School of Letters, Art and Media

Department of Studies in Religion

WREL2001: World Religions in Context

Semester 1 2014

Unit of Study Outline

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*Alex Norman. ‘“World Religions” as an Analytical Category?’ Screenshot taken 11am, 29/01/2014.*

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| **Unit Coordinators** | |
| Unit coordinators are listed on undergraduate and postgraduate coursework semester timetables, and can be consulted for help with any difficulties you may have.  Unit coordinators (as well as the Faculty) should also be informed of any illness or other misadventure that leads students to miss classes and tutorials or be late with assignments. | |
| **Unit Coordinator:** | **Dr Alex Norman** |
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| Consultation Hours: | Tuesday 3-5pm |

This Unit of Study Outline **MUST** be read in conjunction with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Student Administration Manual ([sydney.edu.au/arts/current\_students/student\_admin\_manual.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/student_admin_manual.shtml)) and all applicable University policies.   
  
In determining applications and appeals, it will be assumed that every student has taken the time to familiarise themselves with these key policies and procedures.

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| **WREL2001 World Religions in Context** |
| **UNIT DESCRIPTION** |
| As the core unit for the World Religions major, WREL2001 World Religions in Context has been designed to familiarise you with theories concerning religious phenomena and equip you with the research skills needed to investigate religious traditions professionally.  In this unit we will investigate typologies of ‘religion’ and the prominent methods for studying religious phenomena in the academy. In particular we will look into the debate – some may say the clash – between theories of religion as *sui generis*, and theories of religion as contingent and inseparable from culture and social structure (as you will notice, my own theoretical position is betrayed by the succeeding paragraphs). Following this we will briefly examine the problem of fieldwork on religious phenomena, and collaboratively develop plans for an individual fieldwork assessment exercise.  In the second half of the unit we will examine case studies of so-called world religions in specific contexts. In so doing we seek to challenge the uncritical use of such terminology and, more importantly, investigate whether the term ‘world religions’ actually inhibits critical studies of locally contingent religious phenomena and, instead, participates in a system of socio-political domination.  Religions are complex, contingent, and mutable, and often the study of them is fraught with layers of historical assumption and dubious political motive. This makes them challenging to study critically, but we do not shy from such a task. In this unit we – you, your student colleagues, and I – will develop a common understanding of what is entailed in the practice of studying religious traditions and institutions academically. This project will take us into many disciplines and fields of study, ranging from history to politics, neuro-philosophy to sociology. We aim not simply for adequacy but for excellence in our approach to this grandest of fields amid the sweeping landscapes of the Humanities. |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**  1. Students will acquire working knowledge of various methodological approaches to World Religions. Including the rise of the World Religions paradigm within the academy.  2. Students will be encouraged to choose a specific example of a ‘world religion’ and assess how various methodologies to World Religions may or may not be relevant.  3. Students will be enabled to formulate innovative but appropriate approaches to world religions through critical peer feedback and academic assessment.  4. Students will develop awareness of ethical concerns arising between the academy and world religion traditions, especially regarding the oppositional classification of Indigenous Religions.  **LEARNING OUTCOMES** |
| By examining the correlation of specific examples of ‘world religions’ to a range of methodological approaches, students will:  1. Be able to critique both received knowledge of a specific tradition and,  2. Apply and test the validity of various methodological approaches to the working concept of World Religions.  3. be able to build upon and improve methodological approaches to religions in a World Religions sense as independent thinkers.  4. be able to demonstrate a range of methodological problems that can beset academic approaches to indigenous religions.  5. take the body of knowledge acquired and engage it with the process of life-long learning. |
| **LEARNING STRUCTURE** |
| The assessment for this unit draws a distinct line between an ongoing awareness of ways in which the academy contains and theorises this field (the methodological essay), and an active engagement in real-time situations of religion (the fieldwork essay). You will then be asked to apply your methodological reassessment of the field to a specific example in the research essay.  **Lectures** (two hours per week) will provide a framework for your own research (essay and assignments) and class work. **Tuesdays 10am-12pm, Merewether Lecture Room 5 (Rm277)**. These will occasionally take the form of seminar-workshops, and in Week 8 will be wholly dedicated to your essay plan presentation assessment.  **Tutorials** (one hour per week). I ask that you read the provided material carefully and come to tutorials prepared to engage in critical analysis exercises, join group discussions, and express your views based on research in a critical and positive environment.  **Note**: While marks are not awarded for attendance only, students are personally responsible for attendance at classes, and for submission of work, in compliance with requirements and guidelines set out in this outline and in Faculty and University policy. Attendance at a minimum of 80% of lectures and tutorials is mandatory. Attendance records are kept for tutorials and help determine your final grade. If you cannot attend, please consult your lecturer. If you must miss more than 20% of classes for any reason (health, family troubles) you must apply for special consideration online, and also inform your lecturer.  **Reading and Research** will familiarise you with the critical scholarship of Studies in Religion. Reading and research is required in order to achieve the learning outcomes of this unit. In addition to the journal articles included in this handbook, there are a range of edited volumes and monographs that I think are mandatory reading. I highly recommend you pick up at least one of them and read it, however, quickly, to get a sense of the concerns, themes, and cadence of the field of study. A ‘must read’ list will be distributed via Blackboard in Week 1. |
| **UNIT SCHEDULE** |
| |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Week** | **Week beginning** | **Lecture** *[content]* | **Tutorial** | | 1 | 03 March | World Religions in Context | **No tutorial** | | 2 | 10 March | The World Religions Paradigm: History of an Idea | **World Religions? In Context?** | | 3 | 17 March | Methodologies for Studying Religions, Part 1 | **Methodological Critique 1** | | 4 | 24 March | The Indigenous Religions Paradigm: History of an Idea | **Methodological Critique 2** | | 5 | 31 March | Methodologies for Studying Religions, Part 2 | **Methodical Fieldwork Planning** | | 6 | 07 April | Fieldworking in Religious Studies | **Fieldwork and ‘World Religions’** | | 7 | 14 April\* | Innovating and Critiquing Methods: Fieldworking in Religious Studies | **Essay Planning** | | **BREAK** | **21-25 April** | **SESSION BREAK / EASTER** |  | | 8 | 28 April | **Essay Plan Presentations** | **Essay Plan Presentations** | | 9 | 05 May | Religions in Context – Three Movements in America | **Dharmic Religions in the Americas** | | 10 | 12 May | Religions in Context – Three Movements in Africa | **Indigenous World Religions in Africa** | | 11 | 19 May | Religions in Context – Three Movements in Europe | **Indigenous World Religions in the EU** | | 12 | 26 May | Religions in Context – Three Movements in Asia | **Abrahamic Religions in Asia** | | 13 | 02 June | Conclusions: Context in Religious Worlds | **Studying Religions of the World** | | **STUVAC** | **09 June** | **STUVAC** |  | | **EXAMS** | **16 June** | **EXAM PERIOD commences** |  |   *\* NB: Public holidays on Friday 18 April, Friday 25 April, Monday 09 June.* |
| **READING REQUIREMENTS** |
| Tutorials begin in Week 2 of semester. Students are expected to have read and thought about the readings and to be prepared to discuss the issues that arise from them in the convivial and collegial atmosphere of the tutorial. Tutorials will focus on discussion of the week’s topic with the intention of developing your familiarity and fluency in the study of religions. The readings provided are intended as stimulants for discussion. Your task is to read them critically in order to discover their weaknesses and strengths according to the purposes they might be put to. You must purchase a copy of the Unit Reader for this unit of study, which contains all the essential tutorial readings from the University Copy Centre.  The tutorial topics for discussion and readings each week are as follows:  **Week 1 NO TUTORIAL**  4 Mar Not dreaming, reading.  **Week 2 World Religions? In Context?**  11 Mar Bell, Catherine. ‘Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion’. *History and Theory* 45:4 (2006), 27-46.  **Week 3 Methodological Critique 1**  18 Mar Eliade, Mircea. ‘The Quest for the “origins” of Religion’. *History of Religions* 4:1 (1964), 154-169.  And  Dawson, Lorne L. ‘*Sui Generis* Phenomena and Disciplinary Axioms: Rethinking Pal’s Proposal’. *Religion* 20:1 (1990), 38-51.  **Week 4 Methodological Critique 2**  25 Mar Tafjord, Bjorn Ola. ‘Indigenous Religion(s) as an Analytical Category’. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 25:3 (2013), 221-243.  **Week 5 Methodical Fieldwork Planning**  1 Apr McKenzie, John Stephen. ‘Tartan Buddhists: A Typology for Understanding Participants in a Tibetan Buddhist Organization in Scotland’. *Fieldwork in Religion* 7:1 (2012), 8-28.  And  Harvey, Graham. ‘Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method’. *Numen* 50:2 (2003), 125-146.  **Week 6 Fieldwork and ‘World Religions’**  8 Apr Goh, Robbie B. H. ‘Hillsong and “Megachurch” Practice: Semiotics, Spatial Logic and the Embodiment of Contemporary Evangelical Protestantism’. *Material Religion* 4:3 (2008), 284-305.  **Week 7 Essay Planning**  15 Apr Mewburn, Inger. ‘Write That Journal Article in 7 Days’. Prezi (11 April, 2011), <http://prezi.com/ruj35uigcuwo/write-that-journal-article-in-7-days/>  **Week 8 ESSAY PLAN PRESENTATIONS**  29 Apr No readings  **Week 9 Dharmic Religions in the Americas**  6 May Gunn, Janet. ‘“On Thursdays We Worship the Banana Plant”: Encountering Lived Hinduism in a Canadian Suburb’. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21:1 (2009), 40-49.  Or  Rocha, Christina. ‘All Roads Come from Zen: Busshinji as a Reference to Buddhism’. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35:1 (2008), 81-94.  **Week 10 Indigenous World Religions in Africa**  13 May Maxwell, David. ‘“Catch the Cockerel Before Dawn”: Pentecostalism and Politics in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe’. *Africa* 70:2 (2000), 249-277.  Or  Oonk, Gijsbert. ‘The Changing Culture of the Hindu Lohana Community in East Africa’. *Contemporary South Asia* 13:1 (2004), 7-23.  **Week 11 Indigenous World Religions in the EU**  20 May Strmiska, Michael. ‘Ásatrú in Iceland: The Rebirth of Nordic Paganism?’ *Nova Religio* 4:1 (2000), 106-132.  Or  Andersen, Karen. ‘Irish Secularization and Religious Identities: Evidence of an Emerging New Catholic Habitus’. *Social Compass* 57:1 (2010), 15-39.  **Week 12 Abrahamic Religions in Asia**  27 May Park, Chang-Won. ‘The Movement of Copying the Bible in South Korea: An Embodiment of Christian and Confucian Spiritualities’. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24:2 (2009), 205-217.  Or  Howell, Julia Day. ‘Indonesia’s Salafist Sufis’. *Modern Asian Studies* 44:5 (2010), 1029-1051.  **Week 13 Studying ‘World Religions’**  3 Jun Wiles, Lee. ‘Mormonism and the World Religions Discourse: Contesting the Boundaries of Comparative Religion’s Prevailing Taxonomy’. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* – ahead of print version (2013) DOI: 10.1163/15700682-12341265 |

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| **ONLINE COMPONENTS** |
| WREL2001 World Religions in Context has no compulsory online learning component. However, we will utilize online sources as we go. All lectures will be recorded and made available online through Blackboard, with Prezi links. There will be a Twitter hashtag – #WREL2001 – that I will use as and where appropriate. If you use Twitter please do likewise if you feel inclined. As a platform Twitter can be quite useful for sharing resource links and conversing with others, including some of the leading thinkers in the field. I will attempt a Twitter feed on Blackboard (it has vexed and foiled me in the past). I will also open the discussion forums (so-2004 as they are) in order for us to be able to maintain group discussions outside the physical class space.  Blackboard will be the only official online method of content deliver aside from email. As such, this unit requires regular use of the University’s Learning Management System (LMS), also known as Blackboard Learn. You will need reliable access to a computer and the Internet to use the LMS.  The easiest way to access is through MyUni (click on the ‘MyUni’ link on the university home page, <http://sydney.edu.au> or link directly to the service at <https://myuni.sydney.edu.au/>. There is a ‘BlackBoard LMS’ icon in the QuickLaunch window on the left hand side of the screen.  If you have any difficulties logging in or using the system, visit the Student Help area of the LMS site, <http://sydney.edu.au/elarning/student/help/>.  ***Mobile Learn***  You can also access your LMS sites via the Sydney Uni App for iPhone and Android. The full set of features available on the mobile app for the University LMS can be found in detail in this PDF document: [Features in the mobile App for the University LMS (PDF)](http://sydney.edu.au/elearning/docs/student/mobile/MobileFeatureGuideDevice.pdf)  To download the University of Sydney mobile app directly to your phone or mobile device you need to be able to access the marketplace associated with your device's operating system.   * **iTunes store** on your iPhone/ iPod touch or iPad * **Play Store** or the Android Marketplace (depending on the phone's OS) * **BlackBerry App World**® on your BlackBerry® smartphone device * **Palm App Catalog** on your HP webOS device   Once you are at the marketplace or app store:   1. Search for University of Sydney 2. Install the app 3. Open the app and click on the icon 'Bb Learn' to access the LMS 4. Login to the LMS with your UniKey and password.   **Important:** due to the limitations of mobile devices you cannot submit assignments using the assignment tool. You should not complete graded tests (quizzes) using your mobile device due to the possibility of internet drop out.  The University’s Privacy Management Plan governs how the University will deal with personal information related to the content and use of its web sites. See <http://sydney.edu.au/privacy.shtml> for further details. |

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| **ASSESSMENT TASKS AND DUE DATES** |
| *Methodological Essay (1000 words) 20% Due 28 March 2014*  *Fieldwork Report (1000 words) 20% Due 17 April 2014*  *Essay Plan Presentation (500 words) 10% Due 29 April 2014*  *Research Essay (2000 words) 40% Due 30 May 2014*  *Unit Participation 10% Throughout semester*  I envisage an additional aim of this unit to be ‘become familiar with working to standards set high and rigid’, as is expected in all professional capacities. All written work for this unit is to be submitted with a professional standard of formatting, layout, and referencing style. For this unit of study we will use the style guide provided by the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion.* Both this and a marking rubric that takes this expectation into account will be available on Blackboard and will be discussed in the first lecture and tutorial.  Please submit all written assignments for WREL2001 World Religions in Context with a signed cover sheet in the SLAM Religious Studies Essay Box (John Woolley Building A20) by 4pm on or before the due date.  **Methodology Essay**  The methodology essay is 1,000 words in length and requires that you answer one question on methodology in the study of religious phenomena. Your task will be to closely read and critically analyse the claims about religions/religious phenomena made by a particular author/text. Questions for the methodology essay will be distributed in the first lecture and thereafter on Blackboard. This assessment is to be submitted by 4pm Friday 28 March, 2014.  **Fieldwork Report**  The fieldwork essay is 1,000 words in length and will require a site visit to a location to be agreed with the unit coordinator. Your report will be a discussion of your observations of the site, any practices or events you observe, and any naturally occurring data you are able to gather. These data are to be applied to a theory of your choosing, in discussion with the unit coordinator. This assessment is to be submitted by 4pm Thursday 17 April, 2014.  **Essay Plan Presentation**  Your essay plan presentation will involve selecting and committing to a topic for your research essay, and presenting on it for 5 minutes (equivalent of 500 words), followed by 5-10 minutes discussion. This will take place in the lecture and tutorial in Week 8 (29 April, 2014).  This assessment task is designed to help you craft a high quality research essay. Its explicit purpose is to familiarise you with the process of accepting feedback and peer review (I am your peer in this context) working with it to produce quality research. This assessment is therefore a chance for your to present a work-in-progress draft of your essay and gain formal feedback on it from the unit coordinator, and informal feedback from your peers.  We will make every effort as a group of colleagues to make the day a collegial and fun one. I’m looking forward to it already!  **Research Essay**  The essay assessment task is 2,000 words in length (excluding references). Your essay should be well researched, use primary sources where appropriate, and contain adequate referencing and a bibliography on a separate page. Please ensure essays are typed or printed (double-spaced and single sided). A piece of work which is not adequately researched or referenced is not an essay, and will be failed. This assessment is due to be submitted on or before 4pm Friday 30 May, 2014. |
| **ASSESSMENT CRITERIA** |
| This unit uses standards referenced assessment for award of assessment marks. Students’ assessment will be evaluated solely on the basis of students’ achievement against criteria and standards specified to align with learning outcomes.  The Department of Studies in Religion uses the grade descriptors from the Department of English, which are generic and clearly outline the standards of academic work the University expects from its graduates. For reference to criteria and standards, please consult Department of English grade descriptors at <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/english/undergrad/grades.shtml>.  In addition to these grade descriptors a rubric for unit participation is available on the WREL2001 Blackboard site. This will be used to determine your unit participation mark. |
| **CHANGES TO GRADE CODES IN 2014**  As the University moves to adopt a new online student management system in 2014, there will be some changes to the grade codes that are used to report on your results. This will not affect the standards you are expected to meet in order to achieve a Pass, Credit, Distinction or High Distinction grade, but your academic transcript may look a little different from mid-year onwards.  The University will keep students updated on the timing of these changes throughout the year. You can also check in with the [Ask Sydney website](http://current.ask.sydney.edu.au/app/answers/detail/a_id/757/session/L3RpbWUvMTM4NDkyODk3NS9zaWQvbXJUUW5PRmw%3D/c/125%2C127/p/86/student_audience/3/r_id/100250/sno/0) for help with understanding the common grade codes that appear on your academic transcript. |
| **SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK** |
| **Compliance Statements**  All students are required to submit an authorised statement of compliance with all work submitted to the University for assessment, presentation or publication. A statement of compliance certifies that no part of the Work constitutes a breach of Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Policy.  The format of the compliance statement will differ depending on the method required for submitting your work (see “Assessment Submission” below). Depending on the submission method, the statement must be in the form of:   1. a University assignment cover sheet; 2. a University electronic form; or 3. a University written statement.   **Assessment Submission**  ***Paper submission only***  Written work must be submitted in hard copy at the SLAM Office by 4pm on the due date.  You must complete, sign, and attach a cover sheet/compliance statement to any written work handed in for assessment.  Essays and assignments not submitted on or before the due date are subject to penalty. Refer to <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/late_work.shtml> for the Policy on Late Work. |
| **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM** |
| Academic honesty is a core value of the University. The University requires students to act honestly, ethically and with integrity in their dealings with the University, its members, members of the public and others. The University is opposed to and will not tolerate academic dishonesty or plagiarism, and will treat all allegations of academic dishonesty or plagiarism seriously.  The University’s Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Policy 2012 and associated Procedures are available for reference on the University Policy Register at <http://sydney.edu.au/policies> (enter “Academic Dishonesty” in the search field). The Policy applies to the academic conduct of all students enrolled in a coursework award course at the University.  Under the terms and definitions of the Policy,   * “academic dishonesty” means “seeking to obtain or obtaining academic advantage (including in the assessment or publication of work) by dishonest or unfair means or knowingly assisting another student to do so. * “plagiarism” means “presenting another person’s work as one’s own work by presenting, copying or reproducing it without appropriate acknowledgement of the source.”   The presentation of another person's work as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement is regarded as plagiarism, regardless of the author’s intentions. Plagiarism can be classified as negligent (negligent plagiarism) or dishonest (dishonest plagiarism).  An examiner who suspects academic dishonesty or plagiarism by a student must report the suspicion to a nominated academic in the relevant faculty. If the nominated academic concludes that the student has engaged in **dishonest plagiarism** or some other sufficiently serious form of academic dishonesty, the matter may be referred to the Registrar for further disciplinary action under the terms of the *Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Policy 2012* and Chapter 8 of the *University of Sydney By-Law 1999* (as amended). |
| **SPECIAL CONSIDERATION** |
| The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences assesses student requests for assistance relating to completion of assessment in accordance with the regulations set out in the [University Assessment Policy 2011 and Assessment Procedures 2011](http://sydney.edu.au/policies/default.aspx?mode=glossary&word=Academic+Board). Students are expected to become familiar with the University’s policies and Faculty procedures relating to Special Consideration and Special Arrangements.  Students can apply for:   * **Special Consideration** - for serious illness or misadventure * **Special Arrangements** - for essential community commitments * **Simple Extension** – an extension of up to 5 working days for non-examination based assessment tasks on the grounds of illness or misadventure.   Further information on special consideration policy and procedures is available on the Faculty website at <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/special_consideration.shtml>. |
| **OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RELEVANT TO THIS UNIT OF STUDY** |
| The Faculty’s Student Administration Manual is available for reference at the “Current Students” section of the Faculty Website (<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/>)**.** Most day-to-day issues you encounter in the course of completing this Unit of Study can be addressed with the information provided in the Manual. It contains detailed instructions on processes, links to forms and guidance on where to get further assistance. |
| **STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR STUDY** |
| **For full information visit** <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/staying_on_top.shtml>  **The Learning Centre** assists students to develop the generic skills, which are necessary for learning and communicating knowledge and ideas at university. Programs available at The Learning Centre include workshops in Academic Reading and Writing, Oral communications Skills, Postgraduate Research Skills, Honours, masters Coursework Program, Studying at University, and Workshops for English Language and Learning. Further information about The Learning Centre can be found at <http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/learning_centre/>.  [**The Write Site**](http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/index.htm) provides online support to help you develop your academic and professional writing skills. All University of Sydney staff and students who have a Unikeycan access the WriteSite at <http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/>.  The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences has units at both an Undergraduate and Postgraduate level that focus on **writing** across the curriculum or, more specifically, writing in the disciplines, making them relevant for all university students. To find out more visit <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching_learning/writing_hub/index.shtml> and <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching_learning/pg_writing_support/index.shtml>.  In addition to units of study on writing, The FASS Writing Hub offers drop-in sessions to assist students with their writing in a one-to-one setting. No appointment is necessary, and this service is free of charge to all FASS students and/or all students enrolled in WRIT units. For more information on what topics are covered in a drop-in session and for the current schedule, please visit  <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching_learning/writing_hub/drop_in_sessions.shtml>.  Pastoral and academic support for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students** is provided by the STAR Team in Student Support services, a dedicated team of professional Aboriginal people able to respond to the needs of students across disciplines. The STAR team can assist with tutorial support, mentoring support, cultural and pastoral care along with a range of other services. More information about support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be found at <http://sydney.edu.au/current_students/student_services/indigenous_support.shtml>.  The **Library** offers students free, online tutorials in library skills at <http://sydney.edu.au/library/skills>. There's one designed especially for students studying in the Humanities and Social Sciences at <http://sydney.edu.au/library/subjects/subject.html>. And don't forget to find out who your Faculty Liaison Librarians are. |
| **OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES** |
| Disability Services is located on Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building G20; contact 8627 8422 or email <mailto:disability.services@sydney.edu.au>. For further information, visit their website at <http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/disability/>.  Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) are located on Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building G20; contact 8627 8433 or email <mailto:caps.admin@sydney.edu.au>. For further information, visit their website at <http://sydney.edu.au/current_students/counselling/>. |