

**School of Art History, Classics, Religious Studies**

**Religious Studies**

**RELI 328 (CRN 10406)**

**Religion and Human Biology**

**TRIMESTER 1 2012**

**5 March to 4 July 2012**

**Trimester dates**

Teaching dates:	5 March to 8 June 2012
Mid-trimester break:	6–22 April 2012
Last piece of assessment due:	1 June 2012
Study week:	11–15 June 2012
Examination/Assessment Period:	15 June to 4 July 2012

**Withdrawal dates**

Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at  
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds.aspx>

**Names and contact details**

Coordinator: Dr. Joseph Bulbulia

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tel:	463-5043
Office:	Hunter 322
Office hours:	Monday 4pm→5pm or by appointment.

Tutor: Aidan MacLeod

Email:	<a href="mailto:aarmacLeod@gmail.com">aarmacLeod@gmail.com</a>
Office:	HU 217
Office hours:	Thursday 12pm- 1pm

**Class times and locations**

Lecture place:	HMLT001.
Time:	Thursdays 14:10-16:00
Start date:	Thursday, 8 March 2012
Tutorials:	start the second week of term and occur every second week. Tutors will be available in weeks without tutorials for one to one consultations, by appointment. Sign up outside HU 318.

## **Course delivery**

The course also consists of:

- Lecturers and tutorials.
- Mandatory readings.
- Five response essays of 1,200 words (min) –2,000 words (max).

## **Communication of additional information**

Additional information or information on changes will be conveyed to students on Blackboard.

Because information about the course will change from time-to-time, students are expected to check Blackboard for updates at least once a week.

## **Course Prescription**

We discover religion from the vantage point of fascinating interdisciplinary research happening at the borders of biology, neuroscience, economics, and religious studies. Sample topics: the praying brain; out of body experiences; the placebo effect; hypnosis; collective ritual; emotion and memory; the evolutionary archaeology of religion; trance; violence and generosity.

## **Course Description**

This course approaches religion as a dimension of human biology. We consider research that investigates religion using the methods of cognitive science, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, economics, and social psychology. Topics include religious education; religion and cooperation; hypnosis; collective ritual; emotion and memory; and the evolutionary archaeology of religion.

## **Learning objectives**

Students passing the course should be able to:

- understand debates in the biological study of religions;
- evaluate arguments based on scientific evidence;
- construct arguments based on scientific evidence;
- express ideas clearly and persuasively, in writing.

## **Readings**

### **Essential texts:**

All readings can be found as PDFs on Blackboard under

## **Materials and equipment**

Students are permitted computers in class, though only to take notes. Students must disable their wifi. Any use of a computer for purposes other than note taking will result in the computer being confiscated for the remainder of the class.

Cell phones must be switched off.

## Assessment requirements

### Critical Response Essay Due Dates

1. March 23, 2012: worth 20% final mark.
2. April 5, 2012: worth 20% final mark.
3. May 4, 2012: worth 20% final mark.
4. May 18, 2012: worth 20% final mark.
5. June 01, 2012: worth 20% final mark.

### Marking Criteria

#### Critical response essays:

- 33.3% for clarity.
- 33.3% for critical engagement.
- 33.4% for creativity.

### Penalties

- Essays shorter than 1,200 words or longer than 2,000 words will not be marked.
- Any late submission will *not* receive written feedback.
- Unexcused late submissions will receive a 0.05 point deduction for each day that the assignment is late.
- Students will have a 48-hour grace period before receiving point deductions. This period includes weekends and holidays (e.g. if an essay is due 5pm Friday, points will be deducted beginning 5pm Sunday).
- No unexcused work that is more than ten days overdue will be marked.
- The only valid excuse for a late submission will be a medical certificate.

### Mandatory (i.e. minimal) course requirements

To gain a pass in this course each student must:

- Miss no more than two tutorials.
- Submit at least 4 assignments
- Students must submit assignments no later than 12 June 2012 (No assignments will be accepted after 12 June, 2012).

### Class Representative

A class representative will be elected in the first class, and that person's name and contact details will be available to VUWSA, to the Course Coordinator, and to the class. The class representative will provide a communication channel to the Course Coordinator on behalf of students. The contact details for the Class Representative will be placed on Blackboard under:

COURSE RESOURCES → PEOPLE → CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

## Use of Turnitin

Student work provided for assessment in this course may be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin. Turnitin will retain a copy of submitted material on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions is not made available to any other party.

## WHERE TO FIND MORE DETAILED INFORMATION

Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study). Find out how academic progress is monitored and how enrolment can be restricted at [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress). Most statutes and policies are available at [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy), except qualification statutes, which are available via the *Calendar* webpage at [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar.aspx](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar.aspx) (See Section C).

Other useful information for students may be found at the website of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic), at [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about\\_victoria/avcacademic](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/avcacademic).

## The Lecture Schedule

### Week 1. March 8

Introduction

## PART I: COGNITION

### Week 2. March 15

#### PART I. SECTION 1: *Cognitive Science and Learning*

1. Cognitive Science

<http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/cep/primer.html>

2. Concept transmission: the cognitive optimal theory  
(McCauley and Cohen 2010) [Download](#)  
(Boyer 2003) [Download](#)

### Week 3. March 22

3. Ritual and memory: the modes theory  
(Whitehouse 2004) Chapter 4. [Download](#)

#### PART I. SECTION 2: *Cognitive Science and Prediction*

4. Ritual and prediction: goal demolition  
(Boyer and Lienard 2006) [Download](#)

### Week 4. March 29

5. Agency and prediction: anthropomorphism.  
(Guthrie 1993) [Download](#)

6. Summary  
(Barrett 2007) [Download](#)  
(Barrett 2011) [Download](#)

## PART II: EVOLUTION

### Week 5. April 5

#### PART II. SECTION 1: *Evolution and Learning*

7. Evolution  
(Bering 2006) [Download](#)  
(Johnson 2005) [Download](#)

8. Concept transmission: the viral theory  
(Dawkins 1989 [1976]) Chapter 11 [Download](#)

**Mid-trimester break 6 – 22 April 2012**

**Week 6. April 26****PART II. SECTION 2: *Evolution and Prediction***

9. Rituals and memory: SNAFUS  
(Sterelny 2007) [Download](#)

10. Ritual and prediction: costly signalling: behavioural ecology  
(Sosis 2000) [Download](#)

**Week 7. May 3**

11. Agency and Prediction: costly signaling: cognitive science  
(Bulbulia 2004) [Download](#)

12. Summary  
(Pyysiäinen and Hauser 2010) [Download](#)

**PART III: CULTURE****Week 8. May 10****PART III. SECTION 1: *Cultural Evolution and Learning***

13. Niche Construction: introduction  
(Richerson and Boyd 2005) Chapter 3 [Download](#)

14. Concept transmission: a bio-cultural approach  
(Wilson 2002) Chapter 1 [Download](#)  
(Wilson 2005) [Download](#)

**Week 9. May 17**

15. Ritual and memory: social memories  
(Basalou) [Download](#)  
(Geertz 2010) [Download](#)

**PART III. SECTION 1: *Cultural Evolution and Prediction***

16. Ritual and Prediction: Charismatic Signalling  
(Bulbulia 2012) [Download](#)

17. Agency and Prediction: Charismatic Authority  
(Schjoedt, Stødkilde-Jørgensen et al. 2011)

**Week 10. May 24**

18. Summary of Cultural Evolution  
(Bulbulia 2008) [Download](#)

19. Summary of Course  
(Geertz 2010) [Download](#)  
(Richerson and Newson 2008) [Download](#)

**Week 11. May 31**

Graduate Student Talk.

## REFERENCES

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- Bering, J. M. (2006). "The Folk Psychology of Souls." Behav. Brain Sciences **29**: 453-498.
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- Richerson, P. J. and R. Boyd (2005). Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
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- Schjoedt, U., H. Stødkilde-Jørgensen, et al. (2011). "The Power of Charisma: perceived charisma inhibits the attentional and executive systems of believers in intercessory prayer." Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience **4**(2): 199-207.
- Sosis, R. (2000). "Religion and Intragroup Cooperation: Preliminary Results of a Comparative Analysis of Utopian Communities." Cross-Cultural Research **34**(1): 77-88.
- Sterelny, K. (2007). "SNAFUS : an evolutionary perspective." Biological Theory **2**(3): 317-328.

Whitehouse, H. (2004). Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission. Lanham, MD, AltaMira Press.

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Wilson, D. S. (2005). "Testing Major Evolutionary Hypotheses about Religion with a Random Sample." Human Nature **16**(4): 419-446.