

**The College of Humanities: Religion Program
RELI 5802 F: Seminar in Religion and Public Life**

Professor Ash Geissinger

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Office Hours: Online on Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 pm, or by appointment

Classes: Wednesdays 11:35 am-2:25 pm

(classes are synchronous and online; the link and password will be emailed to all registered students a few days before the first class)

Course description

This course will critically examine the categories of “religion” and “public life.” This will be done primarily by considering a number of case studies in which the meanings and boundaries of these terms are called into question one way or another, or the power dynamics involved in efforts to delineate them are made particularly apparent. Questions to be considered include: What counts as “religion”? What is “public life”? Who attempts to define these, and why? How are “religion” as well as “public life” raced, classed, and gendered? What is at stake in such acts of definition? What is gained—or lost—in formulating such categories? How are contemporary technological developments affecting the analytical utility of these concepts?

Course objectives

- To sharpen your critical understanding of the categories of “religion” and “public life”
- To develop a clearer understanding of the ways that social conditions shape religious beliefs, and that religious beliefs when shared collectively can have an impact on how society is constructed
- To hone your skills at analyzing written texts and oral arguments
- To strengthen your ability to formulate and articulate academic arguments supported by evidence, and to express these in written form

Course evaluation

Reading responses (4 reading responses X 5 marks each)—20%

Seminar presentations and active participation—20%

Research paper proposal—10% (due Oct. 14)

Research paper presentation—10% (Dec. 9 in class)

Research paper—40% (15-20 pgs., due Dec. 14)

Reading responses

These responses (about 4 pages in length) must highlight the key issues raised by the assigned readings for the class, as well as the central arguments that their authors make. They are due at the beginning of the class at which the readings are to be discussed.

Seminar presentations and active participation

Each student will be responsible for presenting on the readings for the week and leading class discussion twice during the semester. As with any seminar course, it is essential that all students commit to doing the assigned readings before class, attending regularly, and participating actively and in an informed way in class discussions.

Note: If any student misses more than three classes (which would mean missing a third of the class) they cannot get credit for the course.

Research paper proposal

The paper must deal with an aspect of religion and public life. The proposal must include: a working title, a working bibliography, a preliminary thesis statement, and a preliminary outline which indicates what aspect of the topic will be addressed and what argument will be developed. Note that this proposal must be submitted by the due date, or the research paper will not be accepted.

Research paper presentation

In the final class, all students will present their research papers to the group. Presentations will last 15 minutes, followed by about 10 minutes for questions and discussion. All papers must be in completed physical form for this presentation. However, papers can and should be amended based on feedback received during the presentation before being submitted.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Sept 9—Introduction to the course; discussion about studying “religion” and “public life”

Readings: Matthew Day, “The educator must be educated: the study of religion at the end of the humanities,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22(2010): 1-8.

Sam Reimer, “The gains/losses of Canadian religious groups from immigration: Immigration flows, attendance and switching,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47.3 (2018): 327-44.

Sept 16—“Religion” and constructions of religious authority

Readings: Michael J. Altman, “‘Religion, religions, religious’ in America: toward a Smithian account of ‘Evangelicalism’,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 31.1 (2019)

Adeana McNicholl, “Being Buddha, staying woke: racial formation in Black Buddhist writing,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86.4 (Dec. 2018), 883-911.

Sept 23—Conceptualizing “public life”

Readings: Jurgen Habermas, “Religion in the public sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.1: 1-25.

Heidi Campbell, “Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.1 (March 2012): 64-93.

Sept 30—Whose “religion,” whose “public life”?

Candace Buckner, “Made in an imperfect image: Race, ethnicity, disability, and infirmity in the Life of Aphou,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87.2 (June 2019): 483-511.

Galen Watts, “On the politics of self-spirituality: A Canadian case study,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47.3 (2018): 345-72.

Oct 7— Religious traditions as constructions

Readings: Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), Chapter One
<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/lib/oculcarleton-ebooks/reader.action?docID=3441605>

Sarah Kathleen Johnson, “On our knees: Christian ritual in residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47.1 (2018): 3-24.

Oct 14—Constructing categories of “folk” and “popular” religion

***paper proposal due**

Readings: Jamil Drake, “Folk religion and the medical engineering of rural Black laborers,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88.2 (June 2020): 329-53.

Cuong T. Mai, “The Guanyin fertility cult and family religion in late imperial China: Repertoires across domains in the practice of popular religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87.1 (March 2019): 156-90.

Oct 21—Religious identities and boundaries

Readings: Pew Research Center, “Being Christian in Western Europe”
www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/

Samuli Schielke, “Ambivalent commitments: troubles of morality, religiosity and aspiration among young Egyptians,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009): 158-185.

Emily Sigalow, “Towards a sociological framework of religious syncretism in the United States,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 84.4 (Dec. 2016), 1029-1055.

Oct 28—Fall Break (no class)

Nov 4—Myths of “tradition”

Readings: Mark Sedgwick, *Against the modern world: traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapters 1, 10 and 14.

Nov 11—Religious identities and public interests

Readings: Deepak Sarma, “The final sacrifice: a dead ‘Hindu,’ a missing body, and a \$10 million dollar life-insurance policy,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 19(2007): 58-71.

G.A. Lipton, “Secular Sufism: neoliberalism, ethnoracism, and the reformation of the Muslim other,” *The Muslim World* 101(July 2011): 427-440.

Nov 18—Constructing “public” and “sacred” domains

Readings: Nicholas Shrubsole, “Secularization, dispossession, and forced deprivitization: the conditions of public religion and the protection of First Nations’ sacred space,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 45.3 (2016): 335-359.

William Barylo, “Appropriating Islam as a matrix: young Muslim volunteers blurring the lines between sacred and mundane,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 29.2 (2017), 181-204.

Nov 28—The politics of religious accommodations

Readings: David Seljak, “Post-secularism, multiculturalism, human rights, and religion in Ontario,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 45.4 (2016): 542-565.

Isaac Weiner, “The corporately produced conscience: emergency contraception and the politics of workplace accommodations,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85.1 (March 2017): 31-63.

Dec 2—Freedom of religion and human rights

Readings:

Udi Greenberg, “Is religious freedom Protestant? On the history of a critical idea,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88:1 (March 2020): 74-91.

Jennifer Reid, “Indian residential schools: A governmental assault on religious freedom,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44.4 (2015): 441-56.

Dec 9—In-class paper presentations



Humanities

University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses

Academic Dates and Deadlines

This schedule contains the dates prescribed by the University Senate for academic activities. Dates relating to fee payment, cancellation of course selections, late charges, and other fees or charges will be published in the [Important Dates and Deadlines section](#) of the Registration Website.

Online Learning Resources

While online courses offer flexibility and convenience, they also present unique challenges that traditional face-to-face courses do not. [On this page](#), you will find resources collected by Carleton Online to help you succeed in your online courses; Learning Strategies and Best Practices, Study Skills, Technology and Online Interaction and Engagement.

Copies of Written Work Submitted

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

Academic Integrity at Carleton

The University Senate defines **plagiarism** as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;

- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course

[Academic Integrity Policy](#)

[Academic Integrity Process](#)

Academic Accommodation Policy

Academic Accommodation

Carleton University is committed to providing access to the educational experience in order to promote academic accessibility for all individuals.

Parental Leave: The Student Parental Leave Policy is intended to recognize the need for leave at the time of a pregnancy, birth or adoption and to permit a pause in studies in order to provide full-time care in the first year of parenting a child or for health-related parental responsibilities.

Religious obligation: Carleton University accommodates students who, by reason of religious obligation, must miss an examination, test, assignment deadline, laboratory or other compulsory academic event.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Academic accommodation of students with disabilities is available through the [Paul Menton Centre](#) by evaluations that are carried out on an individual basis, in accordance with human rights legislation and University policy, and with the support of relevant, professional/medical documentation.

Survivors of Sexual Violence

Individuals who disclose that they have experienced sexual violence will be provided support services and will be treated with dignity and respect at all times by the University and its representatives. A person affected by sexual violence is not required to report an incident or make a complaint about sexual violence under the formal complaint process of the Sexual Violence Policy in order to obtain support and services, or in order to receive appropriate accommodation for their needs.

[Supports and services available at the University to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support.](#)

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. [More information.](#)

Grading System at Carleton University

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean."

The [system of grades](#) used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion, is listed below. Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value.

Course Sharing Websites and Copyright

Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copy protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s).

[More information](#)

Student Rights and Responsibilities at Carleton

Carleton University strives to provide a safe environment conducive to personal and intellectual growth, free of injustice and characterized by understanding respect, peace, trust, and fairness.

The [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#) governs the non-academic behaviour of students. Carleton University is committed to building a campus that promotes personal growth through the establishment and promotion of transparent and fair academic and non-academic responsibilities.

[7 Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Deferred Term Work

In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work.

1. Students who claim illness, injury or other extraordinary circumstances beyond their control as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the

instructor concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor and in all cases this must occur no later than three (3.0) working days after the term work was due. The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of term. In all cases, formative evaluations providing feedback to the student should be replaced with formative evaluations. In the event the altered due date must extend beyond the last day of classes in the term, the instructor will assign a grade of zero for the work not submitted and submit the student's earned grade accordingly; the instructor may submit a change of grade at a later date. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

2. In cases where a student is not able to complete term work due to illness or injury for a significant period of time/or long term, the instructor and/or student may elect to consult with the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses) or Graduate Registrar (graduate courses) to determine appropriate action.

[More information of deferred Term Work](#)

Deferred Final Exams

Students who are unable to write a final examination because of a serious illness/emergency or other circumstances beyond their control may apply for accommodation. Normally, the accommodation for a missed final examination will be granting the student the opportunity to write a deferred examination. In specific cases when it is not possible to offer a deferred examination, and with the approval of the Dean, an alternate accommodation may be made.

The application for a deferral must:

1. be made in writing to the Registrar's Office no later than three working days after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination; and,
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation and, in cases of illness, by a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination, or by appropriate documents in other cases. Medical documents must specify the date of the onset of the illness, the (expected) date of recovery, and the extent to which the student was/is incapacitated during the time of the examination. The University's preferred medical form can be found at the Registrar's Office [here](#).

[More information on Final Exam Deferrals](#)

Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

Withdrawn. No academic credit, no impact on the CGPA. WDN is a permanent notation that appears on the official transcript for students who withdraw after the full fee adjustment date in each term (noted in the Academic Year section of the Calendar each term). Students may withdraw on or before the last day of classes.

Important dates can be found [here](#). Make sure that you are aware of the separate deadlines for

Financial and Academic withdrawal!

Making registration decisions in Carleton Central involves making a financial and academic commitment for the courses you choose, regardless of attendance. If you do not attend – you must withdraw in Carleton Central within the published deadlines to cancel your registration. You can do this via the [MyCarleton Portal](#). A fee adjustment is dependent on registration being canceled within the published [fee deadlines](#) and dependent on your course load.

Department Contact Information

Bachelor of the Humanities 300 Paterson Hall CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca

Greek and Roman Studies 300 Paterson Hall GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca

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