



**FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS AND RELIGION  
COURSE OUTLINE  
Fall 2020**

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>COURSE NUMBER</b>           | RELS333  |
| <b>COURSE NAME</b>             | Religious Perspectives on Death and Afterlife                  |
| <b>PRE/CO-REQUISITES</b>       | N/A  |
| <b>CLASSROOM LOCATION</b>      | Zoom   |
| <b>CLASS DAYS &amp; TIMES:</b> | Tuesdays and Thursdays, 15:30 – 16:30 (Synchronous)            |
| <b>INSTRUCTOR NAME</b>         | Dr. Raj Balkaran   |
| <b>INSTRUCTOR CONTACT</b>      | <a href="mailto:rbalkara@ucalgary.ca">rbalkara@ucalgary.ca</a> |

**INSTRUCTOR EMAIL POLICY**

- Before emailing, consult the course syllabus and the documents posted on D2L.
- Email from your UCalgary account.
- Professional emails are not text messages.
- Email is an ideal medium for succinctly relaying information (for example: “which sources can you recommend for information on Goddess worship?”). However, email is an unfit medium for involved and extended conversation (e.g., “How do I write a paper proposal?”). In such cases, book a Student Support slot on the online calendar.
- You will receive a response to course emails by the end of the next business day.

**TEACHING ASSISTANT** Nick Fieseler ([nicholas.fieseler@ucalgary.ca](mailto:nicholas.fieseler@ucalgary.ca))

**COURSE CALENDAR** <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-schedule.html>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The world’s religious traditions variously contemplate the perennial human question: what happens after we die? Do we experience heaven? Hell? Reincarnation? Judgement? Purgatory? Liberation? Oblivion? How do the world’s religious traditions in fact go about deliberating on this important question? Indeed, why do they do so at all? In what is the certainty of their truth-claims surrounding death grounded? How do these deliberations about death factor into the sort of life they prescribe for religious adherents? Are the beliefs of a given religion compatible with those of another? This course explores religious perspectives on death and the afterlife, as conceptualized cross-culturally. We look to the death and afterlife beliefs specifically of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We will situate the material in historical and sociocultural context, drawing on the beliefs, texts, rituals, values implicated from circumstance to circumstance across time. We will also adopt a comparative approach to discern both patterns across these religious perspectives, and also highlight particularities

proper to each, e.g. Jewish mourning practices versus Hindu cremation practices. Moreover, how does contemplation of the meaning and nature of death factor into a secular culture? What do we make of secular funerals? And what about the paranormal and its relationship to death, e.g. near-death experiences? Mediumship? Hauntings and apparitions? Past-life memories? In learning about the deliberations on death across the ages, we confront a quandary innate to the human experience, no less so in modern times.

### **COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- key concepts in the study of religion pertaining to the study of death and the Afterlife
- cross-cultural religious beliefs and values pertaining to death and the Afterlife
- comparative analysis of beliefs and practices pertaining to death and the Afterlife
- methods and theory in the study of death and the Afterlife
- different perspectives – religious, reductionist, non-reductionist – on death and the Afterlife
- the symbiosis between religious prescriptions and attitudes towards death and the Afterlife
- funerary rites, relics, ritual practices surrounding death
- paranormal phenomena such as near-death-experiences, mediums, apparitions, and past life memories

### **LEARNING RESOURCES**

*Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions.* Christopher M. Moreman. Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Second edition 2018.

- This is a course requirement; it is the only text you are responsible for acquiring;
- Additional resources and readings will be periodically posted on D2L throughout the semester
- Ensure you are using the Second edition, else you will need to correspond page numbers to the edition you are using accordingly
- This text is available at the University of Calgary bookstore
- The University of Calgary will mail copies no charge to you if you want a physical copy.
- The full text is available online through the U of C library.

### **LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES AND REQUIREMENTS**

- There is a D2L site for this course which contains required readings and other relevant class resources and materials
- In order to successfully engage in your online learning experience, you are required to have reliable access to the following technology:
  - A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
  - A current and updated web browser
  - Webcam (built-in or external);
  - Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
  - Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
  - Broadband internet connection.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Week 1</b> | September 8 2020<br>Topic: Introduction; Ancient Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 1: Ancient Conceptions                                  |
| <b>Week 2</b> | September 15, 2020<br>Topic: Jewish Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 2: Judaism   |
| <b>Week 3</b> | September 22, 2020<br>Topic: Christian Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 3: Christianity   |
| <b>Week 4</b> | September 29, 2020<br>Topic: Islamic Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 4: Islam  |
| <b>Week 5</b> | October 6, 2020<br>Topic: Comparison; Review<br>Reading: Chapters 1-4<br><b>Test 1: October 8, 2020</b> (15%, Chapters 1-4)               |
| <b>Week 6</b> | October 13, 2020<br>Topic: Hindu Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 5: Hinduism   |
| <b>Week 7</b> | October 20, 2020<br>Topic: Buddhist Perspectives<br>Reading: Chapter 6: Buddhism  |
| <b>Week 8</b> | October 27, 2020<br>Topic: Comparison and Review<br>Readings: Chapters 1-6 Review<br><b>Midterm: October 29, 2020</b> (35%, Chapters 1-6) |
| <b>Week 9</b> | November 3, 2020<br>Topic: Mediumship<br>Reading: Chapter 9: Mediumship   |

**Term Break November 8-14 \*\*\* NO CLASSES\*\*\***

- Week 10**      November 17, 2020  
Topic:            Apparitions and Hauntings  
Reading:        Chapter 10: Apparitions and Hauntings  
**Research Paper Due: November 19, 2020 (35%)**
- Week 11**      November 24, 2020  
Topic:            Near-Death Experiences  
Reading:        Chapter 11: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences
- Week 12**      December 1, 2020  
Topic:            Past-Life Memories  
Reading:        Chapter 12: Past-Life Memories
- Week 13**      December 8, 2020  
Topic            Comparisons, Conclusions  
Reading:        Chapter 13: Comparison of Beliefs (selections)  
                    Chapter 14: Comparing Phenomenon (selections)  
**Test 2: December 3, 2020 (15%, Chapters 9-12)**

**EXAMINATION**

- There will be no registrar-scheduled final exam for this course.

**ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS**

- Test 1 (D2L)                      **Thursday, October 8, 2020**      15%
- Midterm Exam (D2L)        **Thursday, October 29, 2020**    35%
- Research Paper                **November 19, 2020**                35%
- Test 2 (D2L)                      **December 8, 2020**                15%

**MISSED OR LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

- If students miss a required component of the course, they must contact the instructor in writing within 24 hours to discuss options to submit and/or make-up for that component.
- Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

**GRADING**

A final letter grade will be assigned based on the following department-approved scale:

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

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR WRITING**

- All written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills.
- Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization.
- Sources used in research papers must be properly documented.
- If you need help with your writing, you may use the writing support services in the Learning Commons.
- The Department of Classics and Religion uses the most recent edition of the Chicago Manual of Style and requires references and bibliographies to adhere to the Chicago citation system.
- For further information, please refer to the official online University of Calgary Calendar, Academic Regulations, E. Course Information, E.2: Writing Across the Curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>
- Students are required to complete a properly researched term paper pertaining to course themes
  - A list of topics will be circulated in class
  - Internet sources apart from primary sources and bona fide academic journals are not admissible for research papers.
  - Your paper should be in the vicinity of 2,000 words not exceed 2,200 words, not counting citations and bibliography
  - Use standard fonts and margins
  - Submitted your paper via D2L by the beginning of class on the due date

## **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS**

- This course takes place online via Desire2Learn (D2L) and Zoom.
- All lectures in this course are synchronous Zoom sessions.
- Attendance to live lectures are mandatory and necessary for students to pass this course.
- Synchronous lectures will last 60 minutes on Tuesdays (3.30pm-4.30pm) and 60 minutes on Thursdays (3.30pm-4.30pm)
- In addition to mandatory synchronous lectures, students are required to participate in 30 minutes of asynchronous learning tasks weekly via the D2L learning environment, e.g., the discussion forum and viewing video content.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS**

- Please submit all assignments electronically on D2L.
- Assignments may be submitted in Word or PDF format.
- Assignments should have a file name as follows: “First Name Last Name Assignment Number” (e.g., Alex Smith Assignment 2).
- Assignments must be submitted by the beginning of class on their due date.
- It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that the proper version is submitted.

## CONDUCT

- Our classroom is an inclusive, positive space where ideas may be respectfully entertained
- Our classroom is equally a space of free, critical inquiry
- As members of the University community, you are expected to demonstrate conduct that is consistent with the University of Calgary Calendar, the Code of Conduct and Non-Academic Misconduct policy and procedures, which can be found at:  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

## USE OF INTERNET AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN CLASS

- Students are responsible for being aware of the University's Internet and email use policy, which can be found at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/electronic-communications-policy.pdf>

## GUIDELINES FOR ZOOM SESSIONS

- Zoom is a video conferencing program that will allow us to meet at specific times for a "live" video conference, so that we can have the opportunity to meet each other virtually and discuss relevant course topics as a learning community.
- To help ensure Zoom sessions are private, do not share the Zoom link or password with others, or on any social media platforms.
- Zoom links and passwords are only intended for students registered in the course.
- Zoom recordings and materials presented in Zoom, including any teaching materials, must not be shared, distributed or published without the instructor's permission.
- The use of video conferencing programs relies on participants to act ethically, honestly and with integrity; and in accordance with the principles of fairness, good faith, and respect (as per the [Code of Conduct](#)).
- Please be mindful of how your behaviour in these sessions may affect others.
- Participants are required to use names officially associated with their UCID (legal or preferred names listed in the Student Centre) when engaging in these activities. Instructors/moderators can remove those whose names do not appear on class rosters.
- Non-compliance may be investigated under relevant University of Calgary conduct policies (e.g. [Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](#)).
- If participants have difficulties complying with this requirement, they should email the instructor of the class explaining why, so the instructor may consider whether to grant an exception, and on what terms.
- For more information on how to get the most out of your zoom sessions visit:  
<https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/guidelines-for-zoom/>
- If you are unable to attend a Zoom session, please contact your instructor to arrange an alternative activity for the missed session.
- Please be prepared, as best as you are able, to join class in a quiet space that will allow you to be fully present and engaged in Zoom sessions.
- Students will be advised by their instructor when they are expected to turn on their webcam (for group work, presentations, etc.).

- The instructor may record online Zoom class sessions for the purposes of supporting student learning in this class – such as making the recording available for review of the session or for students who miss a session.
- Students will be advised before the instructor initiates a recording of a Zoom session.
- These recordings will be used to support student learning only and will not be shared or used for any other purpose.

#### **COURSE EVALUATIONS AND STUDENT FEEDBACK**

- Student feedback will be sought at the end of the course through the standard University Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) and Faculty course evaluation forms.
- Students are welcome to discuss the process and content of the course at any time with the instructor.

#### **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**

- Academic Misconduct refers to student behavior which compromises proper assessment of a student's academic activities and includes: cheating; fabrication; falsification; plagiarism; unauthorized assistance; failure to comply with an instructor's expectations regarding conduct required of students completing academic assessments in their courses; and failure to comply with exam regulations applied by the Registrar.
- For information on the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure please visit: <https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-policy.pdf>  
<https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-procedure.pdf>
- Additional information is available on the Academic Integrity Website at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/learning/academic-integrity>.
- All written work will be checked for plagiarism through turn-it-in.com. Details to follow.

#### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION**

- It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures listed below. The Student Accommodations policy is available at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/access/prospective-students/academic-accommodations>.
- Students needing an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf>).
- Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than Disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.
- SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

#### **INSTRUCTOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

- Course materials created by instructors (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor.

- These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor.
- The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited.
- Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

#### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY**

- Student information will be collected in accordance with typical (or usual) classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty.
- Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

#### **COPYRIGHT LEGISLATION**

- All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright and requirements of the copyright act to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorised sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.).
- Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy  
<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>.

#### **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Please visit the Registrar's website at: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for additional important information on the following:

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk