

SCAR 1SC3—THE BIG QUESTIONS  
WINTER 2021

(DRAFT ONLY—SUBJECT TO REVISION)

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**Lecture:** Online (asynchronous)

**Teaching Assistants:** TBA  
**Tutorials:** Online (asynchronous)  
**Office Hours:** [By Appointment](#) (Phone, Zoom)

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**Course Description**

This course focuses on the research of current faculty and senior graduate students in the Religious Studies Department to introduce some of the issues contemporary scholars are grappling with in the academic study of religion.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course students will have:

- Encountered a range of approaches to the academic study of religion both historical and contemporary;
- Become familiar with the kinds of questions religious studies scholars investigate;
- Begun to cultivate scholarly approaches to studying religion.

By the end of this course students will:

- Recognize similarities and differences in how human beings participate in religious communities;
- Understand fundamental problems in the academic study of religion;
- Appreciate the complexity and diversity of religious studies.

**Required Materials and Texts**

As noted in the calendar below. All readings are available through McMaster library or Avenue to Learn.

**Class Format**

This course will be conducted online and asynchronously. New materials will be posted each week and it is your responsibility to keep up with the readings, assignments and other learning tasks.

**Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. 80% Four written assignments (@20% each)
  - a. These assignments will be in the form of journal entries and notes based on the interviews and readings as well as observations regarding links to current events.
  - b. The first three assignments should be structured as follows:
    - i. BRIEF summary of the reading (150 words)
    - ii. BRIEF summary of the interview (150 words)
    - iii. CRITICAL evaluation of these issues and their contemporary significance (300 words)
  - c. The final assignment/take-home test will be an exercise in synthesizing the materials covered and engaging with the course content in a critical and scholarly way.
2. 20% Participation & Engagement
  - a. Your engagement and participation will be tracked to ensure that you are keeping up with the work.

**Course Evaluation – Assignment Dates**

- Assignment 1 (2 – 3 pages)
  - (15%) due: 27 January, 11:59 pm.
- Assignment 2 (2 – 3 pages)
  - (15%) due: 24 February, 11:59 pm.
- Assignment 3 (2 – 3 pages)
  - (15%) due: 24 March, 11:59 pm.
- Assignment 4/Take-home test
  - (35%) due: 24 April, 11:59 pm.

**Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

**Week 1 (11 Jan)**

**Introduction: Many Questions, Few Answers**

**Week 2 (18 Jan)**

**Religion: Insiders and Outsiders**

Readings: "Here Comes a Change: At Home in the Weird" by Susan Lepselter

Interviewee: Jeremy Cohen

**Week 3 (25 Jan)**

**Religion: Transcendence and the Sacred**

Readings: "The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World" by Vaclav Havel

"Recovering the Sacred" by Charles Taylor

Interviewees: Joseph Brandt

Max Kennel

**Week 4 (1 Feb)**

**Religion: Corporeality**

Readings: "The Physical, Social and Mental Space of the Right Left Hand" by Kim Knott

Interviewee: Paul Arnold

**Week 5 (8 Feb)**

**Religion: Text**

Readings: "Gendered Beauty: Observations on Portraying Beautiful Men and Women in the Hebrew Bible" by Hanna Tervanotko

Interviewee: Katharine Fitzgerald

**Week 6 (15 Feb)**

**Reading Week**

**Week 7 (22 Feb)**

**Religion: Interpretation**

Readings: "God Who May Be: A Phenomenological Study" by Richard Kearney

Interviewee: Mark Novak

**Week 8 (1 Mar)**

**Religion: Presuppositions**

Readings: "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism" by

Gregory Schopen

Interviewee: Gerjan Altenburg

**Week 9 (8 Mar)**

**Religion: Gender**

Reading: "Charting Known Territory: Female Buddhist Priests" by Mark Rowe

Interviewee: Sam Martens

**Week 10 (15 Mar)**

**Religion: Ritual**

Readings: "Embodying the Past: Gelongma Palmo and Tibetan Nyungne Rituals" by Tanya Zivkovic

Interviewee: Rory Tasker

**Week 11 (22 Mar)**

**Religion: Conduct**

Readings: "Real Buddhas Don't Laugh: Attitudes towards Humour and Laughter in Ancient India and China" by Michel Clasquin

Interviewee: Vanessa Moonilal

**Week 12 (29 Mar)**

**Religion: Remembering**

Reading: "Clearing the Ground" by F. E. Peters

Interviewee: Rahim Samnani

**Week 13 (5 April)**

**Whither the Academic Study of Religion?**

Readings: "Religious Freedoms, Minority Rights & Geopolitics" by Saba Mahmood  
Interviewees: Samar Mashadi  
Manvinder Gill

**Week 14 (12 April)**

**Conclusion**

**Course/University Policies**

**Submission of Assignments**

All assignments should be submitted to Avenue as .doc(x) or .pdf. Please **do not** include a cover page. Assignments submitted in other formats will not be graded. Please do not submit assignments by email attachment unless specifically instructed to do so. If you have a query about a grade for an assignment, please make an appointment and be prepared to explain, in some detail, why you believe your grade is incorrect. Your assignment will be reviewed before final marks are submitted to the Registrar's office. Your grade may be increased, may stay the same, or in very unusual circumstances, be decreased.

**Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

<b>MARK</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

**Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

**Turnitin.com**

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

**Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

### **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

### **Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work**

**McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF):** In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

***If you find it necessary to submit the MSAF during this course, you must submit the missed work before the end of classes. I do not redistribute grades for missed assignments. ADDITIONALLY, it is not necessary to contact me to report your submission of the MSAF; simply submit your work as soon as possible.***

### **Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

### **Copyright and Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

### **Personal Email Policy**

I try to respond to email messages within 24 hours on weekdays. If you email me on the weekend, expect a reply by Monday afternoon. If you do not receive an answer to your email within 24 hours on weekdays, please do not hesitate to email again. NOTE: I do not discuss grades, including requests for grade reviews, by email. Please make an appointment!

### **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.