

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RLG101H LEC0101 (Winter 2020)

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Department of Historical Studies

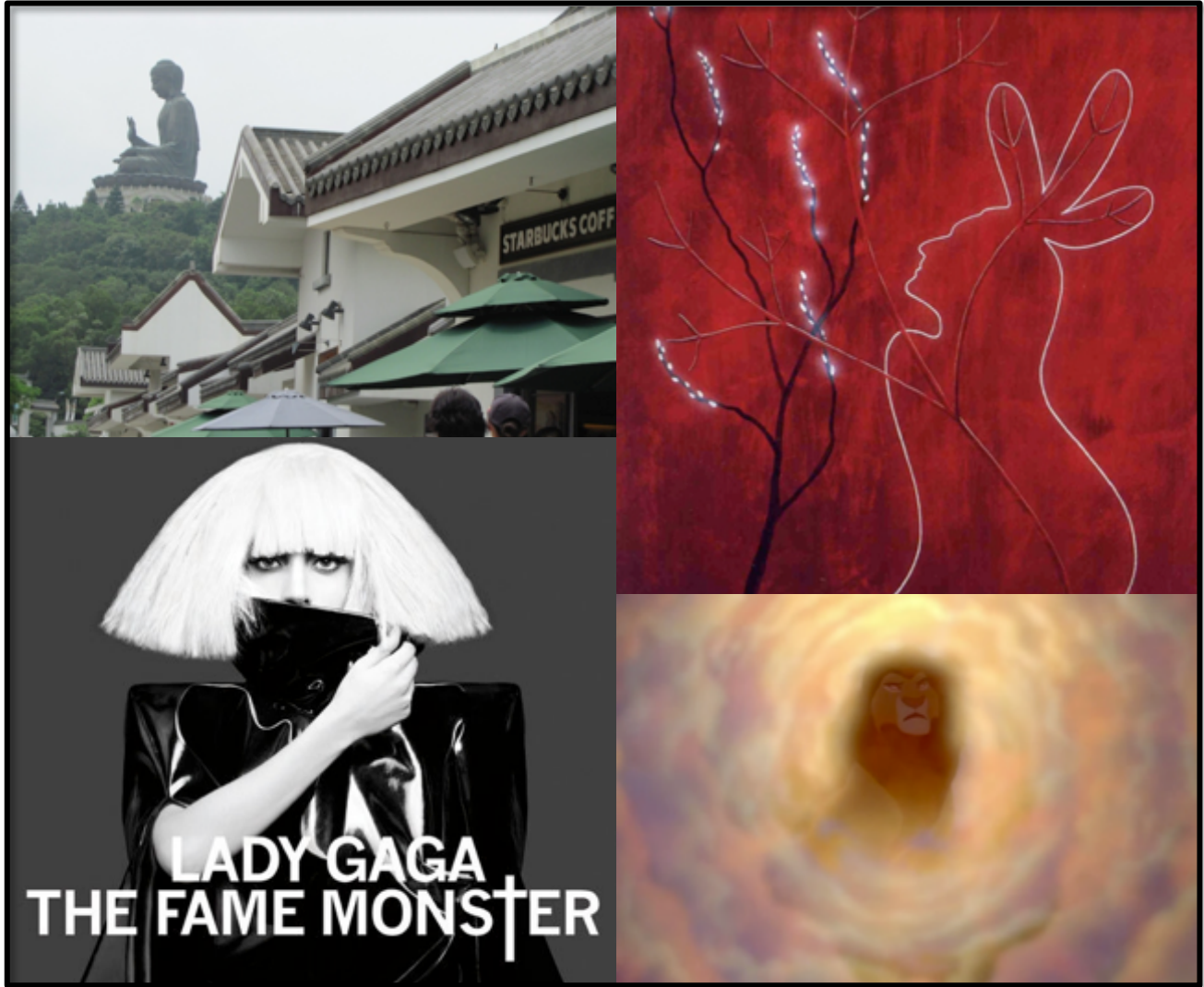


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COURSE WEBSITES

There are two official sites that you are required to use for this course. Each site has very different purposes.

1. WordPress

The website that we will use for most of the course information is located here: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com>

Note that the course instructor's **office hours** are here: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/about/instructor-tas>

The WordPress site includes the following:

- Information about the instructor and the TAs (including who we are and how to contact us);
- Information about other course resources, including staff in the Historical Studies Department;
- Further details about course grading requirements;
- Required readings not included in your course textbook;
- Additional (optional) readings and resources;
- Lecture slides, as pdf files;¹
- All other information contained in this syllabus.

2. Quercus

This course also uses the University's learning management system, Quercus. To access the website, go to the U of T Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>. Click on the RLG101H1S link to open our course area, view the latest announcements, and access the course resources. Please note: do not reply to any Quercus system notifications you receive through email; replies to these system notification messages are not sent to a course instructor.

The Quercus site will include the following:

- All important announcements;
- Online class discussions;
- Assignment instructions and submission information;
- Assignment feedback and grades.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why study religion? Simply put, religion is complicated and important. One example of its complexity is that no one has come up with a definition of "religion" that everyone can agree on. Does a religion require belief in god(s)? Are forms of Buddhism that rely on empirical evidence considered religions? Is Christian atheism a religion? Is sport a religion? Whatever religion is, most people will admit that it has always had an enormous impact on the world, even on those who do not see themselves as religious. It affects us in public and private ways, influencing economics, politics, and art, as well as the ways in which we interact with other people and how we understand the meaning of our own lives. We are rooted *in* religion, and also at times uprooted *by* it.

The questions about religion are virtually endless. What is a "ritual"? Is "belief" the most important aspect of religion? What makes a particular story/person/object/place "sacred"—an inherent quality, or something imposed from without? In what ways are practices that we think of as "religious" similar to, and different from, the "non-religious"? This course will examine such questions by providing a broad, basic introduction to *the academic study of religion*, using examples from contemporary popular culture as well as Indigenous and other religious traditions to illustrate theoretical material. Students will also be directly involved in the attempts to answer questions about religion, and ask many of their own, by doing first-hand original research.

¹ These slides will only be posted *after* each class. This is because I am always changing the slides just before class, and also because I believe that it is good training to learn to take notes based only on what you see and hear during the lecture.

PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

Knowing something about different ways of understanding religion can offer insight into the workings of virtually every other aspect of human culture, including philosophy, business, film, science, and the university itself. The study of religion also provides wonderful training in how to see and think in general. We all have many deep-seated ideas about this topic, prejudices both for and against religion. Trying to push beyond our assumptions and really look at what is in front of us can at times be almost impossible. But aspects of religion will always confound our expectations, if we are willing to see what is there—it will be more violent than we think or more peace-promoting, more interesting or more boring. How we think about religion is also often a key part of how we see ourselves, and how we think about, and interact with, the world in general. One hope of this course is that you will not just know more about religion by the end of it, but that you will leave with new insights into (and questions about) a whole range of beliefs, actions, institutions, symbols, texts, etc.

Learning Objectives:

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 and methods within the study of religion to primary source material, including ostensibly non-religious expressions of popular culture (music, film, television, etc.);
- Express information, arguments, and analyses accurately and with clarity in writing;
- 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.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The “texts” for this course include materials to read *and* to watch:

1. Malory Nye, *Religion: The Basics*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2008). Available from the UTM Bookstore, and placed on short-term loan at the UTM Library.
2. Short readings posted on the course WordPress site each week.
3. *The Lion King* (1994). Placed on short-term loan at the UTM Library. You are expected to have watched the entire film by the second class in the term. If you have seen the film before you are still strongly advised to re-watch it so that the details are fresh in your mind.

You are expected to have completed, and reflected on, the required readings before we discuss them in class. This requirement does not involve a huge amount of reading. Generally you must complete between 25 and 35 pages per week. Much of this material is highly theoretical. You must read closely and carefully, paying attention to the many ideas to which each chapter will introduce you. The readings should leave you with many questions, which I hope that you will raise in class and during tutorials.

Please keep in mind that the success of this course depends greatly upon active student participation. Your engagement with the course material will of course help you learn this material better, but your informed and thoughtful participation will also help the rest of us gain better insight into the study of religion.

GRADING

The grading requirements for this course are as follows:

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|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Course participation..... | 15% |
| 2. Film analysis..... | 20% |
| 3. Field research analysis..... | 30% |
| 4. Final exam..... | 35% |

1. Course participation (15%)

The course participation grade is designed to be flexible. There are several different ways to fulfill the requirements for course participation, and students can choose which ones to focus on. For each participation element you complete you will receive **one mark out of 30**. If you obtain all 30 marks you will receive the full 15% for this part of your course grade. Note: If you obtain more than 30 marks, you will still only receive 30/30 for your participation grade.

Most of the possible participation marks come from the weekly tutorials. There are eleven tutorial sessions, and you will receive one mark for each week you attend, one mark for each piece of completed tutorial homework you submit, and one mark for each tutorial reflection question that you successfully answer. This means that it is possible to obtain 33 participation marks from the tutorials alone. However, if you are unable to do this, there are other options available to obtain participation marks. For more information on these options please visit: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/grading/course-participation/>

2. Film analysis (20%)

This assignment requires you to use theories of religion to analyze a modern non-religious film. The deadlines for this assignment are as follows:

- January 24: film paragraph due (worth 5%)
- February 26: final film analysis due (worth 15%)

3. Field research analysis (30%)

This assignment requires you to attend (and then analyze) an official ceremony/ritual of a particular religious tradition. The tradition you select must be one with which you are not too familiar. If you belong to a Christian church of any denomination, for example, you cannot attend the services of a different Christian denomination. You must also attend the service with one or two other students from your tutorial group, and have a photo of your group taken at the location of the service. If you have any concerns about the site visit component of this assignment, you must discuss them with the instructor before February 5. The deadlines for the assignment are as follows:

- February 7: field research contract due (worth 2%)
- March 9: field research outline (including observations) + group photo due (worth 5%)
- March 30: field research analysis due (worth 23%)

4. Final exam (35%)

The exam will take place at some point during the regular exam period in April. It will include questions on material from all course readings, lectures, tutorials, and class discussions. Questions will be in a variety of formats, and may include multiple choice, short answers, essays, etc.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

The main assignments **must be submitted through the course Quercus site**. Students will also be required to submit their assignments to **Turnitin.com** for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their assignments to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site. Students who do not wish to submit their assignments to Turnitin.com must consult with the course instructor.

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, for example, or who run into technological difficulties (e.g., your Internet service goes down for any reason).

Writing issues: All writing assignments must conform to standard academic expectations, including the use of: unbiased language; correct grammar and spelling; and an accepted method of citing sources (Chicago Manual of Style). Resources on these and other writing issues are available on the course WordPress site.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

None of the course participation elements (e.g., tutorial homework and tutorial reflections) can be accepted late for any reason. However, if you encounter a serious problem or crisis that prevents you from completing a significant number of participation elements, please contact the course instructor immediately.

Here are the late penalties for the **main writing assignments**:

- The film paragraph and field research outline will be penalized 1 mark (out of 20) per day late.
- The film analysis and field research analysis will be penalized 1 mark (out of 100) per day late.
- The field research contract will not be accepted late; failure to submit the contract by the deadline will result in a grade of zero.

You may request special consideration **from the Historical Studies Department (NOT the course instructor)** for late assignments due to reasons beyond your control, including:

- Illness or injury
- Disability
- Religious observances (e.g., holy days)
- Other acceptable unplanned and/or unforeseeable circumstances entirely beyond your control (e.g., a court subpoena, a funeral, an accident, etc.)

Reasons such as vacations, pre-purchased plane tickets, family plans, attendance at a wedding, lack of preparation, technology failure, extra-curricular commitments, and academic work in other courses are not considered to be beyond a student's control and will not be accommodated.

We strongly advise you to complete your late assignment and submit it as soon as you are able, even if you have not received a decision regarding your request.

To request accommodation for a late assignment, please follow the Special Consideration procedure outlined on the department website: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/historical-studies/resources/special-consideration>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from UofT 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* (see <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies>) 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 information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/academic-integrity/resources/students>).

SUPPORT AND ACCOMMODATION

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** (DV2037) as soon as possible (<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/accessability>). Resources for other forms of student support are listed here: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/help/student-services/>

PROTOCOLS AND ETIQUETTE

1. Laptops and phones

The use of laptops and other electronic/mobile devices is NOT permitted in class. Instead, please bring paper and pen and take notes the (literally!) old school way. If you have a special need to use a laptop in class you must speak to the instructor about it, and receive his written permission to do so (i.e., by email).

2. Recording lectures and course materials

UTM Policy on Copyright in Instructional Settings: If you wish to 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.

3. Communicating with the instructor/TAs

Aside from lectures and tutorials, the primary way in which the instructor and TAs will communicate course information to you will be using emails and announcements sent through Quercus. **All students are therefore responsible for checking their @mail.utoronto address on a regular and frequent basis.**

Emails to your instructor or TA can be used to send along information and opinions and to ask **simple, quick questions**. Please do NOT email questions whose answers can easily be found by reading the syllabus/course website. Generally speaking, you can expect a reply to your email from the instructor or TA within **two business days** – i.e., from Monday to Friday; we may check email on weekends occasionally, but we also reserve the right not to do so. Once in a while, we try to have a life too. ☺ If you want to discuss any of the course materials or assignments in detail, please do so **in person** with the instructor or your TA.

If you have comments or questions about the course that you would like to send the instructor **anonymously**, please visit <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/contact-2/contact>.

4. Course and classroom expectations

We believe that everyone involved in a course — students, instructors, and TAs — have the right to certain expectations in a university course. Usually the most successful classes are those in which **we respect each other, and understand our mutual responsibilities**. This point is addressed by the UofT Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/equity-and-diversity/>

One of our most important collective responsibilities is to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. **Discrimination, harassment, and hate speech will not be tolerated.** If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please immediately alert someone who can provide you with assistance. Some of the people who could be helpful are the RLG101H instructor, the UTM Equity and Diversity Officer (edo.utm@utoronto.ca), or the UTM Students' Union Vice President Equity (vpequity@utmsu.ca).

In addition to the above, please consider the following “manifesto” for all of us in RLG101H (including students, TAs, 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, TAs, and from others in class;
- We have the right to a course environment that is free from hostility or intimidation;
- We have the right to a curriculum that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and sexual identity.

For further information on the respective rights and responsibilities in this course of students, TAs, and the instructor, please visit <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/rights/course-manifesto>.

SCHEDULE

Week	Tutorial Dates	Lecture Dates	Topics	Main Readings	Writing Assignments
1	Jan 6	Jan 6 Jan 8	Introduction	Course Syllabus	
2	Jan 13	Jan 13 Jan 15	Belief	Nye, Chapter 5 <i>The Lion King</i> (film)	
3	Jan 20	Jan 20 Jan 22	Writing	Various (posted on the course WordPress site)	Film paragraph due Jan 24
4	Jan 27	Jan 27 Jan 29	Ritual	Nye, Chapter 6	
5	Feb 3	Feb 3 Feb 5	Ritual + "Texts"	Nye, Chapter 7	Field research contract due Feb 7
6	Feb 10	Feb 10 Feb 12	"Texts" + Culture	Nye, Chapter 2	
February 17–21: Family Day + Reading Week!					
7	Feb 24	Feb 24 Feb 26	Culture + Power	Nye, Chapter 3	Film analysis due Feb 26
8	Mar 2	Mar 2 Mar 4	Power	TBA	
9	Mar 9	Mar 9 Mar 11	Gender	Nye, Chapter 4 [Mar 8: academic drop date for S courses]	Field research outline (with group photo) due Mar 9
10	Mar 16	Mar 16 Mar 18	Definitions	Nye, Chapter 1	
11	Mar 23	Mar 23 Mar 25	Contemporary religions	Nye, Chapter 8	
12	Mar 30	Mar 30 Apr 1	Course review + final exam	None	Field research analysis due Mar 30

Schedule notes:

- Most weeks there will be at least one **additional** required reading posted on the course WordPress site: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/course-texts/>
- In the event of unforeseen circumstances, it may be necessary to make changes to the schedule. In most cases these changes will be relatively minor. All changes will be posted on Quercus under Announcements. The schedule will also be updated if any changes are required. The most recent schedule can be found here: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/about/schedule/>