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Religions of the Americas I

Instructor

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Institution

Wilfrid Laurier University
 Provincial University; enrolment: 6000 undergraduates, 1000 graduates

Course Description

An introduction to basic questions in religious studies using selected examples of religion in the Americas. The course concentrates on the religious and cultural interactions of people who are of indigenous or African descent as they encounter European religion and culture. We take up fundamental questions such as: What is religion? What is the nature of religious experience? What is religious studies? How is religion related to other sources of identity such as ethnicity and nationality?

Course Goals

1. To introduce the vocabulary necessary for engaging in religious studies, and to challenge popular assumptions about the nature of religion.
2. To explore the lives of selected individuals with a view to understanding religion's relation to ethnicity and gender.
3. To develop an appreciation for religious diversity, so students may act more compassionately and intelligently in multicultural and inter-religious environments.

Course Outline (24 Sessions)

September

10 What does a typical introduction to religion do? What does this course offer as an alternative? What is religion?

12 Why study religion? What is the academic study of religion?

17 What is ritual? What is myth?

19 What are the kinds of religious experience? How does it shape identity?

24 In what ways does religion effect human behavior? How do religious institutions and movements work?

26 Exam #1

October

1 Context for studying Louis Riel: Francophone Catholicism; the Métis

3 Discussion: Flanagan, *Louis "David" Riel*

8 Religion in *Louis "David" Riel*

10 Film:

15 Context for studying "Jessica:" Religion and drama; Indian-White relations; ethnic and religious identity

17 Discussion: Griffith and Campbell, *The Book of Jessica*

22 Religion in The Book of Jessica

24 Film:

29 Exam #2

31 Context for studying Mama Lola: African religions; African religions in the Americas

November

5 Discussion: Brown, *Mama Lola*

7 Religion in *Mama Lola*

12 Film:

14 Context for studying Malcolm X: African American Christians and Black Muslims

19 Discussion: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

21 Religion in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

26 Film

28 Review and evaluation

Final exam: date and time to be set by the Registrar's Office.

Course Requirements


Your mark will be based on three examinations (worth 25%, 35%, and 40% respectively) over the following three areas: religious studies, indigenous religions, the religions of African people in the Americas. Exams will cover lectures, discussions, readings, and films. Exams are offered at the times indicated in the course outline; there are no deferred exams. If your schedule prevents you from being at the exams, you should not take the course. If you miss an exam, your mark for it will be a zero. Excuses for missing an exam such as "I over-slept," "We had a flat," "I had a job interview," or "My computer broke" receive sympathy; that's all.

If it seems that there is a lot of reading, please notice that you are not required to write papers or do library

research in this course.

Required Readings

1. Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, [The Book of Jessica](#)
 2. Thomas Flanagan, [Louis "David" Riel](#)
 3. Karen McCarthy Brown, [Mama Lola](#)
 4. Malcolm X, [The Autobiography of Malcolm X](#)
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http://www.wlu.ca/~wwaar/syllabi/religions_americas_i-grimes.html

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