

**PSYD15H3 – LEC30: Current Topics in Social Psychology**  
**Ritual & Religion**  
**(and some other fun stuff, too)**  
**Winter 2017**

Instructor: Nicholas Hobson, MA

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Class Time and Location: Thursday 7:00 – 9:00PM, AA206

Website: <https://portal.utoronto.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

Office: SY162

Office Hours: By appointment

**Course Description**

What are rituals and why are they so fundamental to the human species? What functions do they serve, and what underlying psychological/neural processes explain their different effects? How does religiosity, another universal phenomenon spanning time and culture, tie into ritual? When it comes to religion, who believes, and why? What psychosocial outcomes spring out of religious belief? For thousands of years, some of the greatest thinkers and philosophers have asked these questions. Only recently have scientists (and social psychologists in particular) joined in on the debate of what ritual/religion means for the human species. Daniel Dennett says, “Religions are an important phenomenon. We should study them scientifically with the same intensity that we study all other important natural phenomena.” I submit the study of ritual to the same critical analysis.

In this course, we will discuss and debate concepts, both old and new, related to the scientific study of ritual and religion. Each week will touch on a different research topic, where we will discuss the recent empirical and theoretical papers advancing the field’s understanding. Be prepared to discuss ideas at all levels of psychological science – from methodologies, experimental design and statistical analyses, to abstract theoretical concepts and puzzling philosophical questions.

The general **goals and objectives** of the course are to help students:

- a) Learn and gain mastery over basic facts, research findings, terminology, principles, and theories important in the social psychology and cognitive science of religion and ritual.
- b) Practice and develop critical thinking skills, written and oral communications skills.
- c) Analyze current issues and controversies in the field of social psychology.

Given the upper level and seminar format of this course, the main objective will be to expose you to new ideas, and to encourage you to develop and expand the way you think about and express your own ideas. In pursuit of these goals, a large portion of class time will be spent discussing ideas with your classmates. These discussions will be supplemented by in-class demonstrations, and activities to promote the learning and application of course material. You should read the assigned papers prior to coming to class and give the material careful thought, as doing so will facilitate our class discussions and your understanding of the material. Asking questions and making comments during class is highly encouraged.

Class Website: Blackboard will be the course website. Here, you can obtain copies of the syllabus, assigned readings, relevant articles and web links. Although any changes in the course schedule or class location will be announced in class, they will also be posted as

announcements on Blackboard, and therefore I recommend you check this website frequently, especially if you must miss a class.

Assigned Reading: The readings for this class will be comprised of journal articles, book chapters or news articles that are related to course topics. I will post these articles on the course Blackboard website.

Writing: A main goal of this course is to build on students' competency in academic writing skills and to extend those skills through the instruction of normal writing standards in the discipline of psychology. Written assignments will require coherent, logical, and carefully edited prose. In order to succeed at the writing assignment you will have to demonstrate higher-level critical thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis, rather than mere summarization. Your writing will be graded and commented upon and become part of the assigned grade. I will provide evaluation criteria for the writing assignment during class and on blackboard later in the term. There will be ample time for questions about the evaluation criteria prior to the due date. If you have concerns about your preparedness for the writing demands of this course, please see me during office hours and I will try my best to help you and I will also point you to additional resources that can help you to build your writing skills.

Late Assignments: All discussion questions are due at 1pm each Monday, before the beginning of class. **The final paper is due at 8pm on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.** Late discussion questions will **not** be accepted. Late assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 10% for every day (after 8pm December 5<sup>th</sup> counts as a day) that the assignment is late.

### Grade Breakdown

Class Facilitation – (20%): Once during the semester, you and your group (consisting of 3-4 people) will serve as facilitators of the discussion for the week's assigned readings. Class facilitation will include three components:

- 1) Reading the "optional" reading for that week
- 2) Clearly and concisely describe the main ideas and findings from your articles with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation (20-30 minutes).
- 3) Facilitating the class discussion through discussion questions (these will be provided by your classmates).

Given the size of the groups, these two tasks should be broken down so that each group member shows that they were actively involved with their group and can demonstrate mastery of the material. The discussion leaders will come into class prepared to lead and guide the discussion so that the discussion is fluid, lively, and interesting for all the students in the class. I encourage all leaders to be creative by incorporating class activities (e.g. breaking class into small groups to discuss different perspectives of the readings) and multimedia into their discussions. Though not required, familiarity with other relevant readings will help you develop "expertise" on your topic. Your group will receive a single collective grade.

Class Participation and Attendance – (15%): In a seminar-style class, attendance is expected and participation is essential. In order to get the most out of the course, we need **everyone** actively engaged and participating! Your participation grade will depend on quality as well as quantity of participation. I will keep a record of participation throughout the term. Signs of good participation includes: Attendance, punctuality, eagerness to participate, showing respect to others' contributions, paying careful attention to classmates' presentations, and offering constructive feedback, questions, and comments.

Reaction and Discussion Questions - (10%): In order to facilitate critical thinking about the readings, students are required to submit a short reactionary paper (1 page) with 2 discussion questions **on the Tuesday at 5PM** before each class. Prepare one question for each posted article (two of them). You will need to do this for each week's readings (excluding the week when your group is presenting). These reflections and discussion questions should be **thoughtful responses** to the readings, not mere summaries of the study findings. Though there will be 3-4 papers each week, you can choose to focus on 2 for your reflection and discussion questions.

In forming your discussion questions you may want to consider practical implications of the findings, challenge conclusions, or relate the reading to other topics. I will then send these questions to the presenting group who should incorporate the questions into their presentation. Each set of weekly questions will be marked out of four (total of 24 possible marks for 6 submissions).

Debate – (15%): On March 20<sup>th</sup> and March 27<sup>th</sup>, we will be holding two in-class debates based on two controversial topics in religion/ritual psychology that we will be covering. The two topics, the groups, and the “sides” of the topics will be chosen a few weeks into class, in order gauge relevant and controversial topics in the field. There will be approximately 12 people per topic, and 6 people arguing for either side of that topic. More information about the format of the debate, as well as the grading rubric, will be provided later in the term.

Research Proposal: - (40%) The research proposal will involve researching a topic of the students' own interest related to the social psychology of religion, ritual, and group dynamics. Specifically, this assignment will entail writing a detailed description of a specific model, theory, or hypothesis, reviewing the literature, and writing a research proposal to further examine that model, theory, or hypothesis. Detailed instructions for the research proposal will be provided in class and a grading rubric will be posted on blackboard later in the term.

**Final Grade:**

<b>Class Facilitation</b>	<b>20%</b>	
<b>Participation</b>	<b>15%</b>	
<b>Discussion Questions</b>	<b>10%</b>	
<b>Debate</b>	<b>15%</b>	
<b><u>Research Proposal</u></b>	<b><u>40%</u></b>	<b>Total</b>

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>A+</b>	90-100	
<b>A</b>	85-89	Excellent
<b>A-</b>	80-84	
<b>B+</b>	77-79	
<b>B</b>	73-76	Good
<b>B-</b>	70-72	
<b>C+</b>	67-69	
<b>C</b>	63-66	Adequate
<b>C-</b>	60-62	
<b>D+</b>	57-59	
<b>D</b>	53-56	Marginal
<b>D-</b>	50-52	
<b>F</b>	0-49	Inadequate

## Classroom Expectations

Class Participation: As a special topics seminar, this class is structured primarily around class discussion. Thus, it is imperative that students actively participate in class discussions, activities, and exercises. This will greatly enhance the classroom experience. It will make learning more interactive, more fun, and more personally relevant.

Use of Electronics: Turn off cell phones, digital assistants, mp3 players, and/or any device that makes noise during class. Answering a phone call, text messaging, or sending e-mail during class is inappropriate. Also, if you are bringing a laptop to class, only use it for appropriate activities (e.g. taking notes).

Classroom Civility: We hope to create an environment where open discussion can happen about topics in psychology. By virtue of this, there are going to be discussions about sensitive topics that individuals will hold differing opinions on. Please respect the opinions and perspectives of your classmates.

Emails: All emails you send should include PSYD15 in their title. I will try my best to respond to all emails within 24 hours (Monday-Friday).

Disabilities: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with AccessAbility Services. Students who register and utilize the AccessAbility services will not be identified on their transcript as receiving accommodations. Information disclosed to the service is confidential and is disclosed only with the student's permission. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations for the course. Talking with me well in advance is always better. There is little to nothing that I can do for you after an assignment is due.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Scholastic Dishonesty: Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. In this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask me.

### **Missed Term Work due to Medical Illness or Emergency:**

All students citing a documented reason for missed term work (this includes assignments and midterm exams) must bring their documentation to the Undergraduate Course Coordinator, Ainsley Lawson, **within three (3) business days** of the term test / assignment due date. All documentation must be accompanied by the departmental [Request for Missed Term Work form](http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW) (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>).

In the case of missed term work due to illness, only an **original copy** of the [official UTSC Verification of Illness Form](http://uoft.me/PSY-MED) (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MED>) will be accepted. Forms are to be completed in full, clearly indicating the start date, anticipated end date, and severity of illness. The physician's registration number and business stamp are required.

In the case of other emergency, a record of visitation to a hospital emergency room or copy of a death certificate may be considered.

#### **Forms should be dropped off in SW427C between 9 AM - 4 PM, Monday through Friday.**

Upon receipt of the documentation, you will receive an email response from the Course Instructor / Course Coordinator within three business days. The Course Instructor reserves the right to decide what accommodations (if any) will be made for the missed work.

Note that this policy applies only to missed term work (assignments and midterms). Missed final exams are dealt with by the Registrar's Office (<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/registrar/missing-examination>).

#### **Failure to adhere to any aspect of this policy may result in a denial of your request for accommodation.**

If the need for a make-up exam should arise, the student may take a cumulative final exam (covering all the material from the course) during finals to make up for the missed exam. The mark for the cumulative exam will count twice (for the missed exam and also for the third exam)

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
<b>Jan 12</b>	Introduction and group assignments	1. Hobson et al., 2016a
<b>Jan 19 (open class for preparation)</b>		
<b>Jan 26 (Group 1)</b>	Ritual calms: The palliative function of ritual	1. Lang et al., 2015 2. Brooks et al., 2016 3. Norton & Gino, 2014
<b>Feb 2 (Group 2)</b>	Ritual prepares: The regulatory function of ritual	1. Vohs et al., 2014 2. Damisch et al., 2010 3. Hobson, Bonk, & Inzlicht, 2016
<b>Feb 9 (Group 3)</b>	Ritual binds: The social function of ritual	1. Xygalatas et al., 2013 2. Hobson et al., 2017 3. Konvalinka et al., 2011
<b>Feb 16 (Group 4)</b>	Ritual shares: The norm transmission function of ritual	1. Herrmann et al., 2013 2. Watson-Jones et al., 2015 3. Sezer et al., 2016
<b>Feb 23</b>	READING WEEK – no class	
<b>March 2 (Group 5)</b>	When Believing Binds (and Blinds): Religion and (anti)sociality	1. Purzycki et al., 2016 2. Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009 3. Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011
<b>March 9 (Group 6)</b>	Who Believes And Why? Religion and Differences in Culture & Personality	1. Tsai, Miao, & Seppala, 2007 2. Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012 3. Ritter, Preston, & Hernandez, 2014
<b>March 16 (TBD)</b>		
<b>March 23 (Debates)</b>	Debating a seminar topic	
<b>March 30 (Debates)</b>	Debating a seminar topic	