

## **RS 499: Religious Studies Honours Seminar**

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of Religious Studies

MW 1-2:20 pm, SJ1 3013/SH 2028/Online

**Instructor:** David Seljak **Office:** SH 2028 **Phone:** STJ 884-8111, ext. 28232 or 226-747-5812

**Email:** [dseljak@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dseljak@uwaterloo.ca) (put course number RS 499 in subject line)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1-2:30 pm 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.

### **Course Description**

This course is designed as a “capstone” course for Religious Studies majors at the University of Waterloo. **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. The focus of each class will be dedicated to review of students’ written work, and some classes are designated as writing workshops.

### **Course Objectives**

Through this course, students will

- Ask critical questions about the study of religion, that is, the assumptions, methods, theories, definitions, and boundaries of the discipline itself.
- Demonstrate understanding of the broad spectrum of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion (e.g., sociological, anthropological, psychological, philosophical, philological, historical, theological).
- Demonstrate a critical approach to the study of religion, including the ability to question both insider and outsider perspectives on religion (i.e., religious claims as well as claims about religion).
- Ask critical questions about religious phenomena as well as popular and scholarly explanations of those phenomena.

### **Required Reading**

- As negotiated between the course instructor and the student

### **Course Requirements and Assessment**

#### **Class Participation 40%.**

We will meet weekly for ~90 minutes to discuss readings and progress on writing. Several sessions will be organized as writing workshops. Attendance is mandatory for all sessions. Any unexcused absences will mean a 10% (10/40) deduction of your grade.

**Revise-and-Resubmit Assignment 60%. Due April 10.** The student will submit what they consider to be one of their best undergraduate papers from a University of Waterloo Religious Studies course. I will edit the paper as if it had been submitted to an academic journal for publication. Over the course of the semester, the student will revise the paper in several steps and provide a finished paper on the last day of class.

The grade will be based partly on the original submission and partly on how much you have improved the work.

- Have you added to the work with additional research?
- Have you made the work theoretically more sophisticated?
- Have you made the argument more clear or cogent?
- Have you improved the structure and flow of the argument?
- Have you eliminated repetitions, digressions, and unnecessary material?
- Have you addressed all spelling and grammatical errors?
- Have you improved the writing?

**This process includes the following steps:**

Step one: On **January 16 before noon**, submit a paper electronically in MS Word or Open Office. Be prepared to discuss:

- Why did you choose this paper?
- What did you like about it? What frustrated you?
- How might you think it could be improved?

Step two: I will review your work and make comments, corrections, and suggestions to discuss in class on **January 23**

Step three: Review comments, corrections, and suggestions received from instructor (and other students, if any)

Step four: On **February 13**, present a finalized outline of a plan for revision, which will include:

- An oral presentation (10 minutes) and 250-word written plan for revision
- An annotated bibliography of additional research

Step four: On **March 6**, make an oral presentation (3-5 minutes), giving an update on progress made

Step five: On **March 20**, make a 15-minute presentation of your project, followed by a discussion

Step six: On **April 10**, submit the revised, final product

### **POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS**

A late penalty of one mark per day (out of 60) applies to all work at each step. The late penalty can sometimes be avoided simply by contacting me before the deadline.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

With regards to class attendance and participation as well as assignments (in-class and handed-in), we will follow these [UW Regulations](#):

- 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.
- If you fall sick on the day of a due date, contact your instructor at the first possible opportunity.

- If a student has an assignment deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, the instructor will establish a new due date, which will include the same academic penalties for lateness as the original assignment.
- 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 or hand in assignments.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative test or examination time or to modify an assignment deadline.
- If you need an accommodation for other reasons (for example, a family crisis or you are representing St. Jerome's or the University of Waterloo (e.g., at a sports event or academic competition), please see me.

**Academic Integrity:** 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/](http://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](#). 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/](http://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](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**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](#).

**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.

### **In Case of Campus Shutdown**

Since Canada is still experiencing the effects of the COVID pandemic along with an increase in other respiratory infections, St. Jerome's University and the University of Waterloo may move to remote teaching. This course and all of its components will move online.

**Class Schedule** (Note: These dates are subject to change and negotiation.)

**January 9** Introduction to the course.

**January 16** Submit paper for revision: Why this paper? What did you like about it? What frustrated you? How might you think it could be improved?

**January 23** Discussion of revisions to paper / Writing workshop

**January 30** Update on research

**February 6** Update on research and writing workshop

**February 13** Presentation of plans for revision and writing workshop

**February 20-24 Family Day and Study Break**

**February 27** Update on research

**March 6** Oral presentation on progress and writing workshop

**March 14** Update on research and writing workshop

**March 20** 15-minute presentation of your research project followed by Q&A

**March 27** Update on research and writing workshop

**April 3** Update on research

**April 10** Final paper due