RELS 239
RELIGION AND SPORTS
Course Syllabus

Queen’s University, School of Religion
Fall 2016
12 September – 2 December
Thursdays 2:30-5:30
Location: Ellis Hall 324

Course Website:
Available through onQ

INSTRUCTOR:
Brett David Potter
bp57@queensu.ca
Office: 229 Theological Hall
Phone: 613.533.6000 x78066

OFFICE HOURS:
I am available for course-related meetings before class (1:30-2:30) or by appointment. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course will provide an overview of the relatively new and expanding body of research that examines the relationship between sport, spirituality, and religion. Topics including play, games, flow, ritual, prayer, sports stars as role models, doping, fandom, and miracles in sport will be explored.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
1. To develop an awareness and understanding of approaches to the intersection(s) of religion and sports;

2. To consider the relationship between sports and spirituality, particularly “flow experiences”;

3. To ask critical questions about the nature of religion and sports and their embeddedness in a series of cultural, economic, and historical contexts;

4. To develop an informed understanding of the ethical issues surrounding religion and sports in the contemporary situation.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of the course, the student should be able to --

1. comprehend a range of issues raised by the intersections of sport, religion, and spirituality;

2. write critically about the application of spiritual and religious perspectives in a variety of sporting contexts;

3. identify and discuss ethical issues arising out of this interdisciplinary area.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts:

These will be available through the bookstore and as short-term loans at Stauffer Library.


All additional readings will be posted on the course website (onQ). To access the website, go to queensu.ca > “Search and Sign In” and then navigate to onQ. From there you should be able to login using your Queens username and password.

EVALUATION

1. **Short Essay** (20%)  

Discuss the relationship between flow experiences in sport and spirituality. Consider whether flow experiences in sport can be spiritual or religious. For this assignment, there is no need to do additional library research outside of the course readings. (The Csikszentmihalyi/Jackson book is an obvious place to start.) You will have a clear thesis statement in which you argue what the connection (if there is one!) between “flow” and spirituality is, and if so how they are related. Use your first page to summarize an experience of flow that you have had (see the exercise on p. 8 of Flow in Sports to help you). This does not necessarily have to be an athletic experience, but keep in mind the nature of the course. Be sure to define flow.
You will also want to be aware of meanings and relevance of sport and play (flow is autotelic, similar to many understandings of play), transcendence and immanence, and the sacred and profane.

Draw on as many of the required readings as possible, integrating them in your response. This short essay will be 5-6 pages long (double spaced, 12 point font, standard 1” margins).

DUE DATE: September 29

2. Creative Project (30%)

For this assignment, you will use Storify, Tumblr, Wordpress, or another free online blog/website platform to curate/create a page of multimedia and textual content that will demonstrate the connections between sport, culture, religion, and spirituality.

For example, if you are a huge fan of a particular sports team, you might create a personal fan page that connects your “fandom” to religious and ritual patterns. You could embed images, YouTube or Vimeo content, links to stories, articles, and websites, along with your own words and interpretations to create a cohesive story. Alternatively, you could select one of the topics we have examined in class (e.g. flow, play, the history of sports and religion, the Olympics, sports and disability, pilgrimage/movement, sports and nationalism); the spiritual implications of a particular sport (hockey, soccer, baseball, golf, etc.); or the resonances of sports with a particular religious system (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Greek mythology) and use that as a central visual and conceptual theme for your page. The possibilities are almost endless, but bear in mind this is an academic assignment so the material posted should be appropriate for an academic environment.

For this assignment, a strong visual element is expected (you will embed images and video from around the web, and in some cases create your own visual content). However, since this is an academic assignment, there should also be enough text included to demonstrate you are engaging the theories and concepts we have explored in the readings. More information on this project will be provided in class.

DUE DATE: October 27

3. Quizzes (2 x 10% = 20%)

These two short multiple-choice tests are cumulative and will include questions from both assigned readings and in-class content.

TEST DATES: November 3 and December 1
4. **Final Paper (30%)**

For the final paper, you have two options (see below).

In both of these options, papers should be between 7-8 pages (double-spaced, not including bibliography, in 12-pt font) and should consult a minimum of 7 scholarly sources (books or academic journal articles). Please cite your sources using MLA format. Questions about how to find sources, how to use the Queen’s library, as well as citation style will be addressed in class.

**Option A – Research Paper**

Using as a point of departure the topic or theme you explored through your creative project (or, if this is not possible, another topic of significant interest relevant to the course), research and write an essay which sets the issue in context and by doing so makes a concrete argument about one aspect of the relationship between religion and sports. Make sure your thesis statement (the central argument you make throughout the paper) is focused and manageable.

Sample research questions (which you will answer) might include:

*What are the ways that religious athletes connect their faith to their sport?*

*How is _______ (tennis, baseball, etc.) embedded in a particular set of religious-cultural ideologies?*

*What do sports and spirituality have in common? (in North America? throughout history?)*

*What does it mean (from a sociological / theological / cultural standpoint) to say “hockey (or tennis, or water polo) is my religion”?*

These are only examples. But they give an idea of the types of explorations possible. Though you may draw on course readings, this assignment expects you will conduct library research to fully investigate your chosen topic.

**Alternative Option:**

Read and write a critical paper on *Rounding the Bases: Baseball and Religion in America* by Joseph L. Price. Identify the author’s aim in compiling this book. What are themes and issues running throughout the chapters? Ask yourself how the aims of the book were addressed. What was missing that would be relevant to the text and interesting to you? What theme is the most important and why? While keeping the focus on *Rounding the Bases*, you will also need to connect the arguments made by the book to both other course readings and library research. Throughout, include some brief concrete examples from *Rounding the Bases* to support your points.

DUE DATE: November 17

COURSE OUTLINE

Please note that all lecture slides will be made available on the course website during the corresponding week. Students having problems accessing the textbook or readings are advised to talk to the instructor before such problems begin to impact their performance in the course.

Week 1
September 15

Introduction

- The Olympics and arete
- Sport and mythology: ancient Greece and the Aztecs
- Introduction to key terms in the study of religion
- Sport and “play”
- Ritual and liturgy

Required Readings:

Heather L. Reid, “The Training of the Olympian Soul,” The Other Journal 23 (May 2016).


Week 2
September 22

Sport and Religion: A Historical Perspective

Required Readings:


Parry et al (2011): Ch. 8 “Why Dichotomies Make it Difficult to See Games as Gifts of


**Week 3**

September 29

**Short Essay Due**

Understanding Flow | Case Study 1: Buddhism

Required Readings:

Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999): 3-76.


**Week 4**

October 6

**Sport as Secular Religion**

Required Readings:


Johann Huizenga, Homo Ludens (excerpt)

Parry et al (2011), Ch. 6 - “Sport Psychology and Spirit in Professional Football” by Mark Nesti, 149 – 162; Ch. 9 – “The Energy of Play” by Susan Saint Sing, 201 – 210.


**Week 5**
October 13
**Ritual and Pilgrimage**

**Required Readings:**


Zygmunt Baumann, TBA


**Week 6**
October 20
**Sport, Spirituality, and Religion | Case Study 2: Christianity**

**Required Readings:**


**Week 7**
October 27

**Creative Project Due**

**Sports, Religion, and Nationalism**
Required Readings:


Week 8
November 3

QUIZ #1

Prayer, Testimony, and Religious Diversity | Case Study 3: Islam

Required Readings:


Week 9
November 10

Athletes: Saints and Sinners

Required Readings:


**Week 10**
November 17

**Essay Due**

**Enhancements and Body Modification**

**Required Readings:**


**Week 11**
November 24

**Fandom, Curses, and Miracles**

**Required Readings:**


**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Academic integrity at Queen’s University is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. 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 [http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senateandtrustees/principlespriorities.html](http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senateandtrustees/principlespriorities.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 and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1 [http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/2011-2014-calendar/academic-regulations/regulation-1](http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/2011-2014-calendar/academic-regulations/regulation-1)), on the Arts and Science website (see [http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academics/undergraduate/academic-integrity](http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academics/undergraduate/academic-integrity)), and 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 which 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.

**What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism, simply defined, is presenting another’s ideas or phrasings as one’s own without proper acknowledgement.

Some examples include: copying and pasting from the internet, a printed source, or other resource without proper acknowledgement; copying from another student; using direct quotations or large sections of paraphrased material in an assignment without appropriate acknowledgement; submitting the same piece of work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor(s).
Accommodations

If you have a physical, psychological, or learning situation that may require accommodations in this course, please contact immediately Queen’s Student Accessibility Services (QSAS) and register as early as possible. For details and further information see http://www.queensu.ca/studentwellness/accessibility-services/.

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.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY:

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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