

**Psych 404  
Psychology of Religion  
Term 2 2025  
January 8-April 7, 2025**

Course Website at [canvas.ubc.ca](https://canvas.ubc.ca)

Section 003  
Mon & Wed 12:00-1:30  
SWING 205

Section 004  
Mon & Wed 2:00-3:30  
PHRM 1201

Professor:

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Office hour: See Canvas



Teaching Assistant:

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Office hour: See Canvas



## Course Description & Objectives

Every society known to us has religious beliefs and practices, with commonalities across cultures, as well as tremendous diversity. Religion is also a powerful lens through which we can better understand human psychology. This advanced seminar introduces students to the psychology of religion, current debates, and controversies. Topics include belief in supernatural beings and forces, rituals, sacrifice, sacred values, and existential psychology. Phenomena such as animism, mystical experiences, and magical thinking will also be discussed. We will examine religion's role in morality, well-being, treatment of the natural environment, cooperation and conflict, power and prejudice, and intergroup relations. We will also explore religious decline and secularization trends worldwide and within societies, as well as theories that explain these important cultural and psychological changes. Although this is a psychology seminar, perspectives from anthropology, evolutionary biology, sociology, history, archeology, and religious studies, will also be touched on. By the end of the course you will (1) have an understanding of the psychological processes involved in religious thought and behavior (2) gain knowledge about how widely shared religious beliefs, practices, and experiences (as well as their relative absence) in turn shape human psychology, and (3) cultivate critical thinking regarding debates surrounding the role of religion and secularity in multicultural civil societies in Canada and around the world.

## Seminar Format

This is an advanced undergraduate seminar. Most of class time will consist of in-depth discussion of the readings and concepts, group activities, and oral presentations. I will sometimes do short (15 minutes) in-class lectures to put the readings in context or provide additional information, to spur discussion. This lecture material will be made available to the course on Canvas after class.

## Readings and Recorded Lectures

There is no standard textbook for this course. Original articles and chapters from a variety of sources are assigned. These readings are posted on the Canvas course website. You will also watch recorded short lectures by Drs. Azim Shariff and Ted Slingerland, as part of their [Science of Religion series](#) (see Weekly Readings and Guiding Questions on Canvas). The readings and pre-recorded lectures are accompanied by Guiding Questions to help with comprehension and critical thinking. You are expected to have done the readings and watched the assigned lectures before class. This course has a demanding reading load, so be sure to devote ample time on a regular basis to stay on top of the readings.

## Course Evaluation

Students' final course mark will be based on:

- Attendance and Participation (15%) (**Throughout the term**)
- Questions and Reflections (10%) (**Throughout the term**)
- Oral Presentation (25%) (**Throughout the term**)
- Cumulative Final Exam (50%) (**Date TBA**)

Detailed instructions will be provided for each assignment on Canvas. All submitted work in this course should be the result of your individual effort only.

## Attendance and Active Participation

Throughout the term I will occasionally take attendance, which will be worth 10%. Also I will do a subjective evaluation of your active participation (5%).

## Questions and Reflections

To help facilitate discussion, students are to submit one short paragraph (100-200 words) with thoughts or questions about the assigned readings, up to 5 total for the course (you can pick any 5 of the 10 weeks with assigned readings, but 3 must be before February 17 inclusive, and 2 after, to ensure a fair distribution of submissions across the term). These should *not* be summaries of the readings, but rather your reflections on the readings, questions you want to raise for discussion, interpretations and how they might relate to other concepts, events in the world, etc. These reflections for a particular week are to be submitted on Canvas before Monday 9 am sharp (Canvas will not accept late submissions on a given week, and there will be no exceptions made. You can choose which weeks to submit your paragraph, but be sure to be on time on those weeks!) You will receive 2 points for each properly done assignment you submit, up to 10 points total.

## Oral Presentation

Every student will do a 12-minute oral presentation on a particular religious group, movement, or tradition, either contemporary or historical, followed by a brief Q&A. Pick a case that raises interesting questions or deepens our understanding of psychology. You may draw on readings and lectures from the course, your observations and interviews, and online and library research as material for your presentation. This is a fun

assignment that will allow each student to teach the class something interesting about psychology and religion. It is also a great opportunity to practice your oral presentation skills. Oral presentations will commence right after the Winter Break and will be on Wednesdays.

## **Cumulative Final Exam**

There will be a cumulative (covering the entire course) open-book final exam. This means that during this final exam, you can consult your class notes and readings. To do well on the final exam, you are expected to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the theories and concepts covered in the course, a high level of critical and original thinking, and effective written communication. Students are responsible for all readings assigned in the required readings and presented in class, as well as the lectures.

## **Communication with the Professor and the TA**

**If you have a question about the course material:** Reach out to us if you have questions about course material). But *not* via email. Email is not an effective way to have a real conversation. (You shouldn't expect more than a one-sentence response to email inquiries. Nor should you expect any response on evenings or weekends.) If you do have a question about course material, you are very welcome to ask it during classroom time, or during office hours.

**If you have an issue that is personal or specific to you:** Sign up for office hours to arrange a time to talk individually with your professor or TA.

**If you have a technical or logistical question about the course:** We hope everything goes smoothly and that you'll have no problems accessing course materials, or submitting assignments on Canvas. But, unexpected glitches might arise. TAs or your professor are *not* information technology experts. So, if you do have a question about something technical or logistical related to the course, the best way to get help is this: Post your question on the **Course Discussion Board** so that everyone in the class can see it. You'll get help faster (and you'll be helping any other student who may be facing a similar technical/logistical issue). If this approach is not helpful, then contact your TA who can approach a UBC IT consultant who can offer solutions.

## **Office Hours**

For tutoring or issues/questions requiring time and attention, take advantage of office hours by your professor and your TA. If possible, let us know ahead of time that you are coming to office hours. This will ensure that the office hours go smoothly and minimize wait times.

To reiterate: students are encouraged to use e-mail if they have an easy question that can be answered quickly (in one sentence or two) during the weekdays. Individual tutoring or discussion of course concepts cannot be done over e-mail. For tutoring or questions that require more time, please see your TA or professor during office hours or by appointment.

## **ACADEMIC CONCESSION**

If you miss marked coursework (assignment, exam, presentation) and are an Arts student, review the Faculty of Arts' [academic concession page](#) and then complete Arts Academic Advising's [online academic concession form](#), so that an advisor can evaluate your concession case.

If you are a student in a different Faculty, please consult your Faculty's webpage on academic concession, and then contact me where appropriate.

### ADJUSTED DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY FOR 2024-2025

In the Psychology Department, we aim to offer learning experiences that welcome and challenge all students to engage meaningfully in our discipline. We strive for grades that accurately reflect student learning and achievement of course learning objectives, rather than solely reflecting their performance relative to others.

The Psychology department employs department-wide grading standards to promote equitable alignment, supporting students and course instructors as they learn and teach across many diverse courses and sections. For each Course Section, instructors should aim for a grade average in the following Target Ranges: B- (68-71%), in Introductory 100-level and 200-level courses; B (72-75%), in Intermediate 300-level courses; **B+ (76-79%), for Advanced 400-level courses** and Selective-Entry lower-level courses (e.g., PSYC 277, 278, 312, 370, 371, 349, 359, 365).

Ranges are intended to provide some flexibility to instructors and account for differences that can occur between classes. Ranges increase across year levels to account for improvements in student learning, and students' ability to self-select into more specialized courses.

During the course, instructors may choose to adjust grades and/or difficulty of the assessments, to align with the Target Range. At the end of the course, if the average falls outside the Target Range (either direction), instructors will typically be expected to use a linear transformation to adjust final grades (i.e., add or subtract the same number of points to all students' marks, while ensuring no student fails the course due to this transformation).

If a course mean falls in within one +/- letter grade band above the Target Range (e.g., in the B+ range for Intermediate courses), and the instructor believes these grades to be justified, the instructor may submit a justification request using the departmental approval final grades submission form, and the grades may stand. This Upper Range is intended to inspire further excellence in learning and teaching, and allow for the possibility that some classes select for higher performing students. Courses with means exceeding the Upper Range will be expected to provide justification as well as use a linear transformation to fall within the Upper Range.

Grades are not official until they appear on students' academic record. Students will receive both a percent and a letter grade for this course. At UBC, they convert according to the key below:

A+	90-100%	B+	76-79%	C+	64-67%	D	50-54%
A	85-89%	B	72-75%	C	60-63%	F	0-49%
A-	80-84%	B-	68-71%	C-	55-59%		

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### Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct are very serious concerns of the University, and the Department of Psychology has taken steps to alleviate them. In the first place, the Department has implemented software that, can reliably detect cheating on multiple-choice exams by analyzing the patterns

of students' responses. In addition, the Department subscribes to *TurnItIn*--a service designed to detect and deter plagiarism. All materials (term papers, lab reports, etc.) that students submit for grading will be scanned and compared to over 5 billion pages of content located on the Internet or in TurnItIn's own proprietary databases. The results of these comparisons are compiled into customized "Originality Reports" containing several, sensitive measures of plagiarism; instructors receive copies of these reports for every student in their class.

In all cases of suspected academic misconduct, the parties involved will be pursued to the fullest extent dictated by the guidelines of the University. Strong evidence of cheating or plagiarism may result in a zero credit for the work in question. According to the University Act (section 61), the President of UBC has the right to impose harsher penalties including (but not limited to) a failing grade for the course, suspension from the University, cancellation of scholarships, or a notation added to a student's transcript.

All graded work in this course, unless otherwise specified, is to be original work done independently by individuals. **Do** use any of the indexes and databases listed under Indexes and Databases, Subject Resources, OneSearch or Metasearch on the Library's website at <http://www.library.ubc.ca>. (Not sure which index to use? Click HELP on the library homepage at [www.library.ubc.ca](http://www.library.ubc.ca) or try Subject Resources.)

If you have any questions as to whether or not what you are doing is even a borderline case of academic misconduct, please consult your instructor. For details on pertinent University policies and procedures, please see Chapter 5 in the UBC Calendar (<http://students.ubc.ca/calendar>).

### **Equity and Inclusion and Diversity and Respect:**

University courses should be conducive to learning and rigorous intellectual inquiry within a context in which everyone feels included and respected—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, political or religious affiliations, ability, age, social status, etc. All students in this class are encouraged to express themselves freely and thoughtfully when discussing course material; and, when you do express yourself, it's important that you do so in a manner that shows respect for every other member of this class. Therefore, please ensure you're familiar with UBC's policy on building and maintaining a respectful environment. You can find additional information about resources pertaining to equity, diversity, and inclusion on the Psychology Department's website: <https://psych.ubc.ca/about/equity-inclusion/>

### **Copyright and Intellectual Property**

All readings for this course are copyrighted, and cannot be redistributed without permission of the copyright owner. Lecture videos and other course materials are the intellectual property of the instructor(s) and these also cannot be redistributed (e.g., posted on any other website, or shared in any other way) without instructor permission. Violation of these policies may lead to academic discipline.

### **UBC Academic Calendar**

Further information about academic regulations, course withdrawal dates and credits can be found in the Academic Calendar.

## Additional Useful Resources for Students

Additional resources may also be helpful as you contend with the challenges of taking university courses during a pandemic, and just dealing with life's challenges more broadly.

- Guidance on useful skills for students: <https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/>
- Student's guide to Canvas: <https://students.canvas.ubc.ca/>
- Mental health support: <https://students.ubc.ca/covid19/mental-health-during-covid-19-outbreak>
- Counselling Services: <http://students.ubc.ca/livewell/services/counselling-services>
- Wellness Centre: <http://students.ubc.ca/livewell/services/wellness-centre>
- Student Health Services: <http://students.ubc.ca/livewell/services/student-health-service>