

The College of the Humanities: Religion Program  
*Interpretations of Religion (RELI 1730)*

Instructor: Christopher Jensen

Office: 2A54 Paterson Hall

Office Hours: W 11:00-12:00 (or by appointment)

Email:<sup>1</sup> christopher.jensen@carleton.ca

Class Schedule: WF 14:35-15:55

Classroom: Southam Hall THB

### Course Description

What does it mean to “interpret religion?” How do we define the topic at the heart of Religious Studies? What are the boundaries between “religious” and “cultural” practices? Who draws these boundaries, and what is at stake (for individuals and societies) when they are drawn? Are there cases when two people (or groups) might define “religion” in incompatible ways? How can such challenges be addressed?

In this course, we will work through these (and other) questions together, through an approach that combines specific case studies, introduces a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches used by Religious Studies scholars, and promotes collaborative, self-reflective learning.

### Learning Objectives

Throughout this course, you will:

- Propose and refine a nuanced definition of the term “religion,” considering various aspects of this multifaceted cultural phenomenon (from ritual and art, to myth and history);
- Read primary texts in translation;
- Interpret religious rituals and iconography;
- Recognize and discuss patterns in religious culture, while also noting key differences and avoiding essentialism;
- Engage critically with your own learning process.
- Develop interpretive skills;
- Learn to apply various theories (from anthropology, sociology, economics, psychology, religious studies, and other disciplines) to religious phenomena;
- Practice working collaboratively.

### Textbook

- No assigned text. All readings (and other assigned materials) will be made available on Ares.

### Evaluation

*Student performance in the course will be evaluated as follows:*

- Class Passport (15% cumulative)
  - Each class, you will submit a short, *typed* summary (2-3 lines) of that day's assigned reading, including two discussion questions, based on issues you found challenging, unclear, or that otherwise piqued your curiosity. These questions will be used to foster class

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<sup>1</sup> As per Carleton University policy, all communication between students and professors should be conducted via our Carleton email accounts.

discussion. These assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and will be used to monitor your attendance and gauge your participation in the course.

- Midterm Tests (15% x2) (February 7<sup>th</sup> and March 14<sup>th</sup>)
  - These midterms will assess your comprehension of course readings and concepts via definitions, true/false, multiple choice, and matching questions.
  - Note: midterms must be written during class time and can only be rescheduled due to extenuating circumstances.
- Group Work: Weekly Discussion Activities (25% total)
  - Every week, students discussion groups will engage in a critical analysis of specific religious phenomena, drawing upon the questions that each of you will be bringing to class as part of your “Class Passports.” These reflections will then be reported back to the class as a whole.
  - Each week, one member of your group will type up and submit the results of your in-class discussion via cuLearn. It is imperative that this responsibility be shared equally among all group members.
  - The grading rubric for these discussion assignments will be posted to cuLearn and discussed in the first week of class. The grade for these discussion papers will be shared among the members of your group.
  - Note: groups will be assigned in the first week of class. I will be selecting groups so as to guarantee that each one includes a mix of lower and upper year students, as well as students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. By learning together, and learning from each other, we all benefit!
- Group Work: Final Project (30%)
  - Throughout the class, we will be developing a critical vocabulary for discussing religious phenomena of various types. In the final weeks of our class, your group will employ the same case study method we will have been using all semester to compare, contrast and discuss specific examples of your choice. These results will be posted to a class wiki and presented to the class as a whole.
  - The grading rubric for this project will be posted online and discussed in the week prior to the commencement of this project. The grade for the final project will be shared among the members of your group.
    - Note #1: It is imperative to realize that every group member brings their own specific skills, abilities and interests to such a project. Please keep this in mind when planning your group's approach. For example, if one group member is more technologically inclined, they could take responsibility for setting up and inputting material into the wiki; if another has more experience with academic writing, they could take responsibility for the editing.
    - Note #2: One week into the collaborative process, you will each evaluate your own performance and the performance of your group members. If there are issues with attendance or inequitable distribution of effort, they will be dealt with at this time.
    - Note #3: I will be providing time in class to work on this project, so as to avoid the necessity of scheduling extra curricular meetings. This also means that I will be on hand to answer questions, make suggestions, and direct you to potentially useful sources.
    - Note #4: While I realize that collaborative work is not the most popular form of evaluation, it is nonetheless an invaluable skill to practice. Also, it is my experience that collaboration almost always produces better results than individual work: together, we're smarter!

## Tentative Schedule / Important Dates

As mentioned above, I am adopting a student-directed approach in instructing this class. As such, we will be developing the syllabus collaboratively in our first week together. Specifically, we will begin the class with an individual reflection activity (“Defining Religion”), which we will then use to outline the topics that we plan to investigate over the course of the semester, as well as a sensible order for addressing them. Drawing on these specific examples, I will then select readings that provide a critical perspective on them.

### Week 1

- Jan. 9<sup>th</sup> – Introduction, Course Procedures, “Defining Religion,” Collaborative Syllabus Building (1/2)
- Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> – Discussion #1 and Collaborative Syllabus Building (2/2)
  - Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

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### Week 5

- Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> – Midterm Test #1

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### Week 9

- Mar. 14<sup>th</sup> – Midterm Test #2

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### Week 11 + 12

- Collaborative Projects (in-class work sessions)

### Week 13

- Collaborative Projects (presentation and discussion)

## (Collaboratively Designed) Course Policies

Note: We will discuss these policies in our first class meeting. I will then post a revised version of the syllabus to cuLearn.

- As your instructor, I will respond to emails within \_\_\_\_\_.
- Given that our class is predicated on discussion and the free exchange of ideas, we must endeavour to create a respectful, critical classroom. We will encourage this sort of discussion by: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Our policy on using computers / smart devices in class is: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Given that a portion of the grade for this class is based on group work, attendance and participation are clearly vital. Our attendance policy is \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.



## University Regulations for All 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 on <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/#AIatCU>.

### 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).

## 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 Chart](#)

## 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 Exams

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Students who do not write/attend a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply to write a deferred examination.

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 [forms and fees page](#).

The granting of a deferral also requires that the student has performed satisfactorily in the course according to the evaluation scheme established in the Course Outline, excluding the final examination for which deferral privileges are requested. Reasons for denial of a deferral may include, among other conditions, a failure to (i) achieve a minimum score in the course before the final examination; (ii) attend a minimum number of classes; (iii) successfully complete a specific task (e.g. term paper, critical report, group project, computer or other assignment); (iv) complete laboratory work; (v) successfully complete one or more midterms; or (vi) meet other reasonable conditions of successful performance.

More information can be found [in the calendar](#).

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

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## Withdrawal From Courses

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Withdrawn. No academic credit, no impact on the CGPA.

**NEW FALL 2017:** WDN is a permanent notation that appears on the official transcript for students who withdraw after the full fee adjustment date in each term. Students may withdraw on or before the last day of classes.

**Dates can be found here:** <http://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>

## 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 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](#)