

Religion & Human Behaviour

RELS 238/338

Semester One, 2021



*“Hangamu’w with crimped-leaf homicide badges.” from
The Voice of the Tambaran (1980) Donald Tuzin*

Course Description

Religious rituals and supernatural concepts are found in all human societies. Rituals include practices like exorcism, blood sacrifices or simply attending church. Supernatural concepts include karmic forces, creation accounts, and mischievous demigods. In this paper, we will explore what religion means to people in a diverse range of societies, as well as build a picture of the structure and variation in religious systems across societies. These cross-cultural perspectives are crucial for understanding the nature of religion, its role in society, and why religion remains such a pervasive force in the modern world.

Lecturer

Dr Joseph Watts

I study how human evolution, culture and cognition interact. Much of my research focuses on how religion has co-evolved with social systems. More information about my current and ongoing research can be found [here](#).

Office hours

Wednesdays, 11am-12pm in room 4S7 Te Tumu (Richardson South). I will also be available on Zoom at this time.

Zoom address:

<https://otago.zoom.us/j/3700854314?pwd=WFJucXZTSklQTVdySE4xZk9hNkh3Zz09>

Contact

I believe face-to-face communication is most effective and I can answer questions during my office hours, after lectures, or by appointment. I am also happy to answer questions over email.

Email: joseph.watts@otago.ac.nz

Office phone: 03 479 8780

GENERAL INFORMATION ON BLACKBOARD/READINGS/LECTURES/TUTORIALS

For All Students

BLACKBOARD: This course relies heavily Blackboard. Please make sure you have access to this. If not, please contact the ITS helpdesk ASAP (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/contacts/>). Blackboard uses your University email address, so please make sure that you check your university email at least every couple of days.

READINGS: Lectures build upon and presume knowledge of the assigned readings, all of which are available online through Blackboard. Assigned readings for lectures are listed on the schedule below. You will be given quizzes that test your knowledge of the assigned readings (see below). I have kept page-counts minimal and expect all assigned readings will be completed before lectures.

For Students Studying On Campus

LECTURES: There will be one two hour long lecture per week (Tuesday 9:00am – 10:50am). This lecture time will include core content, class quizzes, and information on assignments and assessments. Students are expected to attend all lectures.

TUTORIALS: On campus students do not have tutorials, however you are welcome to attend the distance tutorials through Zoom (see below).

For Students Studying By Distance¹

LECTURES: The audio and slides of lectures will be recorded at the times above via Otago Capture (see link on Blackboard after class). The audio/video will be archived online for you to listen to at your convenience. It is expected that all distance students will view/listen to these recordings in their entirety within the weeks they are given. Lectures build upon each other. Delays in listening will negatively impact your learning and retention.

TUTORIALS: A significant portion of this paper involves in-class discussion and in-class exercises. Tutorials are a time for distance students to ask additional questions about the class material that they may have missed out on during in-person lectures. At the beginning of the term I will consult with the distance students to find the best time for us to meet, and provide the date/meeting times through Blackboard and email.

¹ If you have any problem with any of the online platforms (Blackboard, Otago Capture, Zoom) please make sure you contact the ITS Service Desk ASAP! <http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/contacts/>

Learning Outcomes (Aim/Objectives) of this Paper

By the end of this paper, 200-level students will be able to:

- Understand the universal features of religions and be able to describe some of the patterned variability of religions across cultures.
- Know the major theories used to explain religions and their place in human societies.
- Understand the changing role of religion in human societies up to the modern period.
- Write a clear, persuasive, and original commentary about an evidence-based argument.

In addition to the above, 300-level students will also be able to:

- Relate theoretical approaches to the study of culture and religion to one other.
- Argue for the merits of one theory relative to another, based on a familiarity with multiple religious traditions.
- Articulate the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to the study of culture and religion.

ASSESSMENTS, SUBMITTING WORK, DEADLINES

a. Three quizzes (20% of paper grade in total)

Due: Weeks 5, 9 & 13

There will be three quizzes over the course of the semester. These will test your comprehension of the assigned readings and your understanding of the previous week's lecture material. **Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.** In other words, of the three in class quizzes, only two will count towards your final mark (10% for each of your two highest quiz grades). The goal of these quizzes is to encourage reading and discussion and to reward students who are prepared, keep up with the material, and attend class. Some quiz questions will appear on the final.

Quizzes must be completed on Blackboard and you have up to 30 minutes to complete each quiz. All students will have a 48-hour windows to complete quizzes, starting 00:00 on Tuesday on the week due, and finishing at 23:59 on the Wednesday of the week due.

Missed quizzes cannot be completed later and we will review the answers to quizzes in lectures.

b. Assignment 1: Major Debates in the Naturalist Study of Religion (group-based presentation, 20% of paper grade)

Due: 15/04/21 (Week 6)

You will be assigned to groups at the start of Week 3. Within these groups, you are to choose one of the three following topics:

1. Religious commitment and social conservatism
2. The relationship between natural and supernatural worldviews
3. Stress and ritualized behavior

During lectures in Week 6 (15/04/21), groups will give a presentation on their chosen topic. This presentation must include the following components:

1. Overview of existing research on this topic (40% of assignment grade)
2. Identify a major unresolved research question (20% of assignment grade)
3. Define research hypotheses (10% of assignment grade)
4. Propose questions to test your hypotheses during participant interviews (10% of assignment grade)

At the end of the presentation, there will be 5 minutes for questions (10% of assignment grade). Presentations should be between 10-15 minutes long and all group members should present a roughly equal share of the content.

Groups need to submit a written summary of their presentation by the end of the day that they present (10% of assignment grade). This summary must be between 1600 and 2000 words in length. The summary must include all of the central content of the presentation and be fully referenced, with a bibliography. Presentations summaries will be made available to all students in the course and will form the basis of Assignment 2 (see below).

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, all group members will receive the same grade for the presentation.

Additional information will be provided during tutorials and lectures. Participation in these activities is critical to the overall success of the project, and ultimately, your overall mark.

c. Assignment 2: Ethnographic Report (individual-based research report, 30% of paper grade)

Due: 5pm 27/05/21 (Week12)

Assignment 2 builds on Assignment 1, but is individual-based rather than group-based.

For Assignment 2, you are required to conduct a series of interviews. These interviews should be structured around the research questions identified in Assignment 1. You can choose to base Assignment 2 on any of the groups presentations, not just your own. However, Assignment 2 must relate back to the research questions and hypotheses identified by a group in Assignment 1.

You are required to independently undertake ethnographic interviews with at least five people. The way you select people to interview is up to you, but care must be taken to

ensure that the sample is appropriate for the research questions. The people interviewed should remain anonymous, but their demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender etc.) should be recorded.

During interviews, you should ask the research questions identified by a group in Assignment 1. You can also ask additional questions as you see fit. You must then summarise the findings of the interviews into an ethnographic report, and relate these interviews back to the hypotheses and literature discussed by a group in Assignment 1.

The ethnographic report should include the following components:

1. Summary of interviews, sampling selection, participant responses and demographics (30% of assignment grade)
2. Critical analysis of participant responses in relation to hypotheses (30% of assignment grade)
3. Discussion of implications of research (30% of assignment grade)

An additional 10% of the assignment grade will be awarded based on writing clarity, conciseness, and style.

Late reports will be accepted, but will be penalised by a reduction of 10% of the assignment mark for each day late (including weekends). For example, a report that would have been graded as 75% would receive a grade of 55% (-20%) if it is two days late.

Greater detail regarding the structure of these ethnographic reports will be distributed in lectures in advance of the due date. For 238 students, reports must be between 2,000-2,250 words. For 338 students, reports must be between 2,500-2,750 words. Marks will be taken off for reports that fall under or exceed these word limits.

For report writing, you may use whatever citation style is standard for your major field (i.e., use APA if you're a science student, Chicago if you're a social science/humanities studies student).

d. Final Exam (30% of paper grade) - Date TBA

There will be a 2-hour exam that will assess whether you have listened to lectures, done the readings and reviewed the key concepts discussed in this course.

Tests will consist of both multiple choice questions and short essay questions. Some of these questions will come directly from the quizzes.

The date for the final exam will be sent to you once it has been set by the Examinations Office. All arrangements for examinations are handled by the Examinations Office, as outlined in the Student Handbook. Please contact them if you have questions. Further information on the format of the examination will be given towards the end of the course.

Submitting Written Work

All work must be **submitted electronically** (as .doc, .docx or .pdf) via the 'Assignment' feature on Blackboard by 5pm on the assigned due date. You may email me the essays or essay outline ONLY if you have trouble accessing blackboard. You will be responsible for confirming that your work has been uploaded to BB and/or received by me. Before you submit your essay, make a backup copy, either in electronic form or on paper, and keep it in a safe place. Students should fill out and attach the departmental **plagiarism declaration** as a coversheet to their essays when submitting. These can be found on the Religion Program website and signed electronically.

Deadlines, Extensions and Late Submission

Students have full responsibility for the prompt submission of assignments. For the essay assignments, an extension of the due date may be granted only in exceptional circumstances, usually on medical grounds, by emailing the course coordinator or the departmental administrator at least one week **prior** to the due date. In the event of an extension being obtained on medical grounds, a doctor's certificate verifying the need for an extension should be attached to the assignment when it is submitted. Please note that poor time management is not an acceptable reason for an extension. To repeat: Late reports will be penalised by 10% of the assignment mark for each day late (including weekends). For example, a report that would have been graded as 75% would receive a grade of 55% (-20%) if it is two days late.

Plagiarism

Students are responsible for ensuring that all work submitted is their own. You should fill in and attach a signed coversheet to your essay. Plagiarism is copying or paraphrasing another's work (whether intentionally or not) and presenting it as your own. Any student found responsible for plagiarism shall be subject to the University's dishonest practice regulations. Penalties for plagiarism can include forfeiture of marks for the piece of work submitted, a zero grade for the paper, or exclusion from the University. For more advice on this policy see <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity/otago006307.html>

Readings

Students are responsible for completing that weeks assigned readings before class. We will be reading journal articles and chapters of the following book (TCR):

Tuzin, D. (1997). *The cassowary's revenge: the life and death of masculinity in a New Guinea society*. University of Chicago Press.

Weekly Topics and Readings

Overview

	Week													
	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Lectures	■						■							
Readings	■						■							
Quiz														
Assignment 1							■							
Assignment 2													■	
Distance tutorial			■		■			■		■		■		■
Office hours		■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Week 1

Lecture (4/03/21)

Introductions

Are you WEIRD? Religion and Culture

No tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Jackson, M. (1999/1989). "The Witch as a Category and as a Person," In *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, Ed. Russell T. McCutcheon, London and New York: Cassell pp. 311-330.
2. TCR, Chapter 1: Going Home (pages 1-17)

Week 2

Lecture (11/03/21)

Religion as a Category across Cultures

No tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Durkhiem, E. (1912) Chapter 1: A Definition of the Religious Phenomenon and of

Religion. The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.

2. TCR, Chapter 2: The Mission (pages 18-32)

Week 3

Lecture (18/03/21)

Ritual: Universal and Contextual

Identifying Research Questions

Distance Tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Sosis, R., & Kiper, J. (2014). Religion is More than Belief: What Evolutionary Theories of Religion Tell Us about Religious Commitments. *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution*, 256-276.
2. TCR, Chapter 3: The Repeal of Custom (pages 33-67)

Week 4

Lecture (25/03/21)

Altered States of Consciousness

Defining Hypotheses

No tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Winkelman, M. (2005). Drug tourism or spiritual healing? Ayahuasca seekers in Amazonia. *Journal of psychoactive drugs*, 37(2), 209-218.
2. TCR, Chapter 4: The Cassowary and the Swan Maiden (pages 68 – 95)

Week 5 (01/04/21)

Lecture (01/04/21)

Ethnomedicine: Disease and Healing

Study Designs & Questionnaire construction

Review of Quiz 1

Distance Tutorial

Quiz (1 of 3)

Readings:

1. Foster, G. M. (1976). Disease Etiologies in Non-western Medical Systems. *American Anthropologist*, 78(4), 773-782.
2. TCR, Chapter 5: The Web of True Prophecy (pages 96 – 125)

Easter Break

Week 6

Lecture (15/04/21)

Group Presentations

Sampling Designs & Interviewing techniques

No tutorial

Assignment 1 Due

Readings:

1. Conklin, B. A. (2018). "Hunting the Ancestors: Death and Alliance in Wari' Cannibalism. In Robben, A.C.G.M., (ed.). *Death, Mourning, and Burial*. Wiley Blackwell, pp. 211-217.
2. TCR, Chapter 6: Millennium (pages 126 – 156)

Week 7

Lecture (22/04/21)

Death, Afterlife and Reincarnation

Ethnographic Research Methods

Distance Tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Cassaniti, J. L., & Luhrmann, T. M. (2014). The cultural kindling of spiritual experiences. *Current anthropology*, 55(S10), S333-S343.

Week 8

Lecture (29/04/21)

Religion and Conflict between Groups

Analysing Interview Data

No tutorial

No assessments

Readings:

1. Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (1999). Conflict resolution through a traditional ritual among the Bedouin Arabs of the Negev. *Ethnology*, 163-174.
2. TCR, Chapter 7: Fear in the Heart (pages 157-177)

Week 9

Lecture (06/05/21)

Religion and Conflict within Groups

Writing a Research Report

Review of Quiz 2

Distance Tutorial**Quiz (2 of 3)****Reading:**

1. Watts, J., Sheehan, O., Atkinson, Q. D., Bulbulia, J., & Gray, R. D. (2016). Ritual human sacrifice promoted and sustained the evolution of stratified societies. *Nature*, 532(7598), 228.
2. TCR, Chapter 8: Sanctuary (pages 178-198)

Week 10

Lecture (13/05/21)

Revitalization Movements

No tutorial

No assessments

Reading:

1. Wallace, A. F. (1956). Revitalization movements. *American Anthropologist*, 58(2), 264-281.

Week 11

Lecture (20/05/21)

Religious, Environmental and Social Change

Distance Tutorial

No assessments

Reading:

1. Baier, M. (2007). The Development of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion: A New Dayak Religion in Central Kalimantan. *Anthropos*, (H. 2), 566-570.

Week 12

Lecture (27/05/21)

Aotearoa in Global Perspective

No tutorial

Assignment 2 Due

Reading:

1. Ward, K. (2016). Religion in New Zealand since the 1960s: Some sociological perspectives. *New Zealand Sociology*, 31(3), 186-206.

Week 13

Lecture (03/06/21)

Religion as a Category (Reconsidered)

Paper Summary

Review of Quiz 3

Exam Information

Distance Tutorial

Quiz (3 of 3)

No readings

Final Test: TBA
