

RS 499: Religious Studies Honours Seminar

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of Religious Studies

MW 2:30-4 pm, SJ1 3013

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays after class, Wednesdays 9:30-11 am or by appointment. I have an open door policy, so do not hesitate to ask if we might have a conversation.

Laptop rules and etiquette: This is a seminar course and the use of laptops, tablets, phones, etc. is not permitted.

This course is designed as a “capstone” course for Religious Studies majors at the University of Waterloo. It allows students to review the discipline in a broad perspective and to debate questions and topics that are “live issues” in the discipline. This course is meant to encourage students to integrate what they have learned so far and to explore alternative ways of exploring religious phenomena. Since it is a senior seminar course, it seeks to explore topics in depth; since it is a capstone course, it seeks to be comprehensive. This is a difficult balance to maintain, but we shall try.

At the end of the course, students will be able to understand and critique a variety of theories and methods in the academic study of religion. They will be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and to apply them to specific religious phenomena. Students will learn to summarize assigned texts, ask critical questions of them, and analyze the values, perspective, and agenda of the author. Since this is a seminar course, students will also be expected to develop the kinds of communication skills (presentation, argumentation, intelligent questioning, critique, etc.) expected of scholars of religion. One of the goals of the course—not applicable to all students—is to prepare students for graduate school.

RS 499 is a writing-intensive course, and each student will be asked to write—a lot. They will also be asked to openly share their written work with me, the class, and/or other students. They will allow others to ask questions, make comments, and offer constructive criticism. The goal is to improve not just our writing about religion, but also our overall communication skills. A significant portion of each class will be dedicated to review of students’ written work, and three classes are designated as writing workshops. Because the writing workload will be heavy, I am not asking for any significant research outside of the required reading.

Required Reading

- Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion* (You may use an earlier edition *Eight Theories of Religion*).
- Daniel Pals, *Introducing Religion*.
- Electronic sources on e-Reserves

Requirements and Evaluation

Class Participation 20%.

This course is a senior seminar and participation is graded seriously. First, you cannot participate effectively unless you attend class. You are allowed one unexcused absence during the semester.

The penalty for a second unexcused absence is **5 marks** deducted from your participation mark. The third unexcused absence will result in a penalty of another **10 marks**. Absence is allowed with the presentation of a note from a doctor or approved counselor, or with the permission of the instructor.

Second, it is expected that you will come to the seminar prepared to discuss the assigned readings in detail. This means that you will have read the texts carefully and prepared notes outlining the argument of the readings as well as some important themes. In each class, I will hold you responsible for two things:

- A. I will ask a student chosen at random to give a one-minute summary of one of the required readings for that day. The student will present a brief synopsis of the argument (including a presentation of the whole argument in two sentences at the beginning). This is to help you develop the skill of presenting complex arguments in a concise, clear, and accurate manner. Some people refer to this exercise as giving the “elevator talk,” that is, presenting a proposal, describing a project, or offering an argument in an engaging manner in the amount of time it takes to ride up the elevator with your boss. You will never regret learning this skill.
- B. Each student is responsible for coming to class prepared to answer four questions about the readings:
 1. What inspired you? What part of the reading did you find most insightful? Why? What did it help you understand?
 2. What confused you? What part of the reading just didn’t seem clear, cogent, or logical? (Never be afraid to ask for clarification of a reading in this course. Because its approach is comprehensive, each student, at some point in the class, will be operating outside of her or his “comfort zone” and encountering new material.)
 3. What did you object to? Was there any part of the text that made you angry? Wary? Bored? Why?
 4. If we had this author visit our class today, what would you ask him?

The 20% grade is based on *participation* and not just attendance. Most of the learning in a seminar course comes from discussion, debate, and questions. Consequently, participation is a *requirement*, and silence will be regarded as disengagement from the course material. **Simply put: Everyone has to talk every day.**

The “Elevator-talk” Summary (60 words each), 10%.

On the day that each assigned reading is first discussed (days marked by an asterisk in the class schedule below), students will write up a two-sentence summary (max. 60 words) for that reading. These will be collected at the beginning of each class and graded as a body at the end of the semester. One student will be asked to read aloud her or his summary.

Six Reflection Papers (900-1000 words each), 60% (10% each). Each student will prepare a reflection paper on seven of the assigned theorists, integrating the chapter plus primary source reading. **The Reflection Papers are due on the day that each assigned reading is first discussed (days marked by an asterisk in the class schedule below).** The themes of the reflection paper assignments will vary. Some will ask for a simple synopsis of the author’s argument. Others will ask questions like: What are three questionable assumptions this author makes? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his or her approach? Other assignments may ask you to apply the theory to a religious phenomenon you already

know well. **We will discuss one another's papers in class. Consequently, students must give me permission to share their work with the class.**

One Revise-and-Resubmit Paper (900-1000 words), 10%. Each student will submit a paper on Émile Durkheim before the October 1st class. We will discuss the paper in Writing Workshop One on October 3rd. After revising the paper in light of that discussion, students will resubmit the paper on October 12th. We will discuss the work in Writing Workshop Two on October 15. The grade will be based partly on the original submission and partly on how much you have improved the work.

- Have you caught all spelling and grammatical errors?
- Have you improved the structure and flow of the argument?
- Have you eliminated repetitions, digressions, and unnecessary material?
- Have you made the argument more clear or cogent?

Late Penalty. A late penalty of one mark per day applies to all submitted work. The late penalty can sometimes be avoided simply by contacting me before the deadline.

Policy regarding Illness and Failure to Meet Requirements

The University of Waterloo Examination Regulations (www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf) state that:

- 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.
- If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.
- 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.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Academic Integrity

Please note: I have a zero-tolerance policy on academic offenses. It is the responsibility of the student to understand what an academic offence is. In order to facilitate such understanding the University of Waterloo provides a number of web sites, workshops, and other resources. You may always contact me if you are uncertain. The required SJU/UW language below explains the issue in detail.

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: All students registered in courses at St. Jerome's University are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. 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 professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under St. Jerome's University Academic Discipline Policy and UW Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. In such a case, contact the St. Jerome's University Grievance Officer. Read St. Jerome's University Handbook, Section 4, item 8, www.sju.ca/faculty/SJU_handbook/grievance_policy.html.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under St. Jerome's University Academic Discipline Policy or Grievance Policy if a ground for an appeal can be established. In such a case, contact the St. Jerome's University Appeals Officer. Read St. Jerome's University Handbook, Section 6.4, www.sju.ca/faculty/SJU_handbook/examinations_grades_standings_and_appeals.html.

Academic Integrity website (Arts): http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (UW): <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/>

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, 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 the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

Class and Reading Schedule (Note: These dates, with the exception of due dates, are subject to change.)

September 10, 12 Introduction to the course. What is religion? How do we study it?

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 1-14
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, xiii-xxvi

September 17*, 18 Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 15-48
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 1-70

September 24*, 26 Religion and Personality: Sigmund Freud

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 49-84
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 71-98

October 1* Émile Durkheim

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 81-112
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 99-142
- **Revise-and-Resubmit Assignment due.**

October 3 Writing workshop 1

Oct. 8-10 Thanksgiving and Study Break

Friday, October 12 Émile Durkheim

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 81-112
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 99-142
- **Revised Durkheim Assignment due.**

October 15 Writing workshop 2

October 17*, 22 Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 113-142
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 143-170

October 24*, 29, 31 A Source of Social Action: Max Weber

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 143-184
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 237-270

November 5 Writing workshop 3

November 7* William James: Psychology of Religion

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 185-226
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 171-204

November 12*, 14 The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 227-262
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 271-308

November 19 Writing Workshop 4

November 21* Society's "Construct of the Heart": E.E. Evans-Pritchard / Pals, *Nine Theories*, 263-292

- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 309-340

November 26* Religion as Cultural System: Clifford Geertz

- Pals, *Nine Theories*, 293-324
- Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 341-372

November 28* Feminist Approaches to the Study of Religion: Randi R. Warne and Laurel Zwissler

- Laurel Zwissler, "Feminism and Religion: Intersections between Western Activism, Theology, and Theory," *Religion Compass*.
- Randi R. Warne, "Gender and the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*.

December 3 Conclusion: The Study of Religion