

CLCV 4210 / HIST 4210 / RELI 4850 / RELI 5850

Fall Term

The College of the Humanities

GNOSTICISM: ANCIENT AND MODERN

Tuesdays 8:35 am-11:25 am

Dr. Timothy Pettipiece

Course Email: Timothy.Pettipiece@carleton.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Throughout history people have been in search of secret revealed knowledge (known in Greek as *gnosis*), yet “Gnosticism” continues to be the subject of a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding, and even sensationalism. This seminar will examine the phenomenon through both surviving ancient sources and modern receptions. The much-contested term “Gnostic” is typically applied, in a historical sense, to a variety of early Christian sectarian groups from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, but is also used more broadly to characterize a range of esoteric and perennialist traditions from subsequent periods. As such, the course is divided into two parts: the first will closely examine the complex set of interpretive problems surrounding the ancient primary sources, particularly the Coptic Nag Hammadi codices, while the second will explore how gnostic themes and concepts are deployed within scholarly frameworks and fictional narratives. In addition, students will be asked to model aspects of ancient book production and scribal practice through the production of their own “Gnostic Codex.” *Please note: students enrolling in the course should have at least some familiarity with Early Christianity and the Graeco-Roman world.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will enhance their ability to engage with primary sources in translation
- Students will learn to contrast and differentiate historicist and perennialist approaches to the material
- Students will simulate aspects of ancient manuscript production and scribal practice
- Students will practice academic presentation skills

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Jeffrey Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2006) approx. \$50

Philip K. Dick, *Valis* (any edition) approx. \$25

EVALUATION

Codex Project	(25%)
Comparative Analysis / Research Paper	(25%)
Course Colloquium	(25%)
Course Engagement	(25%)

TOPICS AND READINGS (*provided on Brightspace)

Part I: Ancient Texts and Testimonies

Sept 15	Course Introduction Reading: Burns, "Gnosticism, Gnostics, Gnosis"*
Sept 22	Book Arts Lab (Codex Construction) [<i>It is very important that you attend!</i>] Denzey and Blount, "Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices"
Sept 29	<i>Secret Book of John</i> (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG)* <i>The Reality of the Rulers</i> (NHC II,4)* <i>On the Origin of the World</i> (NHC II,5; XIII,2)*
Oct 6	<i>Gospel of Truth</i> (NHC I,3; XII,2)* <i>Tripartite Tractate</i> (NHC I,5)* Ptolemaeus, <i>Letter to Flora</i> *
Oct 13	Irenaeus, <i>Against the Heresies</i> 1-31*
Oct 20	Porphyry, <i>Life of Plotinus</i> * Plotinus, <i>Against the Gnostics</i> (<i>Ennead</i> 2.9)* Zostrianos (NHC VIII,1)*

Part II: Modern Receptions and Interpretations

Nov 3	Kripal, <i>The Serpent's Gift</i> , Intro, Chapters 1-2
Nov 10	Kripal, <i>The Serpent's Gift</i> , Chapters 3-4, Conclusion
Nov 17	Dick, <i>Valis</i> 1
Nov 24	Dick, <i>Valis</i> 2
Dec 1	Course Colloquium I
Dec 8	Course Colloquium II

THE CODEX PROJECT (25%)

Ancient Gnostic texts were copied and circulated in manuscripts. Some of these were kept hidden and have been discovered in modern times. In order to appreciate this tactile and material aspect of our primary sources, you will produce your own "Gnostic Codex" in four stages.

Stage 1) Creating Your Codex (2%) (Sept 22)

With the help of Carleton's Book Arts Lab, you will construct a small codex to serve as the material basis of your project. (No costs for materials).

Stage 2) Copying Your Text (3%) (Completed by Oct 13)

After you have produced your codex, a primary Gnostic text will be assigned to you by me, which you must transcribe by hand into your book. Be sure to leave space for Stage 4 (Commentary / Exegesis). Each text will be assigned to two students (see Colloquium below).

Stage 3) Adornment and Annotation (10%) (Completed by Nov 10)

As was typical in many ancient and medieval manuscript cultures, you should adorn and annotate your text with decorative motifs, hand-drawn images, and marginal notes or glosses. You will not

be graded on artistic skill or aesthetic merit, but on the extent to which you incorporate these paratextual features.

Stage 4) Commentary / Exegesis (10%) (Completed Dec 1)

In the space that remains in your codex you should collect quotes from assigned readings, personal reflections on the material, and exegetical impressions from throughout the term. These should be specific to your chosen text but may also be related to the course theme more broadly.

Please note that in order to receive a grade for the assignment, each of the four components of your project must be completed. If any components are missing, the assignment will not be graded. Moreover, only those components submitted on time will receive the allotted marks. Also, this project is meant not only as a means to engage with the material aspects of the source material, but your finished codex should also serve as a keepsake and memento of your course experience. As such I encourage you to take care and pride in your work.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: UNDERGRAD REQUIREMENTS (25%)

By the end of term you must produce a paper of at least 15 pages that places your assigned primary source (codex text) in comparative conversation with the work of either Kripal or Dick. This comparative analysis can be focused through any number of more specific themes, but must be supported by at least 15 secondary sources (academic books or articles). This paper will also serve as the basis of your presentation for the Course Colloquium (see below). I am fairly flexible on topics, but they must be approved by me, so please consult me (sooner rather than later) about narrowing the focus of your paper.

Please note that both the 15 pages and 15 sources are both minimum requirements. You should be aiming to surpass both if you want to earn a higher grade.

Formatting: Papers must be presented in standard format: double-spaced, 12-point font, title page, bibliography. The title page and bibliography do not count towards the 15-page minimum, and referencing must conform to Chicago Style.

Research Dossier: Your grade for this component will be based on the completion of a research dossier. This means that in order to receive a grade for the assignment, each of the following three components of your research dossier must be completed. If any components are missing, the assignment will not be graded. Moreover, only those components submitted on time will receive the allotted marks.

Part 1) An annotated bibliography of at least 15 academic sources is due **Oct 20** (5%).

Part 2) Photos / pdfs of your annotated source material / research notes / process materials must be submitted by **Nov 24** (10%)

Part 3) Finished paper of at least 15 pages is due **Dec 11** (10%)

****I reserve the right to request an in-person meeting to discuss your paper before determining a final grade.***

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: GRAD REQUIREMENTS (25%) *RELI 5850 only

By the end of term you must produce a paper of at least 20 pages that places your assigned primary source (codex text) in comparative conversation with the work of either Kripal or Dick. This comparative analysis can be focused through any number of more specific themes, but must be supported by at least 20 secondary sources (academic books or articles). This paper will also serve as the basis of your presentation for the Course Colloquium (see below). I am fairly flexible on topics, but they must be approved by me, so please consult me (sooner rather than later) about narrowing the focus of your paper.

Please note that both the 20 pages and 20 sources are both minimum requirements. You should be aiming to surpass both if you want to earn a higher grade (*of initiation*).

Formatting: Papers must be presented in standard format: double-spaced, 12-point font, title page, bibliography. The title page and bibliography do not count towards the 15-page minimum, and referencing must conform to Chicago Style.

Research Dossier: Your grade for this component will be based on the completion of a research dossier. This means that in order to receive a grade for the assignment, each of the following three components of your research dossier must be completed. If any components are missing, the assignment will not be graded. Moreover, only those components submitted on time will receive the allotted marks.

Part 1) An annotated bibliography of at least 20 academic sources is due **Oct 20** (5%).

Part 2) Photos / pdfs of your annotated source material / research notes / process materials must be submitted by **Nov 24** (10%)

Part 3) Finished paper of at least 20 pages is due **Dec 11** (10%)

****I reserve the right to request an in-person meeting to discuss your paper before determining a final grade.***

COLLABORATIVE COURSE COLLOQUIUM (25%)

The same codex text will be assigned to two students, who must work together to present a collaborative analysis at our Course Colloquium, which you should consider to be a miniature academic conference. All students are required to attend the Course Colloquium in order to ask questions, provide feedback, and support classmates. Your grade for this component will be based on three criteria:

- 1) your ability to effectively communicate your research to an audience of peers (10%)
- 2) your ability to answer questions and address feedback (10%)
- 3) your ability to work within time and format parameters (5%)

****Please note that time limits will be vigorously enforced, so prepare accordingly. Moreover, to avoid unnecessary technical issues and delays, the use of PowerPoint will not be permitted. You may choose to prepare a hard copy handout if you wish, but this is not required. Further details and logistics TBD based on course enrollment.***

COURSE ENGAGEMENT (25%)

Upper-level university seminars are driven by student engagement and participation. As such, even though we have an early start time, you are expected to attend at least 10 of the 12 weeks of class to receive the full attendance portion of the Course Engagement grade (15%). Note: failure to attend the Colloquium will result in the forfeiture of your attendance grade. Moreover, throughout the term you must also demonstrate consistent willingness to participate in class activities and discussions (10%).

IMPORTANT NOTE ON GENERATIVE AI

We are participating in this course as part of a shared Humanistic academic enterprise, not to beta test new technologies. As your professor, I am only interested in hearing your own thoughts, analyses, and insights on the course material as a cognitively autonomous and unique human being. Therefore, use of generative AI or LLM's for any course component is not permitted.

COURSE DELIVERY AND COMMUNICATION

The course will be delivered in-person. Virtual participation is not an option. I am happy to discuss anything course related and can be reached about course via email (see above). I will do my best to respond within 24 hours during weekdays, 48 hours during weekends. I am also available for walk-in office hours (TBD) or by appointment. I encourage you to take advantage of them.

University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses (Updated Aug 12,2026)

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.

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](#).

Academic Consideration Policy

As per the [Academic Consideration Policy](#), if students encounter extenuating circumstances that temporarily hinder their capacity to fulfil in-class academic requirements, they can request academic consideration. The Academic Consideration for Coursework is only available for accommodations regarding course work. Requests for accommodations during the formal exam period must follow the [official deferral process](#).

NOTE: As per the Policy, students are to speak with/contact their instructor before submitting a request for Academic Consideration. Requests are not automatically approved. Approving and determining the accommodation remains at the discretion of the instructor. Students should consult the course syllabus about the instructor's policy or procedures for requesting academic consideration. [More information here](#).

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
- 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

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