RELS 355
Research Methods in Religious Studies

Instructor: Richard Ascough
Office: Theological Hall 211
Term: Winter 2017
Course Time: Tuesday 2:30 – 5:20
Location: Ontario Hall 207
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-11:00, or by appointment
E-mail: rsa@queensu.ca - please include RELS 355 in the subject line
Website: http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/Richard_Ascough/Welcome.html

Course Calendar Description

An investigation into the techniques of critical reading and writing for research in Religious Studies. Prerequisites: Level 3 and 6.0 units at the 200 level in RELS.

Expanded Course Description (Course Objectives)

This course provides students with opportunities to undertake research and craft clear arguments to communicate their learning. Students will learn skills such as establishing a research focus, compiling a preliminary bibliography, researching primary data, engaging with arguments in secondary materials, and constructing a thesis and testing and supporting it with data. Students also learn how to present their arguments in written and oral forms.

Learning Outcomes: Through the course students will

- apply key methods of research in Religious Studies;
- cultivate abilities to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, both orally and in writing, and to a range of audiences;
- recognize the place of ritual in the study of religion;
- encounter various learning styles through content input, interactive tasks, and graded assignments.

Student Outputs: During the course students will

- come to every class prepared to discuss the assigned reading material and participate fully in assigned learning tasks;
- compile and evaluate data;
- construct evidence-based arguments;
- give and receive constructive feedback;
- design and present (orally and in writing) a research project
Students will demonstrate this through

- regular class attendance and responses to course material (30%)
- preparing an annotated bibliography (10%)
- summarizing a methodological approach (5%)
- providing feedback on another student’s draft essay (10%)
- giving an oral presentation of their argument (15%)
- writing a argumentative essay involving ritual analysis (30%)

Course Readings


The page numbers for each unit, along with other readings for the course will be distributed to students through onQ, and may require access from campus or through the Queen’s proxy server if you are off campus (https://login.proxy.queensu.ca/public/proxystart.html).

Mechanisms for Assessing Student Learning (student outputs)

30% Research Essay. This paper is due at the end of the semester but it will be the focus of all of the other assignments in the class, as well as a number of in-class exercises. Within the first couple of weeks of the semester you will be asked to choose a paper topic that investigates a ritual of your choosing in light of the methods of the study of religion. The specific focus and approach of the paper will be worked out as we proceed through the class. The final paper should be no longer than 12 pages at 1.5 spacing. The final paper itself is due by 11:59 p.m. April 14 in the Turnitin* dropbox in the onQ course site.

10% Annotated Bibliography. Once you have picked a general topic for your paper, you need to compile a working bibliography of 12-15 academic books, articles, and/or websites (you need at least one of each type) that you think might be of some help in narrowing your topic and (eventually) writing your paper. For each entry you should included the full bibliographic information, properly formatted. The annotation should be about 3-4 sentences and should give an overview of the thesis and main argument of the paper and a reason why you think it might be helpful for your paper. Due at the beginning of class on Jan. 24, with an e-copy also placed in the Turnitin* dropbox in the onQ course site before class that same day.

5% Summary of Methodological Approach. A one-page (single-spaced) description of the methodological approach you will be using in your paper. You should include the reasons that you chose this particular method to explore your topic along with some of the limitations that will arise from using this method. Due at the beginning of class on Feb. 7, with an e-copy also placed in the Turnitin* dropbox in the onQ course site before class that same day.
10% Feedback on a Draft Essay. On Mar. 7 at the beginning of class each student will submit a paper copy draft of their essay of 6 pages (1.5 spacing) or more, with only their student number as the identifier (and place an e-copy in the Turnitin* dropbox in the onQ course site before class that same day). Failure to submit a draft of your own essay in class on the due date will result in an automatic grade of zero (0) for this assignment. These draft essays will be redistributed amongst the students. You are to take this draft paper and provide feedback and a response to the thesis and arguments. You may do so by annotating the original paper and/or providing a separate written evaluation. The student doing the assessment should also only include their student number as the identifier. Bring the draft essay and your assessment to class on Mar. 14, and it will be returned to the student that wrote the essay. Please do not talk to one another about these papers so that you ensure confidentiality and anonymity in undertaking this assignment. On Mar. 21 I will collect the original draft papers and the feedback that was provided and will be grading the feedback.

15% Student Presentation. On one of the three final sessions (Mar. 21; Mar. 28; Apr. 3) students will give an oral presentation of the argument they are making in their paper. Each student will be allotted no more than 10 minutes to give the presentation, which will be followed by 5 minutes for questions and responses by other students. Students will be graded on content, presentation style, and timing (do not go overtime!). The presentation date for each student will be assigned by the instructor, with priority for the final sessions going to any students undertaking field work or interviews. Other spots will be filled by random draw (although volunteers for the first session will be accepted!). Students are welcome to use visual and/or aural media for their presentations but need not do so.

30% Class Engagement. The primary criteria that I use for evaluating student contribution to class is based on evidence for pre-class preparation, individual reflective work, contributions during small group work, and the nature and content of comments in large class discussion (I may ask you to evaluate yourself and/or others in some cases). I do not value quantity of comments so much as quality of comments — that is, lots of comments that leave the class unfocused will not be valued as highly as one or two well-directed comments that move discussions forward. I describe this in more detail online at http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/participation.htm. I may also ask you to submit your written answers to questions linked to the readings or ask you to undertake some in-class written work that will be graded as part of your participation mark. In addition, each week I will ask you to display your nameplate clearly so that we can address one another by name. On the reverse side of the nameplate is a space for you to write a few sentences at the conclusion of each class session before you return the nameplate to me. Be sure to write something; e.g., your main learning for the session; a lingering puzzle; a question that the discussion generated.

* Turnitin: This course is being used in the pilot at Queen’s for Turnitin, a software program that checks to ensure that your work is original and that you have not inadvertently used material that is not your own. We will be using it as a formative tool for improving research and writing. For each assignment you will be allowed multiple submissions from at least a week prior to the due date. Upon the first submission you will receive a report immediately, which will flag any potential problems. For each subsequent submission you will receive a report 24 hours later. The goal is to have you check and revise your work before the final submission. Of course, any remaining issues upon final submission will be considered a breech of academic integrity. We will have a guest come to class to explain the process in more detail.
Outline of Class Units

1. Jan. 10  Becoming a Researcher
2. Jan. 17  Formulating Research Questions
3. Jan. 24  Undertaking Research
4. Jan. 31  Making Good Arguments
5. Feb. 7   Quantitative and Qualitative Data
6. Feb. 14  Planning and Drafting
   Feb. 21  Reading Week
7. Feb. 28  Revising the Draft
8. Mar. 7   Giving and Receiving Feedback
9. Mar. 14  Giving Effective Presentations
10. Mar. 21 Student Presentations (11 x 12 min)
11. Mar. 28 Student Presentations (11 x 12 min)
12. Apr. 3  Student Presentations (11 x 12 min)

Course Policies

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/home.php). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the “freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas” essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities at (http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senateandtrustees/academicintegrity.html). Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts & Science Calendar on the Arts & Science website under “Academic Integrity” (http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/students-at-queens/academic-integrity) or from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen’s. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions that contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

Accessibility: Queen’s is committed to an inclusive campus community with accessible goods, services, and facilities that respect the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities. Please contact me directly if you need a copy of this syllabus or other course materials in an accessible format.

Accommodations: If you have a physical, psychological, or learning situation that may require accommodations in this course, please contact immediately Queen's Health Counseling and Disability Services (HCDS), located in the LaSalle Building, 146 Stuart Street (613-533-6467), in order to receive documentation identifying accommodation required of the instructor (http://www.queensu.ca/hcds).

Assignment Submission: Assignments must be submitted on the due date both as a hard copy in class and through the Dropbox in the onQ course site. I will not accept assignments submitted via email except in exceptional circumstances and when negotiated with the instructor beforehand or indicated in the assignment description. Include only your student number (and the course number) on all your assignments and tests (i.e., do not include your name). Please observe all page length restrictions – failure to do so may detrimentally affect your grade on the assignment. Please do not hand in assignments enclosed in a covering of some sort (e.g., binder, plastic sleeve); just place a staple in the top left corner. Some guidelines for written assignments can be
found on the Course Resources page (http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/Richard_Ascough/Resources.html).

**Assignment Due Dates:** All assignments are due on the stated date and no extensions will be granted, since the assignments will be the basis for class discussion. In the case of a documented emergency (e.g., medical or family), an alternative assignment may be possible.

**Changes:** The instructor reserves the right to change any aspect of the course and will give notice of any such changes.

**Copyright of Course Materials:** Course material distributed in-class and online is copyrighted and is for the sole use of students registered in this course. This material shall not be distributed or disseminated to anyone other than students registered in these courses. Failure to abide by these conditions is a breach of copyright, and may also constitute a breach of academic integrity under the University Senate’s Academic Integrity Policy Statement.

**Course Completion:** Students wishing to negotiate a course grade of “Incomplete” (IN) must bring the “Permission for an Incomplete Grade” form (http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/sites/default/files/permission_for_an_incomplete_grade.pdf) to the instructor before the end of classes and must provide documentary evidence to support the request (as per the “Accommodations” policy, above). Failure to do so will result in the submission of a final grade based on work completed by the end of the course.

**Electronic Devices in the Classroom:** It is important that we maintain an atmosphere of respect and focus on learning in the classroom. Since the use of electronic devices in the classroom can be disruptive both to the instructor and to other students, the use of these devices may be restricted at the discretion of the instructor. The use of laptops is permitted, but their use is restricted to taking notes and following up course material at the behest of the instructor. The use of recording devices for lectures is not allowed unless you have requested and been given the express permission of the instructor. Non-course related use of electronic devices (e.g. playing games, watching movies, social networking, texting), including smartphones, tablets and laptops, is particularly disruptive to others in the classroom; if you feel you must use class time for these pursuits please do so outside of the classroom itself. If you are engaged in such pursuits you may be asked by the instructor or by other students to cease doing so or otherwise leave the classroom. Please refrain making or receiving telephone calls during class (even if it is your mother calling!).

**Grading:** All components of this course will receive numerical percentage marks. The final grade you receive for the course will be derived by converting your numerical course average to a letter grade according to Queen’s Official Grade Conversion Scale:

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**Grading Rubrics:** For the principles and grading rubric used for assessing written assignments see my Assignment Evaluation Criteria (http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/assessment.htm). For my criteria for grading class participation see http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/participation.htm, although it will be adjusted accordingly for the weighted participation grade for this particular course: 3/3 = 2/2; 2/3 = 1.5/2; 1/3 = 1/2; 0/3 = 0/2.

**Resources:** Academic guidelines can be found on my Course Resources page (http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/Richard_Ascough/Resources.html).