

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

Professor Ash Geissinger

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Office Location and Office Hours: posted on Brightspace

**Classes**: Thursdays 11:35 am-2:25 pm

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### **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 in some way, or the power dynamics involved in efforts to delineate them are made apparent. Questions to be considered include: What counts as “religion”? What is “public life”? Who attempts to define them, how 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?

Two key points to note:

- This is a seminar course, not a lecture course
- The academic study of religion differs significantly from confessional apologetics and pastoral theology

This course is designed to foster the further development of students’ understanding and appreciation of these two points.

### **Course Evaluation**

Each of the following course components is worth 20% of the final mark. More details about what is expected will be provided in class:

1. Written reflection (1500 words, due on Sept. 19 at the beginning of class)
2. Oral presentation I (held in Weeks 3-7)
3. Oral presentation II (held in Weeks 9-14)
4. Written report (in-class, 40 minutes; choice of Weeks 10-13)
5. Active, informed, and constructive class participation

### **Course Readings**

Course readings are listed below. Most of these are library resources, and you will need to be signed into the library website or on campus in order to access them.

## Intellectual Property

All course materials (including lectures, outlines, PowerPoint presentations, handouts, and similar materials) are protected by copyright. I am the exclusive holder of copyright and other intellectual property rights for all course materials. Students may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use, but may not reproduce or distributed lecture notes and course materials publicly for any purpose, commercial or otherwise, without my express written consent. Student work in this course remains the exclusive intellectual property of the student(s) who produced it, and will not be shared with anybody without their permission, except in accordance with Carleton University policies.

## Academic Integrity

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This includes 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. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, artworks, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, **including the use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT)**;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

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.

## Email Policy

The Carleton communications policy states that faculty must conduct email communications with students only through Carleton email accounts. Therefore, be sure to send any emails to me through your Carleton email; I cannot respond to messages sent through any other account. Typically, I respond to emails within 48 hours of receiving them, except during evenings and weekends.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **WEEK 1 (Sept. 5)**—Introduction to the course

#### 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.
- Mary Churchill, “Adjunctification—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 35.2 (Fall 2019): 73-77.
- Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, “The Affective Allure of Authoritarianism”  
[The affective allure of authoritarianism – The Immanent Frame \(ssrc.org\)](#)
- Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method” [Method in Religious Studies - Religion and Public Life \(carleton.ca\)](#)

### **WEEK 2 (Sept. 12)**—Studying “religion”

#### 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.
- Kristen Tobey, “Mormon-ish: Negotiating religious ambivalence online,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 90.2 (June 2022): 396-412.
- Daniel Miller, “American Christian nationalism and the meaning of “religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 34 (2022): 64-85.

### **WEEK 3 (Sept. 19)**—Religious traditions as constructions

**\*\*written reflection due today** (at the beginning of class)

#### Readings:

- 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.
- Kathleen Foody, “The World of Islam: ‘good’ religion, perennialism, and public culture in the 1970s,” *Culture and Religion* 22.2 (2021): 103-121.

**WEEK 4 (Sept. 26)**—Boundaries and belonging

Readings:

- 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.
- Benjamin Goossen, “From Aryanism to Anabaptism: Nazi race science and the language of Mennonite ethnicity,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90 (April 2016): 135-163.

**WEEK 5 (Oct. 3)**—Studying constructions of “good” and “bad” religion

Readings:

- Ira Helderman, “‘Meditation madness’: Meditation’s popularity, popular religion, and unsupervised religion,” *Culture and Religion* 23.1 (2023): 21-45.
- Rose Deighton-Mohammed, “A Sufi pedagogy of community-engaged self-cultivation: contemporary approaches to training, accountability, and religious abuse in Sufism,” *Culture and Religion* (2024): 1-21. Advance online pub. DOI: 10.1080/14755610.2319077

**WEEK 6 (Oct. 10)**—The “public sphere”, the “private sphere” and religion

Readings:

- Matt Sheedy, “Habermas and religion,” *Religion Compass* 10.3 (March 2016): 58-73.
- Michael Baysa, “Materializing the public sphere in American religious history,” *Religion Compass* 18.5 (May 2024): 1-12.
- Shira Gabriel, Nicole Koepler and Veronica Schneider, “Creating a space for the sacred in a secular world: Shabbat dinners as a vehicle for collective effervescence, social connection, and meaning,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* (2024): 1-16. Advance online pub. DOI: 10.1177/00084298241238680

**WEEK 7 (Oct. 17)**—Civil religion and implicit religion

Readings:

- Robert Bellah, “Civil religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.
- George Sanders, “An implicit religion of control: Corporate mindfulness meditation programs,” *Implicit Religion* 21.1 (2018): 70-92.

**WEEK 8 (Oct. 24)** FALL BREAK

**WEEK 9 (Oct. 31)**—Studying constructions and contestations of religious authority

Readings:

- 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.
- Joshua Smith and Sara Patterson, “For time and eternity: feeling the spirit in the lives of LGBTQ+ Mormons,” *Culture and Religion* 22.3 (2021): 244-266.

**WEEK 10 (Nov. 7)**—Religion in Canada

Readings:

- Roger O’Toole, “Religion in Canada: Its development and contemporary situation,” *Social Compass* 43 (1996): 119-134.
- [Religion by gender and age: Canada, provinces and territories \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/28-263-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm)
- Sam Reimer, “The gains/losses of Canadian religious groups from immigration: Immigration flows, attendance and switching,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47.3 (2018): 327-344.

**WEEK 11 (Nov. 14)**—Secularization theories and religious “nones”

Readings:

- Volkan Ertit, “Can the scope of secularization theory be expanded beyond the modern-Christian-West? Exploring the Alevi Experience in Turkey,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 0.0 (2024): 1-23.
- Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, “And then there were none: Regional dynamics of non-religious identities, beliefs and practices among Canadian millennials,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 52.3 (2023): 358-380.

**WEEK 12 (Nov. 21)**—Studying religion at the convoy protests

Readings:

- Hannah Dick, “Americanized discourses of religious freedom and Christian persecution during the 2022 Ottawa trucker convoy,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* (2024): Advance online pub. DOI: 10.1177/00084298241243084
- Christine Mitchell, “Biblical interpretation at the Ottawa convoy occupation,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* (2024): 1-13. Advance online pub. DOI: 10.1177/00084298241238359
- Melanie Coughlin, “Myth, identity and ableism: Jericho March becomes Canadian Marathon of Hope in the Freedom Convoy,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* (2024): 1-21. Advance online pub. DOI: 10.1177/00084298241242710

## **WEEK 13 (Nov. 28)**—Conspiracy theories and religion

### Readings:

- David Robertson, “The hidden hand: Why religious studies need to take conspiracy theories seriously,” *Religion Compass* 11.3-4 (May 2017): 1-8.
- Brooklyn Walker and Abigail Vegter, “Christ, Country, and Conspiracies? Christian Nationalism, Biblical Literalism, and Belief in Conspiracy Theories,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62.2 (2023): 278-292.
- Sven Bretfeld, “Buddhism endangered by hidden enemies: Conspiracy narratives in Sri Lankan Buddhist present and past,” *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, eds. Asbjør Dyrendal, David Robertson and Egil Asprem (Brill, 2018): 257-278.

## **WEEK 14 (Dec. 5)**—Discourses on freedom of religion and religious accommodations

### 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.
- 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.

## **University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses** (Updated August 20, 2024)

### 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.

### 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.

### Online Learning Resources

[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.

### Academic Integrity Policy

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This includes 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. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT)
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.”

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of “F” for the course.

### **Co-operation or Collaboration**

An important and valuable component of the learning process is the progress a student can make as a result of interacting with other students. In struggling together to master similar concepts and problems and in being exposed to each other’s views and approaches, a group of students can enhance and speed up the learning process. Carleton University encourages students to benefit from these activities which will not generally be viewed as a violation of the Policy. With the exception of tests and examinations, instructors will not normally limit these interactions.

Students shall not co-operate or collaborate on academic work when the instructor has indicated that the work is to be completed on an individual basis. Failure to follow the instructor’s directions in this regard is a violation of the standards of academic integrity. Unless otherwise indicated, students shall not co-operate or collaborate in the completion of a test or examination.

**Group Work:** There are many cases where students are expected or required to work in groups to complete a course requirement. Normally, students are not responsible for violations of this policy

committed by other members of a group in which they participate.

**More information on the process [here](#).**

## Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodation refers to educational practices, systems and support mechanisms designed to accommodate diversity and difference. The purpose of accommodation is to enable students to perform the essential requirements of their academic programs. At no time does academic accommodation undermine or compromise the learning objectives that are established by the academic authorities of the University.

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the *Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances*, are outlined on the [Academic Accommodations website](#).

### Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes can be [found here](#).

### Addressing Human Rights Concerns

The University and all members of the University community share responsibility for ensuring that the University's educational, work and living environments are free from discrimination and harassment. Should you have concerns about harassment or discrimination relating to your age, ancestry, citizenship, colour, creed (religion), disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, place of origin, race, sex (including pregnancy), or sexual orientation, please contact the [Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities](#) at [equity@carleton.ca](mailto:equity@carleton.ca).

## Grading System at Carleton University

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. 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 can be found [here](#).

## 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.

## Deferred Term Work

In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of extenuating circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work. Requests for academic consideration are made in accordance with the [Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical or Other Extenuating Circumstances](#).

Students who claim short-term extenuating circumstances (normally lasting up to five days) as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the instructor concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor. If the instructor requires supporting documentation, the instructor may only request submission of the University's self-declaration form, which is available on the [Registrar's Office website](#). The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule.

1. 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 extenuating circumstances lasting for a significant period of time/ long-term (normally more than five days), 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.
3. If a student is concerned the instructor did not respond to the request for academic consideration or did not provide reasonable accommodation, the student should follow the appeals process described in the [Academic Consideration Policy](#).
4. If academic consideration is granted, but the student is unable to complete the accommodation according to the terms set out by the instructor as a result of further illness, injury, or extraordinary

circumstances beyond their control, the student may submit a petition to the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses)/Graduate Registrar (graduate courses). Please note, however, that the course instructor will be required to submit an earned final grade and further consideration will only be reviewed according to established precedents and deadlines. (More information: [Undergraduate](#) | [Graduate](#)).

## Deferred Final Exams

Students who are unable to write a final examination because of extenuating circumstances, as defined in the [Academic Consideration Policy](#), 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 (3) working days after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination; and,
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation. In cases of short-term extenuating circumstances normally lasting no more than five (5) days, students must include the University's self-declaration form, which can be found on [the Registrar's Office website](#). Additional documentation is required in cases of extenuating circumstances lasting longer than five (5) days and must be supported by a medical note specifying the date of 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](#).

### 3. Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

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. A fee adjustment is dependent on registration being canceled within the published [fee deadlines](#) and dependent on your course load. A course dropped after the deadline for financial withdrawal will receive a grade of Withdrawn (WDN), which appears on your official transcript.

Even if you miss the deadline for financial withdrawal, you might decide to drop a course to avoid a failure or a poor grade showing up on your student record and bringing down your CGPA. It is your responsibility to drop the course via Carleton Central within the published [deadlines](#) (see Academic Withdrawal).

If you are considering withdrawing from a course, you may want to talk to an advisor first. Course withdrawal may affect your student status, as well as your eligibility for student funding, immigration status, residence accommodation and participation in varsity sports, etc.

Additionally, remember that once you choose your courses, you must use the “Calculate amount to pay” button to determine the correct amount of fees to pay.

Carleton Central is your one-stop shop for registration activities. If you are interested in taking a course, make sure to complete your registration. Simply attending a course does not mean you are registered in it, nor is it grounds for petition or appeal.

## Mental Health and Wellness at Carleton

As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>

### Emergency Resources ([on and off campus](#))

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: call or text 9-8-8, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- For immediate danger or urgent medical support: call 9-1-1

### Carleton Resources

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

### Off Campus Resources

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: call 613-238-3311, text 343-306-5550, or connect online at <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: call 613-722-6914 or toll-free 1-866-996-0991, or connect online at <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me Counselling Service: call 1-844-741-6389 or connect online at <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: call 1-866-925-5454 or connect online at <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: for online or on-site service <https://walkincounselling.com>

## The Centre for Indigenous Support and Community Engagement

The Centre for Indigenous Initiatives is proud to offer culturally centered individual counselling to students who self-identify as First Nation, Metis or Inuk. Through this service, Indigenous

students [can access confidential, individual sessions for support with personal, mental health or academic challenges.](#)

## Department Contact Information

Bachelor of the Humanities 300 Paterson Hall  
[CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca)

Greek and Roman Studies 300 Paterson Hall  
[GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca)

Religion 2A39 Paterson Hall  
[Religion@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:Religion@cunet.carleton.ca)

Digital Humanities (Graduate) 2A39 Paterson Hall  
[digitalhumanities@carleton.ca](mailto:digitalhumanities@carleton.ca)

Digital Humanities (Undergraduate Minor) 300 Paterson Hall  
[digitalhumanities@carleton.ca](mailto:digitalhumanities@carleton.ca)

MEMS (Undergraduate Minor) 300 Paterson Hall  
[CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca)