

RELG 254: Introduction to Yoga Traditions

Winter 2021
McGill University
School of Religious Studies

Mondays and Wednesdays
10:05 – 11:25 am

Instructor: Hamsa Stainton
Email: hamsa.stainton@mcgill.ca
Office hours: by appointment via phone or Zoom

Teaching Assistant: Anna Lee White
Email: annalee.white@mail.mcgill.ca
Office hours: by appointment via phone or Zoom

Format:

Due to COVID-19, this course will be offered **remotely through a combination of asynchronous lecture recordings AND synchronous “live” Zoom class meetings at the scheduled time**. These synchronous, “live” class sessions will include various small and large group discussions and other exercises, and **they will not be recorded**. Students who miss these classes will have to make up the material covered through other means, such as by obtaining notes from classmates. However, select materials from these “live” classes will be posted online, such as handouts and links to films watched and discussed in class.

Please note: while attendance will not be taken, students are expected to attend lectures regularly and complete the required readings. This expectation is reflected in the methods of evaluation used throughout the course. In the past, students have not succeeded in this course without regular attendance and keeping up with the readings.

In addition, I remind everyone of their responsibility in ensuring that video recordings and associated material are not reproduced or placed in the public domain. This means that each of you can use it for your educational (and research) purposes, but you cannot allow others to use it by putting it up on the Internet or by giving it or selling it to others who may also copy it and make it available. Please refer to [McGill’s Guidelines for Instructors and Students on Remote Teaching and Learning](#) for further information. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Course overview:

This course is an historical and thematic investigation into yoga, including its classical formulations, esoteric practices, and contemporary developments and debates. It explores early yoga traditions as well as the development of modern yoga in India and “the West,” along with themes such as the body and asceticism, power(s) and liberation, spirituality and consumerism, post-colonialism, politics, and religious exoticism.

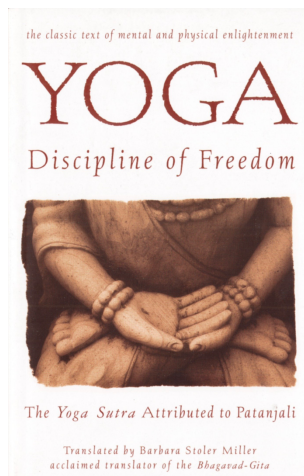


“Vishnu Vishwarupa,” c. 1800-1820, Rajasthan

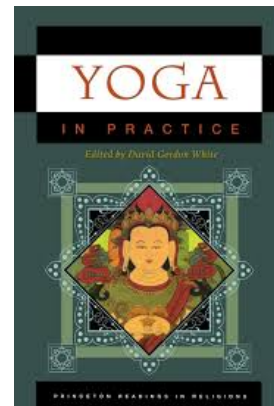
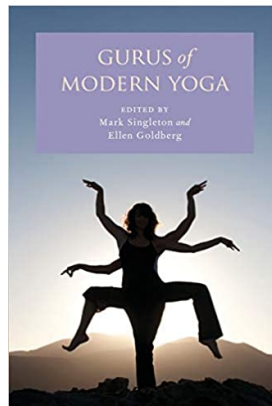
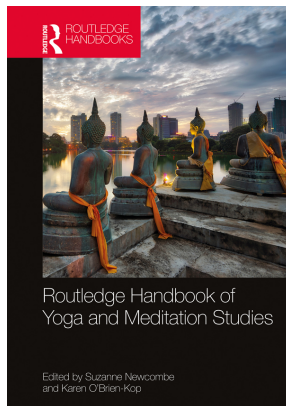
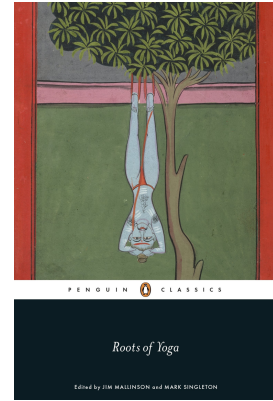
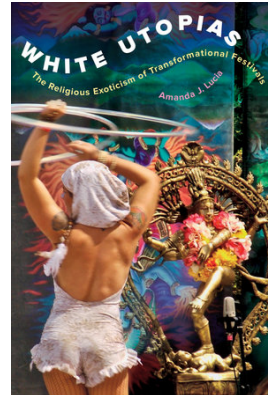
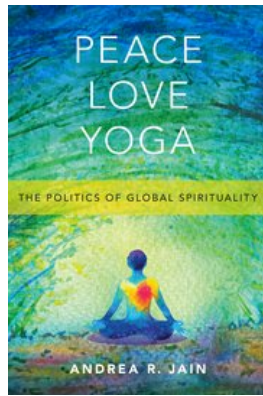
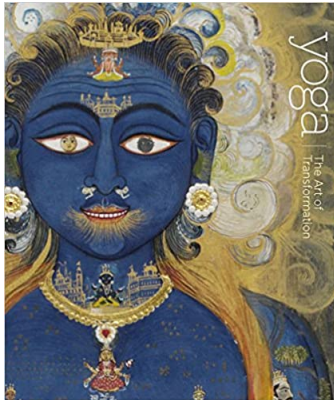
Readings:

Except for one book, all readings for the course will be available through myCourses. The following required book is available through the McGill bookstore:

Miller, Barbara Stoler, trans. *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patañjali*. Bantam Books, 1998.



Other readings for the course will be drawn from various primary and secondary sources and posted on myCourses. These will include selections from the following books:



Diamond, Debra, et al. *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*. Smithsonian Institution, 2013.

Jain, Andrea R. *Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Lucia, Amanda J. *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals*. University of California Press, 2020.

Mallinson, James, and Mark Singleton, trans. and eds. *Roots of Yoga*. Penguin Books, 2017.

Newcombe, Suzanne, and Karen O'Brien-Kop, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*. Routledge, 2020.

Singleton, Mark, and Ellen Goldberg, eds. *Gurus of Modern Yoga*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

White, David Gordon, ed. *Yoga in Practice*. Princeton University Press, 2012.

Assessment and grading:

Reading responses	20% (10% x 2)
Essay #1	25%

Essay #2	25%
“Field” report	30%

All assignments for the course are written work completed outside of class. The “field” report is an analytic paper based on an experiential research activity you conduct outside of class. The standard activity will be to engage in several different types of embodied yoga practices at home via virtual classes or other such guidance, whether they are primarily meditative or physical, and to reflect upon and contextualize these activities in light of the course as a whole. For those who would rather not complete this particular activity, please be in touch with me **at least three weeks before the due date** and we can discuss an alternative assignment. Detailed guidelines for the field report and other assignments will be distributed and discussed during the course.

Assessment timeline and key dates:

- Wed., Feb. 3: Reading response #1 on *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom* due via myCourses by the start of class
- Mon., Feb. 22: Essay #1 due via myCourses by the start of class
- Wed., March 24: Essay #2 due via myCourses by the start of class
- Wed., April 7: Reading response #2 on “Neoliberal Yoga” and *Yoga Journal* due via myCourses by the start of class
- Mon., April 26: Field report due via myCourses by 5 pm

Schedule:

Please note that some lectures will be recorded and made available for viewing by the start of the scheduled class via myCourses. These are noted with **[RECORDED]** after the subject heading. Other class meetings will be held live at the scheduled time and generally will NOT be recorded, so attendance will be critical. These are noted with **[LIVE]** after the subject heading. The general pattern is that Monday classes will be recorded, while Wednesday classes will be live, but there are two exceptions: the first and last weeks of the course, which consist of live classes only.

All readings should be completed by the day they are listed on the syllabus below, and should be accessible during class on the day they are listed. Please note that the following schedule may change slightly during the course. Changes will be announced in class and posted on myCourses.

Week One:

Monday, January 11: Course introduction [LIVE]

Wednesday, January 13: Defining “yoga” [LIVE]

Readings: *Roots of Yoga*, Mallinson and Singleton, pp. ix-xxii, xxxiii-xl, 3-16;
“Yoga, Brief History of an Idea,” White, pp. 20-23

Week Two: Asceticism and early yogic practices

Monday, January 18: Yoga in the Upanishads [RECORDED]

Readings: Selections from *The Upaniṣads*, trans. Olivelle

Wednesday, January 20: The legacy of the Upanishads [LIVE]

Readings: “Ascetic Withdrawal or Social Engagement,” Olivelle; “How Yoga Became Yoga: Yoga and meditation up to the classical period,” Kengo Harimoto

Week Three: Yoga in the Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā

Monday, January 25: Yoga in the *Mahābhārata* [RECORDED]

Readings: “A Prescription for *Yoga* and Power in the *Mahābhārata*,” Fitzgerald

Wednesday, January 27: Yoga in the *Bhagavadgītā* [LIVE]

Readings: “Yoga Practices in the *Bhagavadgītā*,” Malinar

Week Four: Patañjali’s Yoga

Monday, February 1: Introduction to the *Yoga Sūtra* [RECORDED]

Readings: *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, trans. Miller, pp. xi-43

Wednesday, February 3: Philosophy and practice in the *Yoga Sūtra* [LIVE]

Readings: *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, trans. Miller, pp. 44-86

READING RESPONSE #1 DUE VIA MYCOURSES BY THE START OF THE CLASS

Week Five: Yoga, Tantra, and the subtle/yogic/tantric body

Monday, February 8: Yoga in the Tantras [**RECORDED**]

Readings: “The Tantric Body,” Padoux

Wednesday, February 10: Kuṇḍalinī, cakras, and the subtle body [**LIVE**]

Readings: Selections from *Roots of Yoga*, Mallinson and Singleton; selections from the *Vijñānabhairava*, trans. Singh

Week Six: Haṭha Yoga and the Nāth Yogis

Monday, February 15: The early history of Haṭha Yoga [**RECORDED**]

Readings: “Haṭha Yoga,” Mallinson; selections from the *Haṭhayogapradīpika*, trans. Akers

Wednesday, February 17: Nāth Yogīs [**LIVE**]

Readings: “Nāth Sampradāya,” Mallinson; “Yoga & Yogis,” Mallinson

Week Seven

Monday, February 22: Yoga across South Asian religious traditions, Part I [**RECORDED**]

Readings: “Yoga and Meditation in the Jain Tradition,” Pragma; “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga,” Ernst

ESSAY #1 DUE VIA MYCOURSES BY THE START OF CLASS

Wednesday, February 24: Yoga across South Asian religious traditions, Part II [**LIVE**]

Readings: “Buddhist Meditation in South Asia: An Overview,” Deleanu; “Yoga in Tibet,” Worth

Week Eight: Study week

Monday, March 1: NO CLASS (STUDY BREAK)

Wednesday, March 3: NO CLASS (STUDY BREAK)

Week Nine: Yoga and the colonial encounter

Monday, March 8: Early European representations of yogins [RECORDED]

Readings: “Fakirs, Yogins, Europeans,” Singleton

Wednesday, March 10: Yoga and Western Esotericism [LIVE]

Readings: “Yoga and Meditation in Modern Esoteric Traditions,” Strube

Week Ten: Vivekananda to Krishnamacharya

Monday, March 15: Swami Vivekananda and Rāja Yoga [RECORDED]

Readings: “Manufacturing Yogis: Swami Vivekananda as a Yoga Teacher,” Killingley; selections from *Rāja Yoga*, Vivekananda

Wednesday, March 17: Krishnamacharya and international fitness culture in Mysore [LIVE]

Readings: “Yoga, Bodybuilding, and Wrestling: Metaphysical Fitness,” Alter; “T. Krishnamacharya, ‘Father of Modern Yoga’,” Singleton and Fraser

Week Eleven: Twentieth-century developments

Monday, March 22: Krishnamacharya’s legacy [RECORDED]

Readings: selections from *Light on Yoga*, Iyengar; “Becoming an Icon: B.K.S. Iyengar as a Yoga Teacher and Yoga Guru,” Smith and White

Wednesday, March 24: Yoga and politics in India and the world [LIVE]

Readings: “Globalized Modern Yoga,” Singleton; “Decolonizing Yoga,” Black,

Podcast: “Om Alone in India,” Rough Translation Podcast, September 17, 2017 (<https://www.npr.org/2017/11/08/551738065/om-alone-in-india>)

ESSAY #2 DUE VIA MYCOURSES BY THE START OF CLASS

Week Twelve: Yoga, politics, and neoliberalism

Monday, March 29: Swami Ramdev [**RECORDED**]

Readings: “Hindu Ascetics and the Political in Contemporary India,” Voix; “Swami Ramdev: Modern Yoga Revolutionary,” Sarbacker

Wednesday, March 31: Neoliberal yoga [**LIVE**]

Readings: “Neoliberal Yoga,” Andrea Jain; *Yoga Journal* (June 2013; browse the whole issue but choose two articles or parts to focus on for class discussion)

Week Thirteen: Contemporary contexts and challenges

Monday, April 5: NO CLASS (Legal Holiday)

Wednesday, April 7: Yoga and violence [**LIVE**]

Readings: “SELF LOVE CLUB: Neoliberal Feminism and the Call to Heal the Self, Not the System,” in *Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality*, Jain

Note: Please be aware that this chapter discusses yoga and sexual violence at some length. No one will be required or called upon to speak in large or small groups during class, though volunteers may choose to do so.

READING RESPONSE #2 DUE AT THE START OF CLASS (Note: this is a reading response to the readings from March 31st—“Neoliberal Yoga” and *Yoga Journal*—but it is due on April 7th so that the class discussion of March 31st can inform the response essay)

Week Fourteen: Global yoga in the 21st century

Monday, April 12: Religious exoticism and transformational festivals, Global Yoga [**LIVE**]

Readings: “Introduction” in *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals*, Lucia

Wednesday, April 14: Discussion: Yoga in the news [**LIVE**]

Readings: To be determined (students should submit suggestions by Friday, April 9th)

Thursday, April 15: Final reflections, including Q&A about field reports [**LIVE**]

Monday, April 26: FIELD REPORT DUE VIA MYCOURSES BY 5 PM

*

Policy statements and additional information:

The Lands and Waters on Which We Meet: McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations. These nations are hereby honoured, recognized and respected as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the “Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/> for more information). It is your responsibility to educate yourself on this issue. Please do so using the resources here: <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/publications/>

If you still have questions regarding academic culture at McGill after reviewing these documents, you are urged to consult with the instructor personally. Any student found to have submitted plagiarised work will be referred to the Faculty Disciplinary Officer for further action, as outlined under “Academic Integrity”:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/policies>

In addition, please note: Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

Language of Submission: In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue.)

Assessment: The University Student Assessment Policy (https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/2016-04_student_assessment_policy.pdf) exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. All students and instructors are encouraged to review this Policy, which addresses multiple aspects and methods of student assessment, e.g. the timing of evaluation due dates and weighting of final examinations.

Copyright and recordings: Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that

infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

Equal access and academic accommodations: As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009).

The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) is the unit that provides support if you feel that difficulties and impairments are hindering your academic performance while at McGill or if you require assistance with access. You should contact OSD regardless of whether the difficulties you are experiencing are permanent or temporary, and they provide assistance to both undergraduate and graduate students. Various Health and Wellbeing resources are available at <https://www.mcgill.ca/oasis/resources/health-wellbeing>, and the OSD website is at <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>

Course evaluations: End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

Responsibility for material: Students remain responsible for assigned material in every instance of absence. Generally I do not distribute notes or copies of PowerPoint presentations to students. I believe that note taking is an important part of the educational process, both in terms of conceptual understanding and information retention. Therefore, if you find it necessary to miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from another student, after which I will be happy to review any information with you during office hours. For this reason, it is a good idea to introduce yourself to at least one other person in the class if you do not know someone already.

Schedule of readings and assignments: All reading assignments are to be completed by the class date for which they are listed and must be brought to class in either paper or digital form. The schedule of readings and lecture topics may change slightly during the course, and any such minor changes will be announced in class and posted on myCourses.