – no class</i>		
Feb 22	Intense Religious Experience II		
Mar 01	Mysticism		
Mar 08	Conversion	Chapter 7	
Mar 15	Religious Groups	Chapter 11	Test #2 (Feb 1-Mar 8) Thu Mar 18, 7pm EST
Mar 22	Social Consequences		
Mar 29	Mental Health; Conclusion	Chapters 9 & 12	
Apr 05			Test #3 (Mar 15-29)

Course Requirements and Assessment

Tests. The three online tests (see schedule above) are worth 35%, 40%, and 25%, respectively, based on the approximate amount of lecture and reading material that each covers. Tests may contain a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and medium-length essay questions. **THEY ARE NOT DESIGNED TO BE OPEN-NOTES/OPEN-READINGS:** Similar to in-class assessments, each test will be timed so you will need to make sure that you “know your stuff” before writing it. The time allotted and the number of questions on each test will vary depending on the amount of material covered in the section being tested. Tests are not cumulative. There is no final exam.

For students with a documented disability: Please ensure that AccessAbility Services notifies me early in the term to verify any time accommodations that need to be made for the online test sessions.

For students outside the Eastern Time Zone: Please notify me early in the term if you are doing coursework outside the (North American) Eastern Time Zone for possible time accommodations related to online test sessions.

As noted above, all assigned readings will be available to you from the beginning of the term. I will do my best to post online lectures no later than Thursday of each week. Depending on interest, I may also hold online drop-in question-and-answer sessions. If it’s a short question, email works just fine. If there are one or more longer questions, then I’m happy to set up an individual Zoom meeting with you.

Marks will be posted on LEARN as soon as possible. In order to be fair to everyone, *each test mark received stands “as is”* – that is, it will not be dropped or re-weighted.

Extra Credit: Up to 4% extra credit is available via SONA research participation. I will post any information that the Research Experiences Group sends me to assist you. As an active researcher myself, I would ask that you **PLEASE TAKE ANY RESEARCH PARTICIPATION SERIOUSLY**. Careless completion of a study’s materials is a waste of everyone’s time and undercuts the research process. This extra credit option is available to *all* students; please do not expect or request special arrangements.

UW Policy regarding Illness and Missed Tests: UW Examination Regulations

(www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf) state that: 1) A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html. 2) If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, they normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor. 3) The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations. 4) Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Thus, you are entitled to test rescheduling for legitimate medical, compassionate, or religious grounds.

Please note that documentation is expected for granting test deferral even during this online term. Unless it is impossible, please inform me PRIOR to the scheduled test to arrange an alternate writing time. A make-up test should normally be scheduled on the first school day after your documentation expires. Make-up exams may differ in content and format from the original.

Other Important Information

Intellectual Property: I very much want this class to be a good experience for you, and I am putting a lot of time, thought, and effort into that. You (or someone who cares about you a lot) paid so you could benefit from the firsthand experience that this class provides. To be clear, I'm sharing my work with YOU – so **it's not fair to me to sell or give away my lectures, slides, etc. to other people**. That's "unauthorized distribution of intellectual property," and *it's not okay*. I hope that makes sense.

Academic Integrity: Please respect yourself, your fellow students, and your instructor. ***Don't cheat.***

"In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]"

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCAproved.pdf. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf.

Note for students with disabilities: AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/.