

RLG312H LEC0101 (Fall 2013)
Method and Theory in the History of Religions
Department of Historical Studies, UTM

Instructor: Ken Derry
Office: North Building 152, 905-569-4550
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4pm (UTM Library); Fridays 11-12:30pm (NE152)
Email: Blackboard (see “Protocols and Etiquette” below)
Lectures: Thursdays 12-3pm (IB140)

COURSE RESOURCES

1. RLG312H Website (Blackboard)

The course website is a key resource that you should refer to *at least* once a week. It will contain:

- All important announcements;
- Lecture/presentations slides, as pdf files;
- Online class discussions;
- Many course readings (see below);
- Course handouts, as pdf files. No handouts—including this syllabus—will be printed and given out in class, except under very rare circumstances.

In addition to the above, the course website will be used by students to email the instructor, and the instructor will similarly use it to email students.

****IMPORTANT:** Blackboard emails and announcements will be sent to your utoronto email address, so **you are responsible for checking your utoronto address regularly** (again: *at least* once a week). Failure to check your email is NOT an acceptable excuse for missing important information. You are also strongly advised not to forward your utoronto email to another account (e.g., Google, Hotmail, etc.) as these providers sometimes view such email as junk, which means you may not get all (or perhaps any) of your RLG312H messages.

2. Teaching Assistant

There is one TA assigned to this course, David Belfon, who will be responsible for doing some of the grading.

3. Departmental Staff

The Department of Historical Studies is located in room 153 in the North Building. There you will find two key people who may be of assistance to you:

- Shabina Moheebulla, Departmental Secretary
- Sharon Marjadsingh, Academic Counsellor

Please speak with either Ms Moheebulla or Ms Marjadsingh if you have any concerns you think they might be able to help you with. Such concerns could include clarifications on departmental policies and procedures, or information on resources for academic or personal assistance.

4. Other Students in this Course

I strongly encourage you to get to know other students in RLG312H, if you don't already. You can be a great resource for one another, provide mutual encouragement, and work together to understand the course material. It is amazing sometimes how much more we can accomplish when we combine our talents and resources.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Very simply, this course provides a brief, detailed introduction to what it means to study religion academically, and how this study has been conducted since its inception. That is to say, it examines the historical emergence of

the discipline of religious studies, including a consideration of the work of several scholars both past and present. In doing so, the course will also involve the application of theoretical and methodological approaches to aspects of one or more religious tradition. One key challenge of this course, therefore, will be to develop strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of diverse method and theories for understanding such an incredibly complex, disparate, and global phenomenon as religion.

Learning Objectives¹

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Gather, review, interpret, present, and critically evaluate several arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts, methodologies, and theoretical approaches related to the study of religion;
- Critically apply relevant theories, concepts, and methods within the study of religion to primary source material drawn from more than one religious tradition;
- Express information, arguments, and analyses accurately and with clarity in both oral and written form;
- Formulate coherent lines of argument;
- Explain various historic, methodological, and theoretical reasons for uncertainty, ambiguity and limits to knowledge within the study of religion, and how such limits influence analyses and interpretations.
- Formulate clear, informed questions for current scholars of religion to understand and engage their research interests and perspectives.
- Film, edit, and produce a short documentary-style video.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY

In order to best facilitate the learning of methods and theories in the study of religion, this course has been constructed with the following ideas in mind:

- **Reading:** Your engagement with the course readings is crucial to help all of us gain better insight into this material, and into our own worldviews. As such, you are expected to have completed, and reflected on, the readings before we discuss them in class.
- **Writing:** Academic expertise involves the ability to express oneself in writing clearly and succinctly, in a variety of formats from emails to essays. In my experience practice helps a lot, even if it does not necessarily “make perfect.”
- **Speaking:** Academic endeavours also involve oral expression – in the classroom, in conferences, over drinks, etc. – and so all students are strongly encouraged to participate as frequently as they are able.
- **Awareness of perspectives:** Understanding academic material related to religion is a complex act that usually involves the wearing of more than one interpretive “hat” (e.g., sociological, feminist, historical-critical). Learning to recognize which hat we (and others) are wearing at different moments is a key goal of academic work, and is also a valuable skill in other areas of life.
- **Joint ownership of the course:** By this I mean that each of us will prepare for every session, listen closely to other points of view, and share our own ideas and impressions in order to make the course as intellectually and personally rewarding as possible.

REQUIRED READINGS

The required texts for this course include:

- H. Rodrigues and J. S. Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- Readings from current religion scholars, which will be discussed in class and also form the focus of the video projects undertaken by everyone in the class.
- Other short texts to be discussed in class (e.g., primary source materials from particular religions).

The text by Rodrigues and Harding is available at the UTM Bookstore, and has also been placed on short-term loan at the UTM Library. The other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

¹ Adapted from the *Guidelines for University of Toronto Mississauga Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations*.

Note that, on average, you will need to complete between 30 and 50 pages of highly theoretical readings per week. You must read closely and carefully (and usually at least twice), paying a good deal of attention to the many ideas to which each chapter will introduce you. The readings should leave you with quite a few questions, which I hope that you will raise in class.

GRADING REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are as follows:

1. Online Participation.....	5%
2. Reading Comprehension	5%
3. Test 1 (October 3).....	15%
4. Video Project (due November 14).....	40%
5. Test 2 (November 21).....	25%
6. Course Reflection (due December 5)	10%

1. Online Participation (5%)

Every student must contribute a total of five comments (of at least 150 words each) on the course Blackboard site over the duration of the term. This equals one comment every few weeks of class, as follows:

- Sept 12 to Sept 26: first comment due
- Sept 27 to Oct 10: second comment due
- Oct 11 to Oct 24: third comment due
- Oct 25 to Nov 7: fourth comment due
- Nov 8 to Nov 28: fifth comment due

Comments must be spread throughout the term as above. Students who submit all five comments between Oct 11 and Oct 24, for example, will only receive credit for one of them. Comments can concern any aspect of the course content, but ideally should be about how a particular way of thinking about religion actually *matters* to you in some way. (Keep in mind that this is not a course on religion itself, but on how religion is *studied*.) You may begin a discussion thread or reply to a thread started by someone else.

Important! You will *not* be graded on the content of your submissions; as long as you have offered a reasonable contribution to the online discussion you will receive one point for each comment (up to a possible total of five points). The point is simply to engage other students (and the instructor!), not to present a mini formal “academic” analysis of anything. As much as you can, have fun with your comments! (Remember: if you’re bored by what you’ve written, there is a good chance the rest of us won’t find it too exciting either.)

2. Reading Comprehension (5%)

This component of your grade will comprise short quizzes or exercises that I will assign during five different classes, and that will be based on the required course readings. More information will be provided in class.

Important! If you are absent when reading comprehension is being assessed, you will receive zero for that week’s assessment unless you provide acceptable documentation that accounts for your absence (see “Absences and Academic Consideration” below).

3. Test 1 (15%)

This test will cover the readings and discussions from classes 1 through 3.

4. Video Project (40%)

This project requires you to work in groups of four (**assigned by the instructor**). Together with your partners you will create a ten-minute video of your interview with one scholar of religion regarding one of their publications (e.g., an article or book chapter); you will be given a list of scholars/publications from which to choose.

In addition to the final video itself, you will be required to: write a brief overview/analysis of the publication you select, including a list of interview questions for the author; lead a class discussion on the publication; create a very short practice video; and submit an assessment of the work done on the project by yourself and your group members. Throughout the course you will be given training and support for learning how to conduct an interview, as well as how to create and edit a video of this nature.

5. Test 2 (25%)

This test will focus on the readings and discussions from classes 5 through 9.

6. Course reflection (10%)

More details about the course reflection will be provided during the course.

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

IMPORTANT! The writing assignments for this course **must be submitted through the course Blackboard site**. Also, students agree that by taking this course all required papers are to be submitted for textual similarity review to **Turnitin.com** for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

ALSO IMPORTANT! It is **each student's responsibility** to ensure that all assignments are submitted on time. Allowances will NOT be made for students who upload the wrong files, or who run into technological difficulties (e.g., your Internet service goes down for any reason).

File Format: The essays must be submitted as Microsoft Word files (.doc or .docx).

Deadlines: All writing assignments must be submitted by 11:59pm on the due date indicated.

Late penalty: The late penalty for each assignment will vary, and these penalties will be included in the detailed instructions you will be provided well in advance of each deadline. No extensions will be given, although reasonable allowances will be provided for acceptable circumstances (e.g., documented illness). For further information please see "Absences and Academic Consideration" below (under "Protocols and Etiquette").

In general the penalty will be one mark per day. For example, if an assignment is being graded out of 20, you will lose 1/20 of the total grade for that assignment per day. However some assignments *cannot* be accepted late. For example, if you do not appear for your group presentation, and you do not have an acceptable documented reason for your absence, you will receive a grade of zero for that assignment.

Writing issues: All writing assignments must conform to standard academic expectations, which include the use of: unbiased/gender inclusive language; correct grammar and spelling; and an accepted method of citing sources (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style). Resources and tips on these and other writing issues are available here:

- <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/Students/tips.htm>
- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice>
- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/style-and-editing/unbiased-language>

SUPPORT AND ACCOMMODATION

The **UTM Service Directory** (<http://www1.utm.utoronto.ca/~servicesdirectory/>) is a convenient gateway to a variety of campus services, such as the library, UTM Bookstore, Blackboard Help, AccessAbility, etc.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please contact the instructor and/or the **AccessAbility Resource Centre** (DV2047) as soon as possible (access@utm.utoronto.ca or <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/accessability>).

UTM students are also invited to use the resources of the **Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre**. For information regarding, e.g., individual appointments, writing workshops, and peer facilitated study groups, see <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.

For information on other forms of available support, please see the following sites or speak with a UTM instructor or staff member.

- **Campus Police:** <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/campus-police/>
- **Computing Services:** <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/computing-services/>
- **Registrar & Registration Services** (including course information, tuition and scholarship information, and academic advising): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/registrar/>
- **Student Affairs & Services** (including first year programs, health & counselling, housing, international student resources, multi-faith programs, study abroad, etc.): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sas/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the *Code*. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see <http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>).

Copyright in Instructional Settings: If you wish to tape-record, video-record or otherwise reproduce lecture presentations, course notes, or other similar materials provided by the course instructor, you must obtain written consent beforehand. Otherwise all such reproduction is an infringement of copyright and is absolutely prohibited. In the case of private use by students with disabilities, consent will not be unreasonably withheld.

PROTOCOLS AND ETIQUETTE

1. Communicating with the Course Instructor

Aside from speaking in class, the primary way in which I will communicate important course information to you will be through emails sent via the course Blackboard site. **All students are therefore responsible for checking their UofT (utoronto) email address on a regular and frequent basis.**

When you send an email to me, you must do so **ONLY** through the course Blackboard site. Adhering to this requirement will: help protect your messages; clearly identify the message as course-related; and also clearly identify you as the sender (e.g., not as "stinkypants233@hotmail.com"). Emails to me should be reserved for relatively **quick questions**. Also, do **NOT** email questions whose answers can easily be found by reading the syllabus ("When is the video project due?" Etc.). Although if you are not reading the syllabus then you probably won't see this request to read the syllabus. (Tricky problem, that.)

Generally speaking, you can expect a reply to your email within two business days; I may check email on weekends occasionally, but I also reserve the right not to do so. Once in a while, I try to have a life too. ☺

If you want to discuss any of the course materials with me in detail, please do so **in person**. You may speak to me after class or during office hours, or if you see me on campus walking, sitting, eating lunch, waiting for a bus, etc. If none of those options work, please make an appointment with me (by email through Blackboard).

If you have comments about the course that you would like to send me **anonymously**, please visit this site: https://cslinux.utm.utoronto.ca/~peters43/anon_feedback/rlg312h5.html. Remember that the message is anonymous and therefore **it is not possible for you to receive a direct reply**. Instead, responses will be addressed to the entire class, either during the lecture or by email.

2. Phones, etc.

The use of cell phones and other mobile devices is NOT permitted in class.

3. Absences and Academic Consideration

All UTM students are required to declare their absence on ROSI in order to request academic consideration for any missed course work including tests, late assignments, final examinations, etc. Students who wish to receive consideration due to illness must provide a UofT Verification of Student Illness or Injury form, available here: <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>

NOTE: The University of Toronto respects your privacy. The information on the UofT Verification of Student Illness or Injury form is collected pursuant to section 2(14) of the University of Toronto Act, 1971. It is collected for the purpose of administering accommodations for academic purposes based on medical grounds. The department will maintain a record of all medical certificates received. At all times your information will be protected in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

As indicated above, assignments are subject to a late penalty. This penalty may be waived in the event of unforeseen emergencies such as illness or crisis. If your assignment is late and you believe that you should not be penalized, within a week of submitting it please send a written explanation to the instructor, along with appropriate supporting documentation. (Such documentation may include a UofT medical certificate, and/or a letter from a counsellor, police officer, religious leader, etc.) Based on your explanation and documentation I will overlook the late penalty, in whole or in part, as seems justified. Please note that this policy regarding late penalties means that **no extensions for assignments will be given in advance**.

4. Course and Classroom Expectations²

I believe that everyone involved in a course—students, instructors, and TAs—has the right to certain expectations in a university classroom. Usually the most successful classes are those in which **we respect each other, and understand our mutual responsibilities**. With that in mind, please consider the following “manifesto” for **all of us** in this course (including students and instructor):

- We have the responsibility for sharing in and contributing to the learning process;
- We have the right to voice an opinion that is based on a self-chosen value system;
- We have the right to dissent or differ from the instructor and from others in class;
- We have the right to our personal dignity not being infringed upon by the instructor or other students;
- We have a right to a curriculum that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and sexual identity.

Assumptions I make about you:

- You have made a conscious, informed choice to be a member of this class. **This means that you have read the syllabus thoroughly**, and know the workload required.
- You will give the basic respect that is due to all members of this class.
- You will observe basic classroom decorum. In this class that means (but is not limited to) the following: 1) You will turn off (or silence) any noise-making devices such as mobile phones; 2) You will attend every class, **arriving on time and staying until the end of the session**; 3) If for reasons beyond your control you arrive late to the class, or leave early, you will do so with a minimum of disruption; 4) You will not interrupt or cause a disruption when someone else is speaking.

² The material in this section was borrowed and adapted from Amir Hussain, “Responsibilities and Respect,” 31 Aug 2010 <<http://myweb.lmu.edu/ahussain/assumptions.html>>.

- You will do all of the required reading on time. This means that you will most likely have to read something more than once in order to understand it, or at least figure out why you *don't* understand it.
- You will be responsible for all of the material that we cover in this course, including readings, lectures, and presentations. If you miss a class, you may contact another student (*not* the instructor) to find out what you missed; note, however, that other students are not obligated to provide you with this material.
- You will read all announcements and email messages sent to you by the instructor.
- If you have a question, any question, you will ask it. And **if you are having difficulty with any aspect of the course, it is important that you mention this promptly**; don't wait until it is too late!
- If you disagree with a grade received on an assignment and wish to request a grade change, you will explain in writing why you think the work was not assessed correctly. To do this you must focus on the qualities of the work itself; "I tried very hard" is not a valid reason to request a grade change.
- You will share your personality, knowledge, skills, sense of humour, and expertise with the rest of us.

Assumptions you can make about me:

- I will give you the respect that I ask you to give me and the other members of this class.
- As much as possible, I will begin and end each class on time.
- I will be available within reason to help you if you need, and ask for, assistance.
- If you do not turn in an assignment, I will assume that you are content with a grade of zero for that assignment unless you tell me otherwise.
- I will grade fairly and responsibly, returning your assignments to you in a timely manner. I do not grade on a curve, and will assess each assignment on its own merit.
- I will follow and enforce the university policy on academic integrity.
- I will be receptive to and encourage constructive comments about my teaching and grading.
- In all respects, I will do my best to help you learn the course material. That said, please remember that the final responsibility to learn this material is yours.

UNDERSTANDING GRADES

These are the official grade definitions of the University of Toronto Mississauga:

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Definition	
90-100	A+	Excellent	Strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
85-89	A		
80-84	A-		
77-79	B+	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with literature.
73-76	B		
70-72	B-		
67-69	C+	Adequate	Student who is profiting from his/her university experience; understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.
63-66	C		
60-62	C-		
57-59	D+	Marginal	Some evidence of familiarity with subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed.
53-56	D		
50-52	D-		
0-49	F	Inadequate	Little evidence of even superficial understanding of subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; with limited or irrelevant use of literature.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Required Readings	Assignment
Sept 12	1. Introduction; Philosophy + Theology	Rodrigues & Harding, Chapters 1-2	
Sept 19	2. Anthropology, Sociology, Politics, Economics, Phenomenology, Psychology	Rodrigues & Harding, Chapters 3-4	
Sept 26	3. Feminism, Popular Literature, History, Comparative Religion	Rodrigues & Harding, Chapters 5-6	BB comment #1 due
Oct 3	4. Test; start video project training	n/a	TEST 1
Oct 10	5. Article discussions	TBA	BB comment #2 due
Oct 17	6. Article discussions	TBA	
Oct 24	7. Article discussions	TBA	BB comment #3 due
Oct 31	8. Article discussions	TBA	[Nov 4: academic drop date for F courses]
Nov 7	9. Finish video project training	n/a	BB comment #4 due
Nov 14	10. Course summary	n/a	Video project due
Nov 21	11. Test	n/a	TEST 2
Nov 28	12. Awards and video screenings	n/a	BB comment #5 due Dec 5: reflection due



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uoft.me/greencourses