

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

Professor A. Geissinger

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:30 pm,  
or by appointment

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Office: 2A37 Paterson Hall

Office phone: (613) 520-2600, ext. 3108

Classes: Thursdays 11:35 am-2:25 pm (2A46 Paterson Hall)

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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 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 (3 reading responses X 5 marks each)—15%

Art, religion and public life written response—10% (due Oct. 10 in class)

Seminar presentations and active participation—20%

Research paper proposal—8% (due Oct. 17 in class)

Research paper presentation—9% (Dec. 4, in class)

Research paper—38% (15-20 pgs., due Dec. 6)

### **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.

### Art, religion and public life written response

This assignment requires you to go to the National Art Gallery (380 Sussex Drive, Ottawa), find a piece of art or an art installation that directly or indirectly raises questions about religion and public life. This written response (approx. 5 pages) must explicitly engage the Buggeln reading. More details will be provided in class. Note that admission to most of the galleries is free on Thursdays from 5-8 pm.

### 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 5**—Introduction to the course; discussion about studying “religion” and “public life”

Reading: 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.

**Sept 12**—“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)

[https://brill-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/view/journals/mts/31/1/article-p71\\_8.xml/](https://brill-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/view/journals/mts/31/1/article-p71_8.xml/)

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 19**—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 26**—Public life, religion, and visual cultures

Christoph Uehlinger, “Approaches to visual culture and religion: disciplinary trajectories, interdisciplinary connections, and suggestions for further progress,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27.4-5 (2015): 384-422.

Gretchen Buggeln, “Museum space and the experience of the sacred,” *Material Religion* 8 (2012): 30-51.

**Oct 3**—Art, religion, and public life

National Art Gallery visit

**Oct 10**—Religious traditions as constructions

**\*art, religion, and public life written response due today** (in class)

Readings: William Arnal, “The collection and synthesis of ‘tradition’ and the second-century invention of Christianity,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23(2011): 193-215.

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 17**—Religious identities and boundaries

**\*paper proposal due** (in class)

Readings: Pew Research Center, “Being Christian in Western Europe”  
[www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/](http://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 24**—Fall Break (no class)

**Oct 31**—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.

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/view/10.1093/0195152972.001.0001/acprof-9780195152975/>

**Nov 7**—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 14**—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 21**—Freedom of religion and human rights

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

J. Brent Crosson, “The impossibility of liberal secularism: religious (in)tolerance, spirituality, and not-religion,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 30.1 (2018): 37-55.

**Nov 28**—The politics of religious accommodations

Readings: 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 5**—In-class paper presentations



## University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses

### Copies of Written Work Submitted

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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

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Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own. Plagiarism 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, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, and material on the internet. More information can be found [here](#).

### Academic Accommodation Policy

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#### **Academic Accommodation**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

**Religious obligation:** write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at

613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the [PMC website](#) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](http://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-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. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

## **Grading System at Carleton University**

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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. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion is below. Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value. Where the course credit is greater or less than one credit, the grade points are adjusted proportionately.

[Grading System](#)

## **Course Sharing Websites and Copyright**

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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).

## Statement on Class Conduct

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The Carleton University Human Rights Policies and Procedures affirm that all members of the University community share a responsibility to:

- promote equity and fairness,
- respect and value diversity,
- prevent discrimination and harassment, and preserve the freedom of its members to carry out responsibly their scholarly work without threat of interference.

## Deferred Term Work

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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.

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. More information is available [in the calendar](#).

## Deferred Final Exams

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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. [More information.](#)

The application for a [deferral](#) must:

1. be made in writing or online 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 [forms and fees page](#).

Any questions related to deferring a Final Exam or Final Assignment/Take Home Examination should be directed to the [Registrar's Office](#).



## Withdrawal From Courses

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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](#).

## Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

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**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. [More information](#)

## Department Contact Information

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**College of the Humanities** 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

[CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop box for CLCV, HUMS LATN GREK Term Papers and assignments is outside 300 P.A.

**Greek and Roman Studies** 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

[GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop Box is outside of 300 P.A.

**Religion** 2A39 Paterson Hall (613)520-2100

[Religion@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:Religion@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop box for RELI and SAST Term Papers and assignments is outside of 2A39 P.A.

**Registrar's Office** 300 Tory (613)520-3500

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/>

## Student Resources on Campus

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[CUKnowHow Website](#)

[Academics: From registration to graduation, the tools for your success.](#)