

**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

December 18, 2006

Rels 331 L95 – Winter 2007

Religious Perspectives on Suffering

COURSE OUTLINE – WINTER 2007

Logistics

Time: Monday, 6:00 – 8:50 pm

Location: Chinese Cultural Centre
197 First Street S.W.
(Eau Claire Market)

Instructor: Dr. David A. Bergen

Office Hours: MWF 1:00 - 2:00, or by appointment (SS 1322)

Telephone: 220-3285

Email: burgndy@telus.net

Website: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dabergen/>

Textbooks: *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (John Bowker; Cambridge University Press, 2003)

PDF and HTML materials posted on the course website

**Course
Description**

Why do we suffer? What is the meaning of suffering? Why are religions constrained to address adverse exigencies with cognitively satisfactory explanations? Using a combination of lectures, discussions, films, and presentations, this course will examine five religious perspectives on the universal experience of human suffering (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism). As counterpoint to the theodicies and anti-theodicies of these religions, the issue of suffering will also be evaluated from the theory of evolutionary psychology, situating human consciousness within 3.8 billion years of inherited biology. In the final weeks of the term, we will explore the limitations of human representation in coming to terms with this grave human concern.

**Core
Competencies**

This course promotes the following academic competencies:

- Knowledge of the common biological and evolutionary psychological concerns across the religious spectrum.
- Understanding of the mythological constructs that shape religious responses to suffering.
- Skill in reading and interpreting secondary materials on topics of religion.
- Development of written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to critically assess religion from an academic perspective.

Student Responsibilities

- Attendance of lectures
- Comprehension and engagement of presented materials
- Conceptual control of basic facts, concepts, and issues
- Study of assigned readings

Learning Assessment

Six equally-weighted tests, 10% each (see schedule below)	50%
Formal Dialogic Essay (4-6 pages; due March 19)	30%
Informal Response Essay (3-5 pages; due April 16)	20%
	Total: 100%

** There will be no Registrar scheduled Final Exam in this course*

PLEASE NOTE:

- given the nature of the subject and the approaches adopted, it is vital that students attend the first week of class to gain an understanding of the nature and methodology involved.
- tests must be written/submitted on the dates scheduled. No exceptions will be made, except for death, significant illness, or domestic affliction (corroborated by a valid, original note from a physician or counselor). The instructor must be contacted within twenty-four hours of a missed exam or deadline.
- the tests are designed to assess the students' comprehension of the materials discussed and presented. These tests are not directly cumulative, though an increasing level of understanding the nature suffering and the theoretical framework employed is expected as we proceed through the course.
- the essay component (5 to 7 pages) will take the form of a panel debate between proponents from two different religious traditions. These fictitious panel participants will discuss and/or debate a specific instance of suffering of interest or relevance to the student. The panel discussion will be moderated by a third voice, who will be expected to raise questions profiled during the course/term.
- students anticipating a class absence should find a classmate willing to loan his/her notes; no lecture notes will be available from the instructor.
- recording of lectures is not permitted, except by special permission.
- students must maintain "back up" copies of all submissions; no concessions will be made for "lost" materials.
- students are encouraged to discuss the course materials with the instructor. An appointment can be set up for this purpose, either verbally or through email. When arranging to see the instructor, students are asked to be specific in terms of the issues or topics they wish to discuss.

Grading Scale

A numerical grade is assigned for each course requirement. Following the final graded component, a letter grade is assigned, using the department-approved table of equivalencies:

A+ 100-96	B+ 84-80	C+ 69-65	D+ 54-53
A 95-90	B 79-75	C 64-60	D 52-50
A- 89-85	B- 74-70	C- 59-55	F under 50

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

Important Dates

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the current University Calendar.

**Course
Withdrawal**

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the current University Calendar

**Lecture
Recording**

Recording any part of any lectures in any form must be first approved by the instructor in writing and is for individual private study only. See current Calendar, Tape recording of Lectures.

**Safewalk
Program**

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 220-5333 and a member of the Safewalk Team will walk you to your car, the LRT, or any destination on campus. Safewalk is available to all students, staff and faculty any time of the day or night. Look for the Campus Security Help Phones located throughout the University. Please don't hesitate to call!

COURSE SCHEDULE	
Jan 8	Introduction to RELS 331 and the Academic Study of Religion Evolutionary-Psychology Theory
15	Test #1 Jewish Perspectives on Suffering Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Jewish Perspectives on Suffering
22	Test #2 Christian Perspectives on Suffering Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Christian Perspectives on Suffering
29	Test #3 Islamic Perspectives on Suffering Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Islamic Perspectives on Suffering
Feb 5	Test #4 <i>Excursus: Suffering, Theodicy, and Gender</i> Hindu Perspectives on Suffering Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Hindu Perspectives on Suffering
12	Test #5 Buddhist Perspectives on Suffering Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Buddhist Perspectives on Suffering
19	<i>Reading Week – No Lectures</i>
26	Test #6 Other Perspectives on Suffering
Mar 5	<i>Excursus: The Limits of Representation</i>

12	Suffering in Textual Representation
19	Formal Dialogic Essay Due Suffering in Musical Representation
26	<i>Excursus</i> : Suffering and the Holocaust
Apr 2	Suffering in Filmic Representation
9	Suffering in Filmic Representation Take Home Informal Essay (Due April 16)

Academic Honesty	<i>Plagiarism is not tolerated at the University of Calgary and has serious consequences. Your essays/presentations must be your own work and inadequate referencing may be seen as plagiarism. Please see the relevant sections on Academic Misconduct in the current University Calendar. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.</i>
Academic Accommodation	If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor two weeks before the scheduled date.
Gnosis	Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: gnosis@ucalgary.ca or visit http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis .