

THEORY AND METHOD SEMINAR [the following is accurate as of August 2009]
RELI 4740A – (Fall 2009)
Professor Johannes C. Wolfart
Office: Office: 2A62 Paterson Hall; Telephone: x2932

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The seminar has as its mandate “[e]xamination of selected theoretical and methodological models used in the interpretation of religious data.” (<http://www.carleton.ca/calendars/ugrad/0910/pdf/0910ugrad.pdf>). Since the seminar is, with the exception of RELI 1730 “Interpretations of Religion”, the only such course offered undergraduates at Carleton it will consider in survey a relatively broad selection of such models, both classical and contemporary. In keeping with developments in the academic study of religion in the last two decades (roughly), primary emphasis will be on theoretical questions, though these are frequently entwined with methodological issues. In keeping with the rich and established traditions of the academic seminar, the presentation of material by the instructor will be limited in favour of participation of all members of the seminar (on which, more below). Finally, wherever possible, the seminar will explore the contrasting positions and debates that are inevitably associated with any theory or method in the world of scholarship.

This course presupposes your acceptance of the principles of the modern research university, in particular: **1) that a seminar differs fundamentally from a lecture course; 2) that the academic study of religion is not the same thing as confessional theology.** Your understanding of these will undoubtedly develop further during this course.

EVALUATION

Essay Proposal – **20%** (2-3 pages; due 14 October)
Essay – **50%** (15-20 pages; due 2 December)
Seminar participation/contribution – **30%** (up to 3% per class)

Certainly, it is my aim as a teacher to get to know you as individuals, to recognize your individual strengths and weaknesses, and to foster individual intellectual development. At the same time, however, I am obliged to treat individuals equally in certain key respects. As a marker, therefore, I cannot take into consideration anything other than your actual performance on the items above.

POLICY ON ATTENDANCE

Not only is it common practice to evaluate participation in discussion and contribution to a seminar, it is also customary that habitual non-attendance be considered unacceptable performance. Such non-attendance entails a failure to contribute that is simply un-collegial. Moreover, since it is impossible to make up a missed seminar, a member who does not attend regularly cannot really be said to have taken the course. **Therefore, any member who is absent from more than 3 meetings of the seminar will not receive course credit.** In other words, all members of the seminar must be present for three quarters of all meetings of the seminar! Period.

READINGS

All required readings are available to seminar members via Web CT, either as PDFs, or as links to online locations. Please note that readings are a prerequisite for seminar participation. Your ability to contribute effectively will depend on you keeping up with the reading. Furthermore, all members of the seminar are encouraged to “read around” the seminar topics as much as possible, and to share their scholarship with the seminar. The preparation of an essay proposal and term essay will also undoubtedly involve such further reading.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will be held Tuesdays from 4:00-5:00pm and Wednesdays from 1:00-2:00pm.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

In order to ensure compliance with the federal privacy act commonly known as FIPPA (i.e. for your protection), Carleton communications policy states that faculty must conduct email communications with students only through their Carleton Connect accounts. Please be advised, further, that students can normally expect up to a 24hour turn-around time on e-mail communication, especially during high volume times (i.e. before examinations, at essay time, etc.).

SEMINAR MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week I (16 September) – General Introduction and discussion: Why worry about theory and method in the academic study of religion?

UNIT 1: DEFINITIONS (sunt denique fines)

Week II (23 September) – **The Definition of Religion**

READINGS: William E. Arnal, “Definition” in: W. Braun and R. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London, 2000), 21-34; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), 269-284; Malory Nye, “Religion: Some Basics” in: idem, *Religion: The Basics* (London, 2003), 1-19.

Week III (30 September) – **The Limits of Religious Studies**

READINGS: Donald Wiebe, “The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13 (1984), 401-22; Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996), 225-227; Tim Fitzgerald, “Bruce Lincoln’s “Theses on Method”: Antitheses” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006), 392-423.

UNIT 2: TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS (of Religious Traditions)

Week IV (7 October) – **Myth and Religion**

READINGS: Mircea Eliade, “Mythology, Ontology, History” in: idem, *Myth and Reality* (New York, 1963), 92-113; William Doty, “The Many Dimensions of Myths and Rituals” in: idem, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa Alabama, 1986), 1-40; Bruce Lincoln, “The Politics of Myth” in: idem, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (Oxford, 1989), 27-37; Mary Douglas, “Children Consumed by Cannibals: Robertson Smith’s Attack on the Science of Mythology” in: L.R. Patton and W. Doniger, eds., *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville Virginia, 1996), 29-51.

Week V (14 October) – **Ritual and Religion**

READINGS: Ed Muir, “Introduction” in idem, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 1-11; Frits Staal, “Interpretations of Ritual” in: idem, *Rules Without Meaning: Rituals, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York, 1989), 115-140; Roy A. Rappaport, “Enactments of Meaning” in: idem, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge 1999), 107-138. Catherine Bell, “Ritual Traditions and Systems” in: idem, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, 1992), 118-142; 159-168.

UNIT 3: EXPLANATIONS (to rationalize the irrational)

Week VI (21 October) – **Psychological reason**

READINGS: James H. Leuba, “The Emotions in Religious Life” in: idem, *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its origin, function and future* (New York, 1969 [1912]), 126-150; Robert A. Emmons and Raymond F. Palouzian, “The Psychology of Religion” *Annual Review of Psychology*-54 (2003), 377-402 ; Roderick Main, “Psychology of Religion: An Overview of its

History and Current Status” *Religion Compass* 2 (2008), 708-733; Michael P. Carroll, “The Psychology of Italian Catholicism” in: idem, *Madonnas that Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1992), 138-161, 175-177.

Week VII (28 October) – Sociological reason

READINGS: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [excerpt] in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 34-49; J. Samuel Preuss, “Sociogenic Theory: Emile Durkheim” in: idem, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (Atlanta, 1996), 157-177; Bradford Verter, “Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu” *Sociological Theory* 21 (2003), 150-174; Burton Mack, “A Radically Social Theory of Religion” in: Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein, eds., *Secular Theories on Religion* (Copenhagen, 2000), 123-136.

Week VIII (4 November) – Evolution and Cognition

READINGS: Justin L. Barrett, “Cognitive Science of Religion: What is it and Why is it?” *Religion Compass* 1 (2007), 768-786; Joseph Bulbulia, “Meme Infection or Religious Niche Construction? An Adaptationist Alternative to the Cultural Maladaptationist Hypothesis” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008), 1-42; Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, “Two Hypotheses Concerning Religious Ritual and Emotional Stimulation” in: idem, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge, 2002), 89-123.

UNIT 4: CRITICISMS (From DWMs to WMDs)

Week IX (11 November) – Gender and Religious Studies

READINGS: Randi L. Warne, “(En)gendering Religious Studies” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1998), 427-436; Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773-797; Daniel Boyarin, “Gender” in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), 117-135.

16 NOVEMBER IS THE DEADLINE FOR WITHDRAWAL

Week X (18 November) – Postcolonialism and Religious Studies

READINGS: Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers” in: Michael Lambek, ed. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 99-113; Gregory Schopen, “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism” *History of Religions* 31 (1991), 1-23; Stephan Feuchtwang, “Religion as Resistance” in: *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (London, 1999), 161-177; David Chidester, “Real and Imagined: Imperial inventions of religion in colonial southern Africa” in: Tim Fitzgerald, ed., *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London, 2007), 153-175.

Week XI (25 November) – Theory and Method – is there a canon industry?

READINGS: James Mooney, “XVI Parallels in Other Systems” in: idem, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln Nebraska, 1991 [1896]), 928-952; Bryan Rennie, “Manufacturing McCutcheon: The failure of understanding in the academic study of religion” *Culture and Religion* 1 (2000), 105-112; D.G. Hart, “Religious Studies, the Would-be Discipline” in: idem, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore, 1999), 223-233; 292-296.

Week XII (2 December) – Concluding Discussion: Agenda and readings to be established by the seminar.

REGULATIONS COMMON TO ALL HUMANITIES COURSES

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.

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- 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;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*”

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct 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 range from a mark of zero for the plagiarized work to a final grade of “F” for the course, and even suspension from all studies or expulsion from the University.

GRADING SYSTEM

Letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100 (12)	B+ = 77-79 (9)	C+ = 67-69 (6)
A = 85-89 (11)	B = 73-76 (8)	C = 63-66 (5)
A - = 80-84 (10)	B - = 70-72 (7)	C - = 60-62 (4)
D+ = 57-59 (3)	D = 53-56 (2)	D - = 50-52 (1)

F	Failure. No academic credit
WDN	Withdrawn from the course
ABS	Absent from the final examination
DEF	Official deferral (see “Petitions to Defer”)
FND	Failure with no deferred exam allowed -- assigned only when the student has failed the course on the basis of inadequate term work as specified in the course outline.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

The last date to withdraw from Fall term courses is November 16, 2009. The last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter (full year) and Winter term courses is March 12, 2010.

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 more details visit the Equity Services website: http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

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 visit the Equity Services website: http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you **only** require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the last official day to withdraw from classes in each term. For more details visit the PMC website: http://www.carleton.ca/pmc/students/acad_accom.html

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation>

PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to complete a **final** term paper or write a **final** examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control or whose performance on an examination has been impaired by such circumstances may apply in writing within five working days to the Registrar's Office for permission to extend a term paper deadline or to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully and specifically supported by a medical certificate or other relevant documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the Registrar's Office will be considered.

ADDRESSES: (Area Code 613)

College of the Humanities 520-2809	300 Paterson
Classics and Religion Office 520-2100	2A39 Paterson
Registrar's Office 520-3500	300 Tory
Student Academic Success Centre 520-7850	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre 520-6608	500 Unicentre
Writing Tutorial Service 520-6632	4 th floor Library
Learning Commons 520-1125	4 th floor Library