



Religious Studies 2128a/b (670)
Psychedelics and Religion
Fall/ Winter 2026-2027

Instructor: M. Ross

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Course Information

Calendar Description:

This course examines the growing interest in psychedelics and their relationship to religion and spirituality across traditions. Students explore entheogens in mystical experience, connection to nature, acceptance of mortality, pastoral care, and ritual, along with the suppression of Indigenous practices and their possible influence on early religions.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

RS2128
Psychedelics and Religion

Course Outline – Fall 2026

Instructor: Michael Ross

Email: mross67@uwo.ca

Format: Online Course – Asynchronous (with in-person final exam)

ZOOM Office Hours

Wednesdays: 11am-12pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the relationship between psychedelics and religion, examining psychedelic experiences through the lenses of mysticism, ritual, set and setting, history, colonialism, and Indigenous spiritual traditions, as well as their significance within Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The course also considers how psychedelics challenge conventional understandings of science and religion and explores their implications for questions of death, nature, and meaning.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the relationship between psychedelics and religious and/or spiritual experience
2. Examine psychedelic traditions and practices across different cultures and religions
3. Evaluate competing historical, scientific, and religious interpretations of psychedelics
4. Consider the philosophical and theological implications of psychedelic experiences for specific religious traditions

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

1. Weekly Lecture Quiz (Perusall): 35% (12 Lectures x 3%)

Each week, the video lecture will be posted in Brightspace with *Perusall*. The lecture will have built-in questions and opportunity for commentary. Further instructions will be offered with each specific video lecture.

2. Weekly Reading/Video (Perusall): 35% (12 Readings x 3%)

Each week's content (readings and/or videos) will be posted in Brightspace with *Perusall*. Students will answer question prompts and make comments within their smaller online group. Further instructions will be offered with each specific reading and/or video.

3. Final Exam: 30%

The final exam is an **in-person exam and will be written during the December exam period**. This will be a cumulative exam covering all aspects of the course. It will be a mix of short answer/definitions and longer-form answers. A thorough review lecture of the whole course will be offered in the last week.

COPYRIGHT OF COURSE MATERIAL

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, video lectures, exams, course outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Instructors are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and copies for their own use but may not distribute course materials publicly and/or online.

TEXTBOOKS, READINGS & OTHER CONTENT

There is no official textbook for this course that you will have to purchase. All readings will be made available on Brightspace. The schedule of readings listed below is subject to change as we move through the course, but no major changes will be made.

Access to Netflix will be required for at least one documentary series. If this poses a problem for you, please reach out and we can make arrangements.

WORKFLOW AND TIMING

*N.B. Though this is an asynchronous course, weekly lecture videos and reading/commentary ***must be done each week***. Students cannot wait until the end of the semester to catch up. Unless you have an approved accommodation, missing a weekly deadline will result in losing that percentage of the mark (i.e., 3% for a missed lecture quiz and 3% for the reading responses, totaling a 6% loss per week).

The timing structure is as follows:

- Lecture videos and *Perusall* reading/watching assignments will be posted each week on Friday afternoons. This will be the following week's content.
- You will then have all week (9 days, to be exact) to watch the video lecture, complete the quiz, and do the reading/watching assignment through *Perusall*. This must all be completed by 11:59pm on the Sunday night of the following week.

Example of the weekly timeline:

Week 1

- Lecture and readings/videos posted by 5pm on Friday, September 4th
- Deadline for completion is 11:59pm on Sunday, September 13th

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

All readings and video links are/will be posted in Brightspace.

Week 1 – Week of Monday, September 7

Introduction – Psychedelics and Religion: What's the Connection?

Content

1. Michael Pollan, "A Renaissance," Chapter 1 in *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (Penguin Press, 2018), pp. 21–81.
2. *How to Change Your Mind*, Episode 1: "LSD" (Netflix, 2022).

Week 2 – Week of Monday, September 14

Mysticism: Part 1 – The Traditional Definition

Content

1. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (short excerpt)
2. William A. Richards, "Intuitive Knowledge," Chapter 4, and "New Perspectives on Time and Space," Chapter 6, in *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences* (Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 39–57, 69–77.

Week 3 – Week of Monday, September 21

Mysticism: Part 2 – Critiques of the Traditional Definition

Content

1. "Psychedelic-induced Mystical Experiences: An Interdisciplinary Discussion and Critique." Sharday Mosurinjohn, Leor Roseman, and Manesh Girn, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14 (2023), article 1077311.
2. "Psychedelic Mysticism and Christian Spirituality: From Science to Love." Ron Cole-Turner, *Religions* 15, no. 5 (2024), article 537.

Week 4 – Week of Monday, September 28

Ritual, Set & Setting

Content

1. "Set and Setting in the Santo Daime." Ido Hartogsohn, *Frontiers in Pharmacology* 12 (2021), article 651037.

Week 5 – Week of Monday, October 5

Psychedelic Plant Medicines & Colonial History

Content

1. *How to Change Your Mind, Episode 4: “Mescaline” (Netflix, 2022).*
2. Jamilah R. George, Timothy I. Michaels, Jae Sevelius, and Monnica T. Williams, “The Psychedelic Renaissance and the Limitations of a White-Dominant Medical Framework: A Call for Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Inclusion,” *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020), pp. 4–15.

October 12th – 16th – READING WEEK/Thanksgiving Monday

Week 6 – Week of Monday, October 19

Psychedelics in Western History: Speculation vs. Evidence

Content

1. TBD
2. TBD

Week 7 – Week of Monday, October 26

Themes & Issues in Christianity

Content

1. “Psychedelics, the Bible, and the Divine.” Jaime Clark-Soles, *Religions* 15, no. 5 (2024), article 582.
2. “Psychedelic Integration and Spiritual Growth in a Christian Context.” Ron Cole-Turner, *Religions* 16, no. 9 (2025), article 1197.

Week 8 – Week of Monday November 2

Themes & Issues in Islam

Content

1. Haroon Asghar, “Islam and Psychedelics: An Essay on the Issues of Permissibility and Medical Utility,” *Theology and Science* 23, no. 2 (2025), pp. 344–378.
2. Haroon Asghar, “Psychedelics and Islam,” in *Psychedelics and the Future of Religion Series*, Harvard Divinity School, Center for the Study of World Religions, YouTube video, 2025. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDy8IVkGQQc>

Week 9 – Week of Monday November 9

Themes & Issues in Judaism

Content

1. Sam S. B. Shonkoff, Melila Hellner-Eshed, and Jay Michaelson, “Are Psychedelics Theologically Significant for Judaism?” Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, YouTube video, April 27, 2023. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQPTb5u9F-U>

Week 10 – Week of Monday November 16

Science & Religion

Content

1. “Secular Mysticism: Entanglements of Science and Religion in Psychedelic Medicine.” Aidan Seale-Feldman, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 50, no. 2 (2026), article 30.
2. TBD

Week 11 – Week of Monday November 23

Death

Content

1. *How to Change Your Mind*, Episode 2: “Psilocybin” (Netflix, 2022).
2. TBD

Week 12 – Week of Monday November 30

Nature & Cosmology

Content

1. “Psychedelics and Connectedness to Natural and Social Worlds: An Examination of the Evidence and a Proposed Conceptual Framework.” Matthias Forstmann and Christina Sagioglou, *Current Opinion in Psychology* 62 (2025), article 101992.
2. TBD

Week 13 – Week of Monday December 7

Summary & Review

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found at [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible, and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>.

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this which assessment has been designated as requiring documentation for consideration (that is, exempt from undocumented absences).
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

If an instructor has built flexibility into their assessments (e.g., “complete 8 of 10 quizzes”), this flexibility will already address consideration needs and thus academic consideration may be denied.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the “Special Examination” (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a multiple exam situation (i.e., you are scheduled to write more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

Good2talk is an online and phone resource for students, available 24/7, with services in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's by emailing care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a Social Worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see https://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

6. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. **Check with you instructor to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality_Reports_-_TurnItIn.html.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

7. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

8. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

9. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.