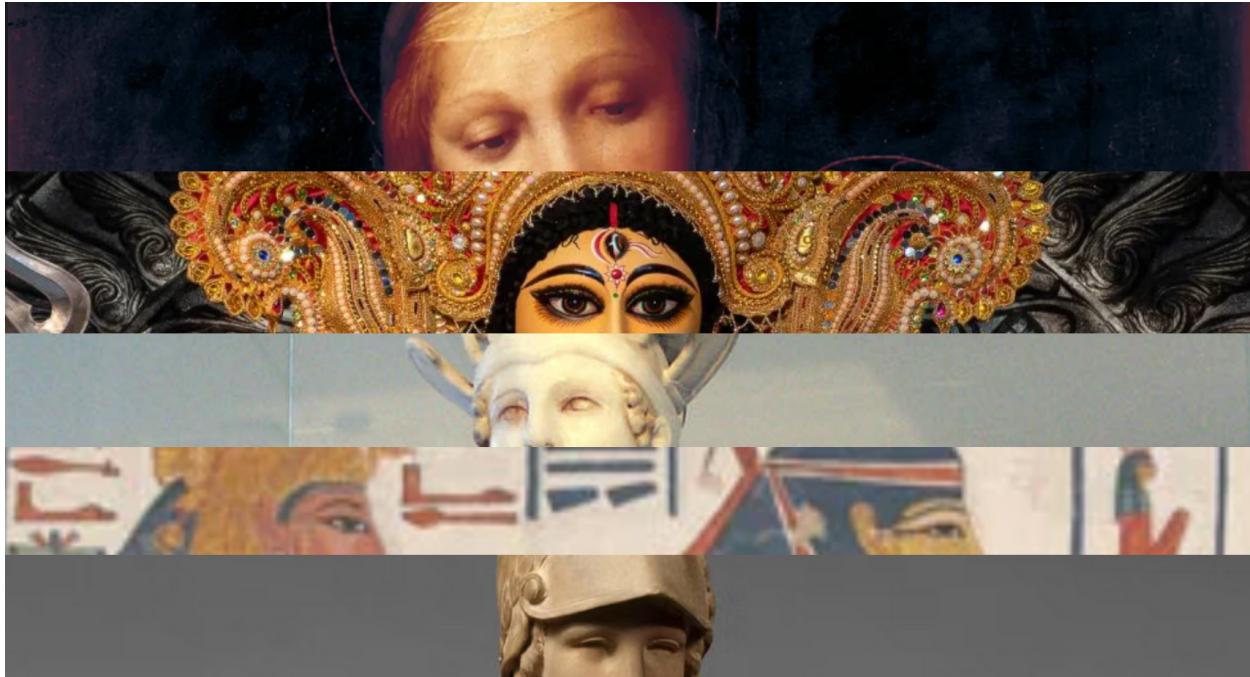


The Study of Religion RLG200H1F



Instructors

Simon Coleman: simon.coleman@utoronto.ca (JHB 333)
Alif Shahed: alif.shahed@mail.utoronto.ca (Zoom)

Office Hours

Simon in office on Tuesday afternoons, 13.30-15.00
Alif on Zoom on Thursday, 14.00-15.30
Please email to make an appointment if these times do not work

Teaching Assistants

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Course Description

In a globalizing world where people are interacting on social media, in classrooms, in workplaces, or simply by chance encounter on the street, it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to find new ways to know and understand each other. As a descriptive marker, religion can be one of the first things we come to know about a person—by how they present themselves, how they interact with you, or how they interact with others. How

we talk about religion, or more importantly, how we *think* about religion comes to shape our own approaches to these encounters.

Religion does not simply exist in the world, like oxygen, and nor is it a universal impersonal force, like gravity. At the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR) we consider ‘religion’ to be the multiple outcome of things that people and their institutions do, requiring work, creativity, thought and commitment. The same can be said of the *Study of Religion*, which requires its own forms of commitment and institution-building—as well as media of expression, as you can see in the image we have placed at the beginning of this syllabus, which we’ll discuss (and deconstruct) in our first lecture.

Throughout this course we will be asking you to reflect on what it means to label something as ‘religious’, and then to study it as such. We want to turn you into *observers* and *analysts* of religious practices—not just in places obviously set aside for worship, but also in the street, in popular culture, and in activities that you carry out but may never have considered religious as such.

Course Objectives

- 1) To gain knowledge of the study of religion in the world and within academic institutions.
- 2) To identify approaches to the study of religion and acknowledge their possibilities and limitations.
- 3) To acquire critical thinking tools and strategies for analyzing the academic study of religion and its broader implications.
- 4) To develop critical writing and speaking skills.

Our Approach to the Course

We want to engage with religion in a way that will be useful to you, equipping you with the tools you will need for further study of religion or for thinking about religion in other parts of your university career and life. If you identify as religious or spiritual, we encourage you to reflect on your own experience in light of the different approaches to religion that we will explore together.

Our course—through its lectures, tutorials, office hours, email conversations, chats in the corridor—will be an exploratory space of thoughtful reading, analysis, creation, exchange and conversation. We will all feed in who we are, what we have and know, to a collective effort toward an understanding of religion.

Lectures will involve Alif and Simon reflecting on selected topics important to the study of religion but for much of the time will create opportunities to hear reflections from you. As researchers, Alif, Simon, Amy, and Michael will share their own approaches to the study of religion and at numerous points you will be encouraged to engage in mutual dialogues in small discussion groups, before feeding back to the class.

Lectures will also be broken up in other ways: an ‘analysis of the week’ where we give you an image or text to consider before sharing reflections with the class; a ‘question so far’ section halfway through each lecture for you to write down any questions you have about what has been said so far; and a final ‘one thing we learned’ section where we bring together the most important point(s) of the lecture. In addition, there will be times when one of the instructors will bring in their messy fieldnotes or cryptic archival material and ask for your help to decipher it. Before each lecture, we will ask you to do a small amount of preparation (labelled a ‘task’) which will link to questions or issues that we’ll be raising in class. Readings will be posted on Quercus and readily available via the Library; links to certain readings are also provided in the syllabus. If you can’t get hold of a reading please notify us asap before the relevant lecture or tutorial.

Tutorials are smaller-scale occasions where you can get to know each other and your TAs, and where you can also raise questions relating to the lectures. These will be active periods of discussion and, at times, collective work, where you will be exploring material in more detail with others. Tutorials will not happen every week but they will be linked to the ‘fieldwork’ element of the course. They will also require you to carry out small tasks in advance of the tutorial.

Evaluation

Our aim is to link assignments closely to the course materials, and to provide you with a range of assessment methods, which connect to different skills and approaches to the study of religion. Time in lectures and tutorials will be given to discuss our aims, and rubrics will be included on Quercus. There will be an end of term exam, as this is expected for a course of this size at the Department for the Study of Religion. We anticipate that if you have attended lectures and tutorials and carried out relevant tasks the questions in the final exam will not come as a surprise.

All deadlines refer to midnight of the stated date. Assignments are to be submitted on Quercus.

Attendance at Tutorials: 10% (You are allowed to miss one tutorial without repercussion)

Film Analysis: 30% (800 words, due —October 9; instructions and rubric to be provided on Quercus)

Scaffolded Fieldwork Project Assessment (more detail to be provided on Quercus and during tutorials):

Group Proposal (15%, 500 words, due October 23)

Individual Final Reflection (15%, 700 words, due November 27)

Final Exam: 30%

You will select three questions related very closely to topics raised in lectures and tutorials and write three short essays.

Policies & Procedures

Email Policy and Contacts

Please email both Alif and Simon together if you have a concern or question about lectures, or the overall running of the class. Email either Amy or Michael (as appropriate) if you have a question about the tutorials. Email Alif and Simon about the film assignment and any questions about the final exam; consult Amy and Michael about attendance at tutorials and the project assignment.

Physical & Mental Health

If you are feeling overburdened with the demands of the semester or personal issues you are free to speak to Alif and Simon (or one of them) if you are comfortable, but know you also have access to free counseling as a student at UofT

- You can access U of T Telus Health Student Support 24/7 at <https://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/> with phone numbers listed on the site
- A full list of resources, including same-day counseling, is available at <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/mental-health-clinical-services/#:~:text=Students%20who%20reside%20out%20of,full%20Health%20%26%20Wellness%20Eligibility%20Policy>

Accessibility

We strive to make the classroom accessible for everyone. If there are any accommodations needed, please do not hesitate to reach out to Alif and Simon. Further information can be found at:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/>

Other Accommodations

Please reach out to Alif and Simon as early as possible to communicate any anticipated absences related to religious observances, and to discuss any possible related implications for course work. This class is a family-friendly environment. You may wish to inform us if you are a student with family responsibilities. If you are a student parent or have family responsibilities, you also may wish to visit the Family Care Office website at familycare.utoronto.ca.

Equity and Diversity

We are committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. Please maintain an open mind and treat others with empathy. We also consider it a sign of care for others that

you do not consult social media during lecture or tutorial unless asked to do so for the purposes of teaching.

Plagiarism

The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

1. Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
2. Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
3. Making up sources or facts.

Note on AI: Students may not use artificial intelligence tools for the physical writing of assignments. We understand that these tools may be useful when gathering information from across sources and assimilating it for understanding, though remember that if given an article to read you should read it in full in order to learn from this course. If you do use AI in gathering information, provide details of how you have done so in a note accompanying your work.

Writing Help

Make use of peer review and the UofT Writing Centre! It is very difficult to self-edit on a deadline, and we recommend having a peer read over your papers to catch grammar faux pas and typos. On a final read through, try reading out loud, you will catch a surprising number of errors. We also recommend making appointments at the Writing Centre, where you can get one-on-one consultations on drafts of papers, or work through any writing issues you may have: <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/> We will also dedicate a tutorial to the issue of writing.

Weekly Schedule

September 2: Introductions, Definitions, Comparisons

There is no task for this first lecture, though we ask you to have a look at the syllabus in advance and come prepared to ask any questions you have at this initial stage. Remember that no question is too trivial: you may be highlighting issues we have not mentioned, and if you want to know the answer to something there is no doubt that others will as well. During the lecture we will introduce ourselves, reflect on the study of religion and our approaches to defining and comparing it, and have our first experiences of working together in small groups.

September 9: Believing (SC/AS)

Task: Read ‘What Religious Beliefs Reveal About Post-Truth Politics’ (2017) by Liana Chua (<https://www.sapiens.org/culture/post-truth-politics/>)

Come prepared to discuss the following:

- Does what Chua says about belief surprise you in any way?
- How many different versions of ‘belief’ can you find in the article?
- What relevance does the article have to the way we should think about belief in North America?

Tutorial I: listen to and take notes from <https://keepingit101.com/e101> and come to class with your own definition of religion. This tutorial will be more about introducing yourselves to each other and your TA, and how *you* think of studying religion.

September 16: Observing (AS/SC)

Task: Please read the colonial account of Durga Puja in ‘Bengali Festivals and Holidays’ [Quercus]. Pay special attention to how this festival and the activities associated are described. What biases are being presented and from what perspective? During lecture we will watch a clip of a Hindu priest performing “sandhya arati” (evening venerations) during the Hindu festival of Durga Puja in Kolkata and write down our own observances. Afterwards we will compare our notes to the reviewer’s.

September 23: Performing (SC/AS)

Task: Read ‘Sonic Privilege: The Holism of Religious Publics’ (2019) by Patrick Eisenlohr (<https://tif.ssrc.org/2019/05/21/sonic-privilege/>)

Come prepared to discuss the following:

- What do you think Eisenlohr’s main argument is?
- What do you think the article tells us about ritual?
- Look at this film
https://www.google.com/search?q=video+showing+evangelicals+protesting+at+walsingham&rlz=1C1UEAD_enCA1010CA1010&oq=video+showing+evangelicals+protesting+at+walsingham&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABjvBTIKCAIQABiABBiiBDIHCAMQABjvBdIBCDgzNzVqMG03qAIIsAIB8QXN3nSABwHPjPEFzd50gAcBz4w&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:7e8a13d6,vid:-q-LH2h5h94,st:0
- Do you think the film has any parallels with the situation Eisenlohr is discussing?

September 30: Representing AS/SC

Task: Please read Dheepa Sundaram’s ‘Instagram Your Durga Puja! Social Media, Hashtags, and State Sponsored Cultural Marketing’ (Quercus). During lecture will watch clips from

movies, vlogs, and TikTok/Instagram reels to discuss how social media allows us to ‘represent’ religion in different ways.

Tutorial 2: Please read Pamela Klassen’s ‘Repossessing the Past’ (<https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/04/08/repossessing-the-past/>). In tutorial you will discuss how to watch and critique films in preparation for your film review.

October 7: Speaking/Writing SC/AS

Task: Read the following classic essay: ‘Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion’ *American Ethnologist* (1987: 167-181)

- Take notes on what she says about belief and language in preparation for lecture, where we’ll work together on religious texts and narratives, including some of the language discussed by Harding.

Tutorial 3: Planning Fieldwork Projects

Task: Read Kelly Baker’s piece ‘Ethnography in Religious Studies Classroom’ (2007, <https://usreligion.blogspot.com/2007/12/ethnography-in-religious-studies.html>) Come prepared to discuss the following:

- What ethical and practical issues does Kelly highlight for carrying out ethnography in religious settings for students?
- Can you think of other issues that might be important in considering how a group of students might observe a religious event or occasion?
- What would you like to observe, and why?

October 14: Locating SC/AS

Task: Read ‘Sacred Space’ by Ursula Rao (2018, *International Encyclopedia of Religion*, https://www.multiple-secularities.de/media/rao_sacred_space_int_encyclopedia_of_anthropology_1.pdf)

Come prepared to discuss the following:

- What makes a place sacred?
- Can you think of places around Toronto that can be considered sacred? What about places that aren’t labelled religious?
- How do discussions of space link to what we’ve been saying already about questions of belief, ritual, and embodiment?

Tutorial 4: Fieldwork—Observations and Note-Taking

Task: Come prepared to discuss the following:

- <https://guides.temple.edu/c.php?g=77838&p=3934485>
- <https://www.gpgrieve.org/PDF/How%20to%20write%20Field%20Notes.pdf>

Also read Farah Ghuznavi's short story "The Mosquito Net Confessions" (Quercus) about a fieldworker for the Grameen Bank. Pay attention to what kind of observations, impressions, and emotions doing 'fieldwork' evokes in the characters.

October 21: Circulating (AS/SC)

Task: Read Tapati Guhathakurta's 'Our Gods, Their Museums: The Contrary Careers of India's Art Objects' (2007: 628-627) (Quercus)

- Take notes on Tapati Guha-Thakurta's discussion on 'representing' religion in museums.
- Come prepared to discuss ethical/theoretical dilemmas around seeing religious objects in non-religious spaces (or on the flipside, seeing non-religious objects in religious spaces).

OCTOBER 28 IS PART OF READING WEEK—NO LECTURE

November 4: 'Studying Religion: Inside Out or Outside In?' SC/AS

Task: Listen to, and take careful notes from, the podcast

<https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/response/katie-aston-insider-and-outsider-an-anthropological-perspective/>

- Come prepared to discuss what you see are the main ethical, political, practical, and analytical questions around whether you need to be an insider to properly study or understand 'a religion'
- What does examining this question tell us more generally about the study of religion?

November 11: The Secular and the Post-Secular AS&SC

Please read Matthew Scherer's summative text 'Landmarks in the Critical Study of Secularism' (<https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/11/12/landmarks-secularism/>) and prepare to discuss the differences between secularism, religion, and pluralism.

November 18 (Simon is Away—Do fieldwork!)

No set task for this week but begin reading Malory Nye's 'Decolonizing the Study of Religion' (Quercus) as it is quite long and will frame the discussion for the following week's class.

November 25: Decolonizing the Study of Religion Plus Revision Questions AS&SC

Task: Finish reading Malory Nye's 'Decolonizing the Study of Religion' and be prepared to discuss in lecture.

Tutorial 5: Group Presentations of Projects