

**The College of the Humanities: The Religion Program
RELI 4850A / 5850A: Studying Religious Transformations**

Professor Ash Geissinger

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Office Hours: Thursdays 3-4 pm, or by appointment

Classes: Thursdays 11:35 am to 2:25 pm (PA 2A46)

Course description

In this seminar, we will critically examine various approaches taken in the academic discipline of Religious Studies and other allied fields to the study of religious transformations of different kinds, particularly conversions, deconversions, and revivals. The examples studied are from several different religious communities, geographical locations, and times. Questions to be considered include: How do the stories that people tell of their conversion, deconversion, or renewed dedication to faith “work”, and for whom? How analytically useful are terms such as “conversion” and “deconversion”? Why do some religious communities seek to convert outsiders, while others do not? How have some religious communities resisted pressures to convert? How do seemingly personal and individual religious decisions relate to broader social, economic, and political contexts? When and in what ways do religious transformations become matters of public concern? What can studying religious transformations tell us about how communities (whether religious or otherwise) construct their identities?

Course objectives

By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- more clearly articulate their understanding of the ways that social conditions shape religious beliefs and practices, and that religious beliefs and practices when shared collectively can have an impact on how society is constructed
- apply theoretical perspectives to primary texts
- engage with secondary sources and their peers in thoughtful informed discussion of topics related to the study of religion, orally and in writing
- further develop their ability to critically read and analyze written texts and media

Course evaluation

Students in 4850 and 5850 will be evaluated on the basis of:

- Regular, active, and informed course participation (worth 20%)
- the following 4 assignments (worth 20 percent each):
 1. Written analysis of a story of religious transformation—**Sept. 21** (hand-written in class, 40 min. allotted)

2. Written reflection on the Semerdjian reading (questions which are to be answered will be posted on Brightspace; **due Oct. 19** at the beginning of class)
3. Oral presentation in class (15 minutes; held during weeks 11-14)
4. Written response to an oral presentation (hand-written in class, 40 min. allotted)

More details about these assignments and what is expected will be given in class. Students taking 5850 will be expected to demonstrate more advanced analytical skills.

Regular, active, and informed participation

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 quarter of the class) they cannot get credit for the course.

Course Readings and Films

All course readings and films can be accessed through Brightspace. You will need to be signed into the library website in order to access most of these materials.

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 distribute 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 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;
- 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

SEPT. 7—Introducing academic approaches to studying conversion and other types of religious transformation

Read:

- Lewis Rambo, "Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change," *Social Compass* 46.3 (1999): 259-271.
- Katherine Gerbner, "Theorizing Conversion: Christianity, Colonization, and Consciousness in the Early Modern Atlantic World," *History Compass* 13.3 (2015): 134-147.

Week 2

SEPT. 14—How do conversion narratives "work"?

Watch: *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee, 1992)

Read:

- Kathleen Self, "Conversion as Speech Act: Medieval Icelandic and Modern Neopagan Conversion Narratives," *History of Religions* 56.2 (Nov. 2016): 167-197.

Week 3

SEPT. 21—Religious transformations and social contexts

Read:

- Fenggang Yang and Andrew Stuart Abel, "Sociology of Religious Conversion," *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, pp. 140-163.
- Ula Taylor, "As-salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace be unto You: The Honourable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," *Race and Society* 1.2 (1998): 177-196.

Week 4

SEPT. 28—Religious transformations and the state

Read:

- Niklas Foxeus, "Leaving Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar," *Handbook of Leaving Religion*, pp. 116-129.
- Paula Cooney, "Women's Religious Conversions on Death Row: Theorizing Religion and State," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70.4 (Dec. 2002): 699-717.

Week 5

OCT. 5—Historical approaches to religious transformations

Read:

- Marc David Baer, "History and Religious Conversion," *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, pp. 25-47.
- Mary Elizabeth Perry, "Finding Fatima, a Slave Woman of Early Modern Spain," *Journal of Women's History* 20.1 (Spring 2008): 151-167.

Week 6

OCT. 12—no class (I am presenting at a conference)

Read:

- Elyse Semerdjian, "Armenian Women, Legal Bargaining, and Gendered Politics of Conversion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Aleppo," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12.1 (March 2016): 1-30.

Week 7

OCT. 19—Crypto-religiosity

Read:

- Matthew Warshawsky, "Inquisitorial Prosecution of Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte, a Crypto-Jew in Colonial Mexico," *Colonial Latin American Review* 17.1 (2008): 101-123.
- Eliza Kent, "Secret Christians of Sivakasi: Gender, Syncretism, and Crypto-Religion in Early Twentieth Century South India," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79.3 (Sept. 2011): 676-705.

Week 8

OCT. 26—fall break (no class)

Week 9

NOV. 2—Psychological approaches to studying religious transformation

Read:

- Kyle Messick and Miguel Farias, “Psychological Approaches to Leaving Religion,” *Handbook of Leaving Religion*, pp. 307-322.
- Tuhina Ganguly, “Connecting Their Selves: The Discourse of Karma, Calling, and Surrendering Among Western Spiritual Practitioners in India,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86.4 (Dec. 2018): 1014-1045.

Week 10

NOV. 9—Inreach, re-conversion and religious revivals

Watch: *Unorthodox* (Anna Wexler, 2013)

Read:

- Elise Berman, “Voices of Outreach: The Construction of Identity and Maintenance of Social Ties Among Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48.1 (2009): 69-85.

Week 11

NOV. 16—Missions and proselytizing

Readings:

- Girardo Rodriguez Plasencia, “Joining Soka Gakkai in Cuba: Affiliation Patterns and Factors Influencing Conversion Careers,” *Social Compass* 62.2 (2015): 159-171.
- Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, “Mormon Missionary Experiences and Subsequent Religiosity among Returned Missionaries in Utah,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 26(2013): 199-225.

Week 12

NOV. 23—Analyzing media representations of religious transformation

Watch: “Van Hagelslag naar Halal” (“From Chocolate Sprinkles to Halal”—Dutch reality tv show with English subtitles)

Read:

- Nella van den Brandt, “Lost Daughters: Affective Framings of Women Embracing Islam,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 90 (2022): 674-694.

Week 13

NOV. 30—Deconversion in enclave communities and processes of resocialization

Watch: *Disfellowshipped*

Read:

- Louis Frankenthaler, “Dialogic Deconversion: Understanding Undercover Infidelity,” *Journal of Religion & Society* 17 (2015): 1-17.

Week 14

DEC. 7—Religious transformations and the next generation; course conclusion

Read:

- Julie Fennell and Laura Wildman-Hanlon, “The Children of Converts: Beyond the First Generation of Contemporary Pagans,” *Social Compass* 64.2 (2017): 288-306.
- Diana Gustafson and Jennifer Selby, “Theorizing de-Christianization in Women’s Reproductive Lives in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 59 (2016): 17-25.

University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses

Tuesday, July
4, 2023

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

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, 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;
- 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; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

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.

The full Academic Integrity Policy can be found [here](#). More information on the process [here](#).

Academic Accommodation Policy

Carleton University is committed to providing access to the educational experience in order to promote academic accessibility for all individuals.

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.

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](#).

Requests for 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 me 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 accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form ([click here](#)).

Religious obligation: write to me 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 [click here](#).

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 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 where 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: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

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 will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me 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/SCCASP-Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-Cleancopy-final-Sept-2022-2.pdf>

Grading System at Carleton University

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 can be found [here](#). 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.

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 short-term incapacitation (illness, injury, emergency, or other circumstances beyond their control) which forces them to delay submission of the work.

1. Students who claim incapacitation 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. 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 illness or injury for a significant period of time/or long-term, 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 accommodation or did not provide reasonable accommodation, the student should consult with the department/school/institute chair/director. If a mutually agreeable accommodation to complete course requirements prior to the course grade submission deadline cannot be achieved, the Associate Dean will become involved. If academic accommodation is not granted, and the student receives word **after** the academic withdrawal deadline, the student may submit a petition to the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses)/Graduate Registrar (graduate courses) for a final grade of WDN (Withdrawn) in the course(s). If academic accommodation is not granted, and the student receives word **prior** to the academic withdrawal deadline, the student may elect to withdraw from the course(s).
4. Furthermore, if academic accommodation 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](#).

Deferred Final Exams

Students who are unable to write a final examination because of incapacitation (illness, injury, emergency, or extraordinary circumstances beyond a student's 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.

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 incapacitation normally lasting no more than 10 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 incapacitation lasting longer than 10 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](#).

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

Discover the tools and resources Carleton offers to help understand, manage and improve your mental health and wellness while at university.

[Counselling](#)

[Residence Counselling](#)

[Supporting Your Mental Health](#)

Get Help Now

<https://wellness.carleton.ca/get-help-now/>

If in crisis call:

Counselling Services: 613-520-6674 (press 2) *Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.*

After Hours

If you need assistance with an urgent situation outside of our regular operating hours, contact:

- [Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region](#): Available 24/7-365 days/year and is bilingual (English/French).
 - **Distress**: 613-238-3311 ◦ **Crisis**: 613-722-6914 ◦ **Text**: 343-306-5550 (available 10:00 am – 11:00 pm, 7 days/week, 365 days/year) ◦ Web Chat: blue chat icon at the bottom right corner of the website. ◦ Text Service is available in English only to residents of Ottawa & the Ottawa Region.)
- [Good2Talk](#): Available 24/7-365 days/year and is available in English, French and Mandarin ◦ Call: **1-866-925-5454** ◦ Text GOOD2TALKON to 686868 ◦ [Facebook Messenger](#)
- [Empower Me](#): A 24/7 resource service for undergraduate students. 1-833-628-5589 (toll-free)
- International SOS's Emotional Support: Offers 24/7 access to mental health professionals in more than 60 languages through their dedicated line +1 215-942-8478. Students can call this number collect (the person being telephoned receives the charges) to access services.

[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.

[More information and to book an appointment.](#)

Department Contact Information

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