REL 890: DOCTORAL SEMINAR 2014-2015

meetings in fall semester: Wednesdays, 2:45-5:30
meetings in winter semester: Thursdays, 10-12:30
downstairs seminar room, Department of Religion
course coordinator: Leslie Orr (orr.leslie@gmail.com)
office hours fall semester: Thursday 4-5 pm or by appointment

In addition to class meetings listed in the schedule below, students in this course will be expected to attend colloquium presentations in the Department – particularly those by guest speakers and by senior PhD students. A tentative schedule for these is found at the end of the course outline; these all take place on Fridays. A part of your evaluation for the course will be based on your “reading responses” to pre-circulated colloquium papers.

The aims of the seminar are (1) to introduce you to a range of approaches to and issues in the study of (as well as to a number of members of our faculty); and (2) to help you develop professional skills and gain experience – in terms of collegial interaction, self-expression, teaching, and gaining access to funding and opportunities for presenting your research to scholarly audiences. Our year-long seminar is divided into four sections.

Section I – after our first class meeting and discussion, we have four sessions in which we will discuss a number of readings (available on-line or in the coursepack, as indicated below). There are two sets of readings – (a) and (b) – for each of the four sessions, and various faculty members of the Department will serve as discussion leaders. You will prepare reading responses to (all) the assigned readings, two separate ones – for (a) and for (b) for each session – each of a minimum of 2-3 pages (i.e. you come to each class with a total of 4 pages as an absolute minimum). These reading responses will provide a starting point for your participation in the discussion in class. In some cases, as you can see below, the faculty discussion leader has provided guidelines for the kinds of questions you should be considering in the reading response. In other cases, you should think as you read of the bigger questions and broader issues being raised with a view toward the class discussion (i.e. your reading response should not consist solely of your personal reactions or focus too much on matters of detail). You hand in your reading responses to the faculty discussion leader.

Meanwhile, in preparation for Section II of the course, you should begin to look for a major recent book or article that is important for your particular field of research – something that reviews the state of the field of study or raises significant problems and issues, new directions, etc. You may wish to consult with your thesis supervisor or someone else knowledgeable in the field for suggestions about what source to use for this assignment. Please try to establish this source by September 17. You will be assigned to October 15, October 29, or November 12 to make your “my field” presentation about this source. On that same day, you will submit your “my field” essay. In this essay (suggested length 8-10 pages) you will explain why the source you have chosen is significant for your field, how it fits into the field, what are its implications for further scholarship in the field, whether you perceive problems or possibilities in the ideas or recommendations it presents. Your “my field” presentation to your fellow students (10-15
minutes) will be based on your essay, but you should not read your essay and you should gear your presentation to an audience that does not consist of specialists in your research field. Following the “my field” presentation, we will have two student respondents who will have read your source (or part of it, in the case of a book) and prepared reading responses (3 pages in length). These reading responses will be similar to those prepared for Section I of the course, but in addition should have some questions for the presenter and provide commentary or critique (perhaps challenging the notion that the source is so significant, or observing as an outsider to the field what some of the field’s peculiarities seem to be). The respondents will not read their responses, but try to engage in interchange and help lead the class discussion. On all three dates -- October 15, October 29, and November 12 -- every student will have prepared and will hand in either a “my field” essay or a reading response.

Section III of the course starts on November 26 with a roundtable on teaching and learning, led by Professor Norma Joseph. You will have prepared a 3-4 page discussion paper in which you consider the following questions (and others that might occur to you): what is the goal (or goals) of education (we are concerned primarily with undergraduate education)? what is the role of a teacher? what are the most (or least) valuable educational experiences that you have had as a student? in your experience as a teacher, what have you found most effective or difficult or satisfying? On January 15, you will come to class with a course outline for an introductory or intermediate undergraduate course. (Please clear the proposed course title/ content with me on or before November 26.) As you design the course outline, consider the following questions:

1. Does this course suit the level / type of student who will enroll?
2. Does it move through themes or a historical chronology in a way that builds for the student and moves their learning forward?
3. Are the assignments helpfully related to the course material? What are the learning objectives for assignments?

On January 15, you will work in groups with other students to “workshop” your course outline. Following this, and based on the feedback that you get, you will submit a revised course outline. On January 29 and February 12, you will give a 20-minute lecture/ presentation as if you were teaching a part of the undergraduate course you have designed. Both your revised course outline and your class teaching will be evaluated by your fellow students.

Section IV starts, on February 19, with a discussion of the process of applying for fellowships and other forms of funding. Those among us who have been successful will share their proposals with us. So too those who are waiting to hear if their proposals have been successful. And those who have not yet applied will bring a draft of their proposal for funding. This session will be workshop format. March 12 we consider how to make proposals for conference presentations and March 19 for publication in scholarly journals. Our sessions will be discussions based on the work that you will have done to prepare a hypothetical proposal. For each of these two days, you will have prepared a 5-10 page document in which you identity which conference/ journal you will present at/ publish in and justify your choice, outline what the specific procedures, format, etc. are for both the proposal and for the finished product, and produce the proposal itself according to the parameters for submission to a particular conference or design a prospectus for your proposed scholarly article. Explore a variety of options, and look into what past incarnations of various conferences or journals look like, before choosing one.
SECTION I - PRELIMINARY READINGS

September 3: OURSELVES AS RESEARCHERS
https://www.academia.edu/7862928/How_to_Choose_a_Good_Indological_Problem

September 10: RELIGIOSITY, IRRELIGION, FREEDOM AND MORALITY – with Leslie Orr and Marc Lalonde

September 17: QUEER THEORY, FEMINISM, POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION – with Donald Boisvert and Michael Oppenheim
[Discussion questions for Jantzen and Joy (b): Jantzen: What lessons from feminists in their struggle with academics in the philosophy of religion are insightful for scholars initiating post-colonial work in religion? What critique of Western masculinist approaches to the study of religion does she offer? Joy: What does she see as the legacies of colonialism and globalization on the everyday life of those outside the West? What is her critique of such categories as culture and gender?]

September 24: RITUAL, AGENCY, SECRECY, AND THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH – with Lynda Clarke and Leslie Orr
[Discussion questions for Bok (a): In the first part of the session, we will explore practical challenges related to studying secret and discrete religions. Identify some actual or potential practical problems with studying secret or discrete religion (doctrines, practices, and so on). Use, if possible, your own field of study for examples. Although Chapter IV of S. Bok, Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation says little about religion, it is helpful in that it characterizes secret societies, even if in a rather negative way. In part two, we will discuss ethical problems that arise when studying secret and discrete religion, as well as issues involved in generally exposing religions and the lives and sentiments of religious persons. Be ready to discuss the ethics of ‘scholarly exposure’. Bok’s Chapter XV, “Intrusive Social Science Research” can help to get you started. Note: Bok’s Secrets is a work of ethical philosophy, with
a good dose of psychology. The scope is wider than religion and social-scientific research. Although we have assigned only two chapters, reading the whole book, if you have the time and inclination, gives a broader view of the issues. As the session leader, Clarke will present examples from secret and discrete Islamic traditions such as Nusayrism (Alawism), Druze religion, Ismailism and Twelver Shiism.]


(b) Christian Meyer, “Performing Spirits: Shifting Agencies in Brazilian Umbanda Rituals” (pp. 35-58) in Body, Performance, Agency, and Experience (575pp; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010) coursepack

October 1: THE MATTER OF RESEARCH – with Shaman Hatley and Hillary Kaell
(a) “material philology” reading TBA


https://www.academia.edu/6983663/The_Material_Turn_in_the_Study_of_Religion

SECTION II – STUDENT-RUN SEMINAR SESSIONS: STATE OF THE ART/ NEW ISSUES IN YOUR RESEARCH AREAS

October 15

October 29

November 12

SECTION III – DESIGNING AND TEACHING A COURSE

November 26: round-table discussion on teaching and learning, led by Norma Joseph

January 15: workshop on course outlines prepared by students

January 29: class teaching

February 12: class teaching
SECTION IV – PROPOSALS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FELLOWSHIPS, CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS, AND PUBLICATION

February 19 fellowships workshop

March 12 conference presentations

March 19 publications

April 2 final considerations

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIONS

Section I
four sets – (a) and (b) – of reading responses, plus class participation ….. 20%

Section II
“my field” essay and presentation ............................................................... 20%
two reading responses ................................................................................. 10%

Section III
hand-in for roundtable on teaching and learning ........................................ 5%
evaluation of revised course outline .......................................................... 5%
“student evaluations” of teaching ................................................................. 5%

Section IV
proposal for a conference ........................................................................... 10%
proposal for an academic journal article .................................................... 10%

Colloquium reading responses
three, each worth 5% ................................................................................... 15%

Colloquium reading responses should be four pages, and should be designed along the lines of the reading responses you have done for Section I of the course, with the difference that you should be prepared to address some of your questions and observations to the author of the colloquium paper. Colloquia papers are made available a week or two in advance of the colloquium. You prepare your reading response and bring it with you to the colloquium, handing it in to me at the end of the colloquium. You may write as many colloquium reading responses as you wish, and I will choose the best three for grading purposes. Do not wait until the winter semester to produce these reading responses, since there may be cancellations or a lack of pre-circulated paper in some cases.
Department of Religion colloquia 2014-2015

October 24 9:30 Dr. Hugo Lundaug, University of Oslo (no pre-circulated paper)
October 31 10:00 Department faculty
November 14 13:00 Dr. André Couture, Université Laval (tentative)
November 28 10:00 Department faculty
January 30 10:00 Department faculty
February 13 13:00 Ph.D. student colloquium - Mrinal Kaul
March 6 13:00 Dr. Chiara Letitzia, UQAM
March 20 10:00 Ph.D. student colloquium - Ali Ahmad Rasekh
March 27 13:00 Dr. Robert Orsi, Northwestern University
April 17 10:00 Department faculty

Other events where your participation is anticipated:

Thursday December 4 16:00 graduated grad students symposium
Thursday March 5 - all day - grad student conference