

# Courses and Curriculum

---

---

## Initiative in Religion Studies at the University of South Australia (Underdale Campus)

Religion forms one strand of a new Master of Education Studies. This is a one year full-time or two years part-time award available to applicants who have completed four years of tertiary education including an education qualification.

The University of South Australia inaugurated its higher degrees program in Religion Studies with a Master of Education in 1985. It was decided that the approach should be innovative and tailored to the individual interests and requirements of the students. Almost at once students came to the notice of staff who were enrolled in the MEd but in fact were not primarily interested in the educational aspect but in the study of religion per se. As a result an MA in Religion Studies was introduced at the beginning of 1991.

The MA has attracted a wide range of students, internal ones from the Adelaide area and external students from most Australian states and from expatriates in countries such as Mozambique, Japan, Singapore and Papua New Guinea. In 1994 the intake of new students was 31 at last count bringing a total enrolment for

the MA to 50. Students are not required to have a teaching qualification (which is a prerequisite for the MEd) but they must have a 3-year BA (equivalents are considered) and preferably they should have completed study in the field of Religion Studies equal to 18 points. Where students are unsure of their ability to enter into the program immediately they can be directed to preliminary studies which would enhance their potential for acceptance into the university quota.

The MA is a 72 point award which is designed to be taken part-time over four years, 36 points of coursework and a 36 point thesis. There are four 9-point coursework subjects. They cover the major areas of investigation in Religion Studies. In the first instance religion, as a phenomenon, is legitimately studied by insiders, those committed to a particular tradition. When such people endeavour to articulate the faith-experience implied in their commitment they are involved in *theologia* or an analogue where that term is inapplicable. The first coursework unit studies *theologia*, looking at the question

of sources or dimensions and at the actual process involved. The emphasis in seminars is on the doing of Christian theology although students are allowed full liberty to apply principles learned in that setting to other traditions. Thus, one student has focussed personal study on Islamic theology, another has studied Aboriginal Australian iconography.

Religion can also be studied from the outside. Religious traditions can be studied holistically, seen as organic units which presumably provide ultimate meaning and direction to the believer. Likewise religious traditions can be analysed into component phenomena such as myth, ritual, experience, text, social structure, belief, ethics, symbol. These component phenomena can be studied across religious traditions. Hence there is the possibility of non-partisan vertical and horizontal study of religious traditions. Two semesters are given to such studies. In each of the semesters two religious traditions are selected as exemplars. Christianity is not included since it is taken as the exemplar in the first semester of the course. Choice depends on staff interests and availability but it is hoped that students would be exposed to four exemplars from the categories of ancient religion (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Indian), Eastern religion (Hinduism, Buddhism), Western religion (Judaism, Islam) and primal religion (Aboriginal Australian religions, Melanesian religions).

The fourth subject consists of critical studies of religion, those studies where tools have been borrowed from the social sciences and humanities. Such studies challenge any naive, undiscerning acceptance of information provided by religious traditions. Included under this rubric would be sociology of religion, psychology of religion, philosophy of religion, lit-

erary analysis of religious texts, feminist approaches towards religion. The actual teaching emphasis in any one semester would depend on staff interests and availability although students will be able to follow any personal interests in the field.

Internal students have a three hour intensive seminar per fortnight. A team from the Religion Studies staff is co-ordinated to challenge their thinking and they are directed to appropriate reading and the development of a minor research project. External students are provided with a subject outline, books of readings and a teleconference once a fortnight. The teleconference hooks up a manageable group of students from various parts of Australia and overseas. Contact by phone and fax complete the human network.

By the end of the four coursework subjects the students have been exposed to a wide range of methodologies and a broad content. They then begin the alternate phase of their degree which is the thesis component. They attend seminars in which a thesis proposal is prepared for submission to the Graduate Studies Committee. The thesis can cover any aspect of the religious phenomenon so long as it is viable for the student and can be adequately supervised by university staff. Associate supervision is allowed.

In addition to the coursework MA there is also a research PhD and a research MA introduced in 1994. These can be taken internally or externally and they allow for the PhD or MA to be completed entirely by submission of a research thesis. Students submit a proposal and, provided the university considers that it can be adequately supervised and the quota allows, the student is allowed to enrol and then the proposal is fine tuned for submission to the Graduate Studies Committee. In 1994 there are two PhD research stu-

dents and one MA research student in the field of Religion Studies. They rub shoulders with other PhD and MA research students in related fields of interest for the proposal preparation stage.

The interest in the coursework MA and the research PhD and MA in Religion Studies has been heartening. Many of those enrolled are employed in areas where religion is an issue. They appreciate the freedom to explore their own ideas and the ideas of others in the university environment. Others have no direct employment link with religion but are simply completing the degree out of interest. It is hoped that in time the University of South Australia, with a growing contin-

gent of post-graduate students, will be able to develop its own tradition in the field of Religion Studies.

If anyone wishes to obtain further information on the University of South Australia's offerings in Religion Studies they could contact Associate Professor Robert Crotty as regards the MA (Religion Studies) or Michael O'Donoghue as regards the MEd (Religious Education) or the MEd (Religion Studies). Information on the research MA, MEd or PhD in Religion Studies should also be addressed to Robert Crotty.

*Robert Crotty*

## Women and Religion at UNE

In 1995, the Studies in Religion Program within the Department of Philosophy at UNE will introduce a second/third year undergraduate subject in Women and Religion. Offered both internally and externally, the subject will be conducted by the Program's Co-ordinator Dr Majella Franzmann. With the discontinuance of Cynthia Dixon's external subject 'Women in Religious Traditions' at Edith Cowan, the UNE subject will be the only one of its kind on offer externally within Australia. Other subjects at the University of Queensland ('Women in World Religions' - themes around formal and informal power; an anthropological approach to Primal Religion, Aboriginal women's "women's business", new religious movements, ancient goddess religion, Christianity, Hinduism [including Hare Krishna women], Judaism, and feminist theory) and at La Trobe ('Women in Religion' - covering women's experience in Hindu-

ism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity), are not offered externally.

Prerequisites for the subject are the introductory subjects in the Studies in Religion Program ("Varieties of Religious Experience" and "How Can Religion Be Studied?") or subjects in the Diploma of Women's Studies. With this subject, the Program hopes to draw a broad range of students from those interested both in Studies in Religion and in Women's Studies.

'Women and Religion' deals with women's experience of religion and spirituality in the broadest sense, including but in no way exclusively concerned with that experience within organised religion. With regard to the latter, as with other subjects offered by the Studies in Religion Program, the focus is on comparative religion, with some investigation of women's experience within the major world religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Bud-

dhism, Christianity and Islam). The material is organised under key themes, which have been introduced previously in general terms within the first year subjects: women and the Sacred, women and sacred space, women and sacred time, women and sacred texts, women and sacred groups, contemporary Australian experience.

It may well be surprising for those who surmise that women's studies are alive and well or at least in some stage of development in all fields of academic enquiry, that this subject will be unique within the Australian university scene. There have been a smattering of courses on Women and Religion over recent years. Unfortunately people like Penny Magee from UniSA who offered Women in Asia and Women, Religion and Feminist Thought have moved on to greener (?) pastures and others have given up the fight with administrators to keep their subject afloat. Of those that remain, Erin White teaches at University of Sydney

(Feminist Hermeneutics; Feminist Theology) and TAFE SA runs a course on Women, Religion and Spirituality at Brighton campus every couple of years (a broad cause with no specific reference to the traditions except for Aboriginal Australian and Christianity).

Australia is put to shame by the activity in this area in New Zealand. I have been informed by a New Zealand colleague that at the University of Canterbury, Jane Simpson has a subject 'Religion and Gender' and at the same university William Shepard offers a section on Women in Islam. At Massey University, Bronwyn Elsmore took over Renée Turner's work and the University of Otago at Dunedin offers a one semester unit on Women and Religion, but again the material for the most part is heavily concentrated on the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

*Majella Franzmann*

## Religion Studies through Open Learning Australia

Religion Studies is now an established subject among the offerings of Open Learning Australia. The story of how this came about and the form the subjects have taken is an interesting one.

### The History

In March 1991 a consortium led by Monash and including the University of New England and the University of South Australia as well as the ABC, which was to act as the broadcaster for the project, submitted a proposal to the Commonwealth for the Open Learning Project.

The Commonwealth had called for tenders to offer University subjects to students who were unable to attend or undertake traditional University studies. There was at the time a good deal of concern about the unmet demand for University places and a desire to make use of new technologies to make tertiary education more accessible. Many thought there was also the Commonwealth's desire to offer more tertiary places on the cheap!

The initial subjects which were proposed were Australian Studies, by UNE, Marketing Theory and Practice by Monash, and Development Psychology

by the University of South Australia. Other Universities with significant Distance Education programs such as Deakin also agreed to cooperate with the venture. Eventually French, Statistics, Anthropology, and Australian Environmental Studies were added to the subjects to be offered.

The Commonwealth eventually accepted this tender and the project became known as the TV Open Learning Project. It was to be a pilot project over two years, 1992 and 1993, to test the waters. The budget was \$2 million.

How did religion studies come to be involved? It was to some extent a chance of history.

Bruce King, the director of the Distance Education Centre at the University of South Australia, approached the Religion Studies staff in late September 1991 (the subjects were due to be offered in March of 1992) with the news that the American television material which was to be the basis for the Developmental Psychology subject had been found to be inappropriate. This left a gap in the offerings. He asked if it would be possible to prepare a subject in Religion Studies by March. It would be a cooperative venture with Deakin who were also interested in offering Religion Studies through Open Learning.

Our immediate reaction was a combination of horror and enthusiasm. Horror at the very short time line, and enthusiasm because clearly here was a golden opportunity to give Religion Studies a significant place in a high profile and very public venture. The latter reaction won out and we agreed to participate. A meeting was held at the University of South Australia on 1st October 1991 with the Religion Studies team from UniSA,

Dr Ian Weeks from Deakin and Associate Professor Bruce King.

The ABC were strongly of the view that the BBC series *The Long Search* was excellent material in terms of its production qualities and urged us to use this as the television component if we thought it suitable. We agreed it was a good series and despite some weaknesses - it was ageing, it omitted Australian Aboriginal Religion, and had some weaknesses in specific segments - adopted it as the basis for the subject. Once this decision was made the form of the subject was in part determined. It was to become a survey of the major world religions. We decided to arrange the material around six topics, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Australian Aboriginal religion. Subsequent meetings of the writing group decided to write a study guide which introduced each of the traditions. It would build on John Hinnell's *A Handbook of Living Religions* as the text and each of the six sections would raise the issues of power and change in the individual religious traditions.

It was also decided to add ten minute discussions to each of the *Long Search* episodes to give them a local flavour and add material where this was felt appropriate. There was a particular concern to represent Australian aboriginal religion since the indigenous religions covered in the *Long Search* were African. These discussions were taped during two hectic days at the ABC Melbourne studios on 23 and 24th January. I must say that I was very impressed with the ABC and its staff. They were enthusiastic, supportive, professional, and committed to the success of the program.

The writing needed to be completed by the end of December to allow editorial, production and distribution time.

This meant that a first draft had to be produced in about 4-6 weeks, which put people under extreme pressure at a time when end of year assessment was about to occur. The editorial process for the group consisted of circulation of the drafts to each other for comment. It is a tribute to the people involved that they produced the material in such a short time. The writers were from the University of S.A. Robert Crotty, Jerome Crow, Bill Edwards, Penny Magee, Michael O'Donoghue, Margaret O'Toole, Evan Zuesse, and from Deakin Peter Fenner and Ian Weeks. As well as the study guide, a book of readings was developed which provided extension readings chosen by the authors of the sections.

When Open Learning was first advertised the response was overwhelming. Noone expected such a large number of people to purchase the materials. There were three options available, they could simply watch the TV programs which were broadcast from 6:30 - 7:30 each morning, or they could watch the TV programs and purchase the study materials and simply work through them by themselves, or they could watch the TV programs, purchase the study materials and submit work for assessment. The study materials costed \$150, assessment \$150 and access to library facilities \$150.

**Table 1 Student Enrolments TVOL 1992**

Subject	Number purchasing materials	Number assessed
Marketing	702	53
Religion Studies	397	89

Australian Studies	440	159
French	1914	unavailable

So overwhelming was the response that by May there were already proposals to extend the number of subjects available through the TV Open Learning project.

Later in the year the Commonwealth, without even waiting for the evaluation of the TVOL project, and obviously buoyed by the evidence of the success of the TVOL trial, called for proposals to establish an Open Learning Agency to expand and administer the delivery of Open Learning tertiary studies. This led to a period of intense rivalry between competing groups of Universities for the tender. Eventually Monash in association with a number of other universities won the tender and the new Company had to move very quickly late in 1992, when the Commonwealth eventually announced the successful tenderer and urged it to expand to include other Universities. Although the Commonwealth made an initial financial contribution, the contract specified that within a few years the Open Learning initiative had to be self funding. Calls were made for further subjects although now the need to be fully self funding meant that most subjects would be only print based and minimal new TV material was to be developed. In the midst of this uncertainty, approval was eventually given, very late in the year, to develop the second Religion Studies Subject, *Myth Ritual and the Sacred* which was to be available as a print based subject from the first study period(March) in 1993.

Again the subject had to be produced in a matter of two months and Deakin and the University of SA decided to rationalise the process so that UniSA would pro-

duce the second subject and Deakin the third.

We decided this time that, since we weren't bound by following a TV program we would adapt a subject which we already offered at the University of SA. This had the added advantage of being able to use the materials for both Open Learning and our own students.

The result was *Myth Ritual and the Sacred an introduction to the Phenomena of Religion*. A study guide and reader were produced and a text hurriedly written which was to be sold to students separately.

## Enrolments 1993-4

In 1993 558 students enrolled in Religion Studies subjects through OLA and about the same number in 1994. There are four study periods in the OLA year, March-June, July-October, October-December, January-March.

### The Subjects

There are currently three subjects in Religion Studies available through the Open Learning Agency. **Rel 11 Religion Studies: The Long Search**, **Rel 12 Myth Ritual and the Sacred** and **Rel 21 Religious Understanding: Revelations, Reasons, Beliefs**. The first two subjects are semester long, first year level subjects. The last subject is a second level semester long subject. The original TVOL subject was assessed by Logbook responses to questions and an essay for a total of 6,000 words. The Open Learning Agency however required an exam to ensure the student's bona fides, so now all three subjects are examined.

We have seen that **Religion Studies: The Long Search** is a survey of six major religious traditions. With the passage

of time we have found that we have had to cut back the requirements on students. Originally there were six logbook exercises for each of the six traditions This was far too ambitious and now the students only complete one for each tradition.

**Rel 12 Myth Ritual and the Sacred** is an introduction to religious phenomena and surveys such subjects as the sacred, sacred space, myth, pilgrimage, religious experience, sacred persons, ethics and sacred texts. Students submit two sets of brief studies and an essay before sitting for an exam.

**Religious Understanding: Revelations, Reasons, Beliefs**. Prepared by staff at Deakin University and first offered in Study period 1 beginning in March 1994. This is a print and radio based subject with 13 radio programs accompanying the print materials. It surveys a range of religious traditions and experiences of revelation within these traditions. Being a second level subject there is a limited pool of students. Only those who have completed both of the earlier subjects can proceed to this subject and numbers so far have been small. This seems to be a characteristic of Open Learning in general - large numbers of students in first level subjects but few in second level subjects.

### The Students

#### *Demographic Characteristics*

The demography of the TVOL student population reveals the religion studies students are older and more likely to be from professional groups and to be women. They are also more likely to have a tertiary degree.

These figures of course relate to the first year of the TVOL project. I don't have any comparable figures since the advent of the Open Learning Agency. My observations of our students seem to indi-

cate that while there is still a large number of mature age students there is an increasing number of younger students undertaking studies through Open Learning. This could well be related to the fact that it is now possible to complete a degree through this form of study, and a number of secondary colleges are offering tutorial assistance to students undertaking OLA subjects. The subjects may be credited towards a Bachelor of General Studies Degree, or a Bachelor of Arts Degree both from Monash and also from a number of the other participating Universities.

#### *Costs*

For undergraduate semester subjects in 1994 OLA charged \$305. My understanding is that this figure is limited by the Commonwealth and is linked to the HECS fee. Of this \$185 comes to the University of South Australia. The division thereafter is as follows.

Distance Education Centre \$75

University \$10

Faculty \$10

School \$90

The OLA, in its costing, makes provision for the marking of two assignments and an exam. This means that almost all of the \$90 is absorbed in paying for assessment of assignments. The result is that offering institutions have not been able to offer subjects on a cost neutral basis. Staff time which is absorbed in administering the OLA offerings is really funded by the contributing University. The only reason schools have been able to cushion these effects is because many students who pay for the materials never actually submit assignments.

There is no provision in this basic charge for any academic support of students. No provision for discussions with lecturers, teleconferences, teletutorials or other forms of academic support. Those

who offer each subject may make provision for a further fee to cover the cost of some form of support but this option where offered doesn't seem to have been taken up by many students.

There are payments made for writing a subject in the first place and for yearly updates of the subject, but the first of these is based on the presupposition that the OL subject is simply an adaptation of a subject taught by the contributing University so the payment is minimal.

#### **The Future**

The OLA has called for tenders for further subjects to be offered through OLA. Deakin and UniSA have submitted a proposal to extend Religion Studies into a full undergraduate major. The OLA has not as yet responded to these proposals and my understanding is that there is some discussion going on about whether the OLA will expand to full majors, and in what subjects.

Recently a very interesting proposal has come through the ABC for the ABC, and religion studies at Deakin and the University of South Australia to be part of an international project initiated from the United States of America to develop a series of television programs on religions. These would be used for the OLA religion studies subjects but would have wider use. Discussions on this initiative are continuing.

What will be the impact of Open Learning on Religion Studies in Australia? It is too early to assess this. But it is encouraging to see some of the Open Learning students going on to take up further studies in religion at Deakin and University of South Australian (and perhaps elsewhere?).

*Michael O'Donoghue  
Religion Studies, UniSA*