

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

06/01/06

Rels 331 L01

Religious Perspectives on Suffering

COURSE OUTLINE

Logistics	<p>Time: T/TR, 11:00 am – 12:15 pm</p> <p>Location: SS 010</p> <p>Instructor: Dr. David A. Bergen</p> <p>Office Hours: T/TR 12:30 - 2:00, or by appointment (SS 1322)</p> <p>Telephone: 220-3285</p> <p>Email: burgndy@telus.net</p> <p>Website: http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dabergen/</p> <p>Textbooks: <i>Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World</i> (John Bowker; Cambridge University Press, 2003)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Night</i> (Elie Wiesel; Bantam Books, 1986)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">PDF-materials posted on the course website</p>
Course Description	<p>The greater part of this course will examine five religious perspectives on the universal experience of human suffering (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism), in the order presented in the Bowker textbook. Bowker’s presentation of the major religious theodicies and anti-theodicies will be framed by and evaluated from the theory of evolutionary psychology that situates human consciousness within 3.8 billion years of inherited biology. In addition to the routinely compelling questions of “Why do we suffer?” or “What is the meaning of suffering?,” this course will also explore the question of why religions are constrained to address adverse exigencies with cognitively satisfactory explanations. In the final weeks of the term, we will explore the limitations of human representation in portraying matters of grave concern. To focus our discussion, students will be required to read (portions of) the Book of Job (Hebrew Bible) and Wiesel’s novel <i>Night</i>, and to view the film <i>Hotel Rwanda</i>.</p>
Core Competencies	<p>This course promotes the following academic competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Seven equally-weighted tests, 10% each (Jan. 19 and 31, Feb. 9 and 28, Mar. 9 and 21, Apr. 13) 70%
Essay (Apr. 13) 30%
Total: 100%

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 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 be in the form of a panel discussion between proponents of two different religious traditions who 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.

Academic Honesty

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.

Important Dates

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

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.

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!

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>.

RELS 331 – COURSE SCHEDULE	
January 10	Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion
12	The Evolutionary-Psychology of Suffering (Part One)
17	The Evolutionary-Psychology of Suffering (Part Two)
19	Test #1 Jewish Perspectives on Suffering (Bowker, pp. 5-41)
24	Jewish Perspectives on Suffering, Continued
26	Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Jewish Perspectives on Suffering
31	Test #2 Christian Perspectives on Suffering (Bowker, pp. 42-98)
February 2	Christian Perspectives on Suffering, Continued
7	Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Christian Perspectives on Suffering
9	Test #3 Islamic Perspectives on Suffering (Bowker, pp. 99-136)
14	Islamic Perspectives on Suffering, Continued
16	Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Islamic Perspectives on Suffering
20-24	Reading Week – No Lectures
28	Test #4 Hindu Perspectives on Suffering (Bowker, pp. 193-236)
March 2	Hindu Perspectives on Suffering, Continued
7	Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Hindu Perspectives on Suffering
9	Test #5 Buddhist Perspectives on Suffering (Bowker, pp. 237-68)
14	Buddhist Perspectives on Suffering
16	Evolutionary-Psychological Evaluation of Buddhist Perspectives on Suffering
21	Test #6 Excursus: The Limits of Representation
23	Suffering and the Book of Job
28	Suffering and the Book of Job, continued
30	Suffering and Wiesel's <i>Night</i>
April 4	Post-Holocaust Responses
6	Post-Holocaust Responses
11	Suffering and <i>Hotel Rwanda</i>
13	Test #7 Essay Due