

Carleton University

Winter, 2023

**College of the Humanities
Religion Program: RELI 2741 B
Winter syllabus**

Big Questions in Religious Studies

Instructor: Dr. Robert Michael Edwards

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Class times: Tues/Thurs 2:35-3:55

Class location: Mackenzie 3275

Office hours: Virtual over Zoom, Time TBD

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this Inquiry course, students will be introduced to a specific topic in Religious Studies (e.g., ritual, narrative, space) and develop a research project related to it. Focus on fostering intellectual curiosity and developing practical skills of reading, writing and research fundamentals.

COURSE CONTENT

This is an inquiry and research-based course that will focus on two key elements throughout the semester. As the overall course topic is “Big Questions in the Study of Religion” we will be performing an in-depth study of the intersection of religion and politics. By the end of the semester students will have a broad understanding of the major themes in the study of religion as it relates to a variety of political contexts on a global, national, and local level. They will also attain an understanding of how the world’s religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, among many others) play both a direct and indirect role in the development and maintenance of political systems. Finally, students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of religions, and their influence and impact in the context of current events (local, national, and international).

As this course also acts as an introduction to research practices in the field of religious studies, students will spend the semester developing a research topic that is related to the broad themes of the course. Throughout the course lectures, we will spend significant time working through the process of researching and writing an academic paper. This will proceed in stages, involving a short research proposal and preliminary bibliography; two brief research meetings (at the end of January and the end of March); a short blog style entry that is related to your topic and; the final paper submission at the end of the semester which will be the culmination of the previous work.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students should:

- Be able to think and write critically, at a second-year university level, about the themes examined in the lectures, as well as in the assigned texts, listening, and viewing.
- Develop a strong understanding of the interaction of religion and political systems.
- Be able to engage critically with religious texts as primary source material.
- Have developed an understanding of the different types of inquiry that are common to the field of religious studies.
- Be able to conduct research on topics within the field of religious studies
- When reading, be able to distinguish a paper's argument from its subject matter
- Construct a solid argument and support it with evidence
- Be able to recognize acceptable scholarly primary and secondary research sources for the study of religion and distinguish these types of sources from each other.
- Demonstrate second-year undergraduate-level research skills, and proper citation styles
- Recognize personal situated-ness and personal bias in confronting religious phenomena
- Recognize and use key theoretical religion concepts, terminology, and thematic frameworks covered in the lectures and readings

PRECLUSIONS

Precludes additional credit for RELI 2002 (no longer offered), RELI 1205 (no longer offered), RELI 1402 (no longer offered), and RELI 1730 (no longer offered).

REQUIRED TEXTS, READING, AND VIEWING

Bettina Stumm. 2021. *Joining the Dialogue: Practices for Ethical Research Writing*. (Available at Haven Books, as well as online at <https://www.redshelf.com/app/ecom/book/1903766/joining-the-dialogue-practices-for-ethical-research-writing-1903766-9781770487598-bettina-stumm>)

Additional readings and resources will be linked or made available through Brightspace.

EVALUATION

Research Proposal: 10% (Week 5)

Mid-Term Exam: 25% (Week 6)

Current Events/Blog Post Assignment: 15% (Week 8)

Research Paper: 20% (Week 12)

Guidelines for assignments will be discussed in class and posted on Brightspace

Final Exam: 30% (Take-Home)

COURSE TEACHING METHODS

Course lectures will be delivered in-person throughout the semester. As the pandemic is ongoing, I will be conducting our lectures in a bi-modal format (in person and live over Zoom) to accommodate students who may be unable to attend due to illness. During each lecture we will be discussing a particular tradition and related texts in-depth. As such, students will be expected to have done the assigned reading prior to class each week. Please note that, while students are not being evaluated on their class participation, respectful discussion is encouraged as an important element in the learning process. Please note that class lectures will be recorded and available to students throughout the semester.

OFFICE HOURS AND MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS

Office hours are provided for one-on-one consultation with the instructor. You are all encouraged to visit my office hours if you have questions, comments, concerns, or suggestions about any aspect of RELI 2741. This term, my office hours will be held via Zoom -Time TBA.

EMAIL AND COMMUNICATION POLICY

I typically respond to email correspondence within 24 hours (Monday to Friday). This time may increase during high volume periods. Please note that this may mean a wait of up to 48 hours for a response. It is required that all electronic communication between students and faculty about course matters will be conducted through the Carleton University email system.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND THE PAUL MENTON CENTRE

Should you require accommodations for a disability or other health condition, and have not already made arrangements with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, please be sure to contact them as soon as possible at 613-520-6608 or via email at pmc@carleton.ca. (Visit their web site at: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>) I will work with them to ensure that you receive the accommodations you require throughout the academic year.

CLASS DATES AND ASSIGNED READINGS

1-Jan 10, 12	Introduction to the course, syllabus, and modes of evaluation Background in the field
	Required Reading: Stumm Chapter 1

- 2-Jan 17, 19 Religion and Politics in the Ancient World: The Levant and China;
Guidelines for inquiry
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 2
Rowe Chapter 1
- 3-Jan 24, 26 Politics and the Apocalyptic Mindset; Summarizing and
Interpreting Material
Required Reading
Stumm Chapters 3, 4
- 4-Jan 31, Feb 3 Modern Apocalypticism – The North American and Global
Contexts, Radicalization – From the Alt-Right to Al-Qaeda; Writing
as Conversation
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 5
- 5-Feb 7, 9 Apocalypse Now? Political Conspiracies and Chaos in the Era of
Covid-19; Civil Religion and Political Unrest; Ethical Citation
Research Proposal Due
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 6
- 6-Feb 14, 16 Research Topics and Proposals
Mid-Term Exam – Take-Home
Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 9
- Feb 19-25 Statutory Holiday; Winter Break, No Classes
- 7-Feb 28, Mar 2 Popular Culture, Human Rights, and BLM; Developing your
argument
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 10
Woods and Edwards (2021) - Brightspace
- 8-March 7, 9 New Religious Movements and Theories of Conversion;
Introducing your Material and Joining the Scholarly Dialogue

Current Events/Blog Assignment Due**Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 11**

- 9-March 14, 16** **Guest Lecture by Doctor Henry Edwards – Psychological Approaches to Religious Extremism on the Global Stage; Evaluating the arguments**
- 10-March 21, 23** **Religion and Politics in Canada, Multiculturalism vs. the Melting Pot; Structuring your Conversation**
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 12**
- 11-March 28, 30** **Guest lecture by Dr. Alyssa Woods – Topic TBA; Jumping to Conclusions**
- Required Reading:
Stumm Chapter 13**
- 12-April 4, 6** **Topic: TBA
Required Reading: TBA**
- 13-April 11** **Review
Final paper due.**

COMMON HUMANITIES REGULATIONS HERE