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**UNIVERSITY  
OF ABERDEEN**

**DEPARTMENT of SOCIOLOGY**

**POST-GRADUATE STUDIES IN**

**RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

**(MASTERS, DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE)**

**HANDBOOK**

**2010-2011**

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## ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Welcome to the Department of Sociology in the School of Social Science at the University of Aberdeen. The Department enjoys a reputation as one of the leading centres for the study of sociology in the United Kingdom, being recognised both nationally and internationally for the outstanding quality of its teaching and research.

Our prominence can be seen in many ways. A recent national assessment of teaching quality at undergraduate level judged our Department as 'Excellent', the highest mark attainable. And, in the most recent assessment of the quality of research in UK universities (RAE 2008) we were ranked joint sixth in the UK and one of the top two departments for sociology in Scotland.

The Department's success has been largely driven by the quality of its faculty, which have gained international reputations for conducting high-quality research in the following areas:

- Religion and secularisation
- Global and political sociology
- Cultural diversity and socio-economic inequality

### Aberdeen Sociology in the News

The *Times* Newspaper's Good University Guide consistently ranks the Department as one of the top centres for the study of sociology in the UK.

The Department "ranks as one of the highest achieving departments in the UK"

Dr Norman Bonney in *The Times Higher Education*

## **ABOUT THE RELIGION AND SOCIETY PROGRAMME**

The MSc, Diploma and Certificate in Religion and Society will provide students with an advanced sociological understanding of the reciprocal interactions of religion and society, with particular focus on the modern west. The programme is ideal either for those looking to pursue doctoral studies in the area, or for those who wish to continue their professional development, drawing upon their experience in parish, congregational and community development, or religious education.

The degree programme is the first of its kind in Scotland, the only one taught in a sociology department in the UK, and reflects the strong concentration of research interest in the sociology of religion in the department. Staff with interest in the sociological study of religion include: Professor John Brewer (religion, violence and peacemaking), Professor Steve Bruce (secularisation), Mr Tony Glendinning (religion and sectarianism), Professor Bernadette Hayes (women and religion, religious non-participation), Dr Andrew McKinnon (religion and social theory, religious conflict) and Dr Marta Trzebiatowska (gender, sexuality and religion).

### **PROGRAMME AIMS**

The programme aims to provide its students with an advanced social scientific understanding of religion and society. After successfully completing the programme, students should be equipped with:

- an understanding of the key debates in sociology of religion
- the ability to think theoretically and critically about religion and society processes.
- the ability to sustain life-long learning and intellectual development.
- the ability to undertake independent social scientific research.

### **PROGRAMME STRUCTURE**

The programme can be taken either full-time over a 12-month period, or part-time over a 24-month period. The requirements for the particular degrees awarded by the programme are listed below:

- The Master of Science (MSc) in Religion and Society requires the successful completion of 180 credits, including 60 credits from the two core courses, 30 credits from the research methods course, 30 credits from an approved elective, and 60 credits for competing a 10-15 thousand word dissertation.
- The Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Religion and Society requires the successful completion of 120 credits, including 60 credits from the two

core courses, 30 credits from the research methods course, and 30 credits from an approved elective.

- The Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Religion and Society requires the successful completion of 60 credits from the two core courses.

A typical course schedule for a full-time, MSc student is shown below:

First Half-Session (September to December)

- Advanced Social Theory (30 credits)
- Qualitative Research Methods (30 credits)

Second Half-Session (January to May)

- Religious Belief and Practice in the Modern World (30 credits)
- Elective option (30 credits)

Summer Session (June to August)

- Dissertation (60 credits)

## **PORTFOLIO OF COURSES**

### **Core Course: Religious Belief and Practice in the Modern World**

This course explores patterns of belief and un-belief in modern religion. It focuses, in particular, on the secularization paradigm and those who have dissented from it, and evidence of both decline and growth in religious belief and practice. It explores the dynamics of belief across the different world religions, and examines the particular threat to the future of the Christian churches as a result of declining participation and practice in mainstream Christian churches. The course also addresses the alternative forms of spirituality that are evidenced in the West, such as new forms of religious movements, New Age spirituality, the mutation of religion into memory and cultural tradition, as well as the growth of other world religions in the modern West.

### **Core Course: Advanced Social Theory**

The programme's core theory module aims to provide an understanding of contemporary theoretical approaches in sociology. Classical sociology can be understood as an attempt to understand the transition to modernity and the effect this has had on society. Three fundamental sociological traditions emerged, each taking one form of social change as their central concern: industrial revolution and the shift to capitalist social relations (Marx), the emergence of the modern bureaucratic military state (Weber), and the transition to a more complex form of social organizations where social cohesion can no longer be generated by shared religion or ethnicity (Durkheim). Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changes in social

organization have accelerated and transformed further, and out of these three traditions sociology has developed a wealth of theoretical approaches to try to come to grips with these changes. This course provides an in depth look at some of the most influential theorists and schools of thought in contemporary sociology, as they struggle to understand fundamental processes such as globalization, late modernity, and the information technology revolution, and their effects on such things as identity, gender, knowledge production, social structures, inequality, culture, capitalism and the State.

### **Core Course: Qualitative Sociology: Philosophy and Methods**

This two-part course introduces students to a range of methods used in qualitative sociological research (such as participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, diaries, photography and film, and archived data sources). The emphasis will be on the research process, from project design to analysis and presentation, with methodological issues raised in the context of researchable questions. Issues of reliability, representativeness and validity, and the potential for combining methods will be addressed. Students use the course work to develop their research interests and reflect on their research practices.

### **Primary Elective Courses for 2010-11**

One elective course will be chosen from a portfolio of courses available on other MSc degree programmes in the Department of Sociology, the School of Social Sciences, or the College of Arts and Social Sciences (including history, divinity, religious studies, and languages and literature). The elective course chosen will be made with the advice of the Programme Director, and in accordance with the needs and inclinations of the student. Below is a sample of elective course being offered during the 2010-11 academic year.

#### **(1) Dimensions of Globalization**

This interdisciplinary course focuses on substantive dimensions of globalization by considering recent changes occurring in the economic, political, social, and cultural realms of society. These themes are analyzed by considering recent empirical studies, which seek to clarify our theoretical understand of globalization through advanced social scientific research. The substantive themes covered include global capitalism, the global division of labour, global governance, the changing role of the nation-state, transnational social change, and cultural homogenization and heterogenization. Interconnections between these aspects of globalization are highlighted.

#### **(2) Comparative Study of European Societies**

The core course will look at Europe as a society as well as by comparing different nations and regions within it. It will look not just at the European Union, but also countries that are also in the broadest sense “European”

stretching to the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. It will address key contemporary issues such as citizenship and belonging, identities in a European context, work, family and the demographic challenge as well as work-life balance. The quality of life in Europe and social capital may also be addressed as well as issues of social stratification. The course will look at contemporary phenomena such as xenophobia and racism from a sociological perspective. Hence it will consider problems and challenges in considering Europe as a society. In addition to considering these key issues, the course will take a research perspective by looking at the evidence for these trends and patterns, enabling students to be able to seek out information and assess it for themselves.

### **(3) Quantitative Sociology: Philosophy and Methods**

This course covers quantitative approaches to sociological research (including design, sampling, administration, instruments, measures and levels of measurement, formulation of hypotheses and operationalisation of concepts, and access to secondary survey data). The course also covers more advanced statistical techniques, such as multivariate analysis for categorical data. Various quantitative approaches are illustrated by means of existing studies. It will normally be possible to link the course material with the student's particular research interests.

### **(4) Sex, Gender, Violence: Critical Approaches**

This course investigates the ways people think about, understand, and respond to violence. How do we know what counts as violence or a violence act? Why does legislation against violence often seem inadequate, perhaps especially in the case of gendered and sexual violence? As the links between sex, gender and violence appear intimate and often lethal, a central but not exclusive focus of this course will be on theories and practices of sex/gender. We will focus on specific texts, for example Slavoj Žižek's 'Violence: Six Sideways Reflections' (2009, Profile Books) throughout the course. We will consider how violence is represented, for example in media representations of conflicts, or in popular culture such as films. We will also analyze legislative attempts to deal with violence for example in the arena of human rights and gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, we will pay close attention to the brutal fecundity of violence through the banality of every-day ordinary violence. This will be a seminar class with the emphasis on student led participation and discussion rather than lectures.

## **PROGRAMME DIRECTOR**

The degree programme is convened by Dr Andrew McKinnon, a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology. He has studied at the Universities of British Columbia (BA, MA) and Toronto, where he was previously Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Science at the Scarborough. His writings in the sociology of religion include articles published in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, *Critical Sociology*, and *Sociological Theory*. He has recently written the chapter on classical foundations for the sociology of religion in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* edited by Bryan S Turner (2010).

## **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

### **HOW TO APPLY**

Applicants to the Religion and Society Programme should hold an Honours degree in the social sciences or related fields (at a 2:1 standard or higher) from a recognised university. Under exceptional circumstances, applicants without these qualifications may still be admitted, provided they have an approved level of work experience in a related field and strong references.

Additionally, non-native English speakers must demonstrate their competence in the English language. Details on this requirement are posted on the University's web site:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sras/international/english.shtml>

Applications can be submitted at any time, but for full consideration, please apply by 1 April. For further information, including an online application, contact the Postgraduate Admissions Office:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sras/postgraduate/apply.shtml>

### **FUNDING**

Students entering the Religion and Society Programme can pursue funding from the College of Arts and Social Science (CASS) at the University of Aberdeen. Each year, the College awards several prestigious postgraduate studentships. Applications for these studentships, which range from £15,000 per annum, are welcomed from students of any nationality. To be considered for these awards, applications must be received by 1 March for the first-round of awards, and 1 June for the second round of awards. Unsuccessful applicants to the first-round of awards are automatically considered for the second-round of awards. Decisions are announced during the month following the respective deadline.

Further information, including details on the application procedure, can be found at the following web site:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cass/graduate/funding/funding.php?S776475303137=18e90712e3dac222ae058f824c0cd4bf>

#### **CONTACTS AND FURTHER DETAILS**

General information for postgraduate study at the University, including an online application form, can be found at:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sras/postgraduate/apply.shtml>

The University's postgraduate prospectus can be accessed at:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/prospectus/pgrad/>

Further particulars about the Department and staff can be found at:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sociology>

University's regulations governing postgraduate education can be found at:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/calendar/postgrad/inxdex.shtml>

Additionally, the following individuals can likely answer your questions:

##### *Programme Director*

Dr Andrew McKinnon  
School of Social Sciences,  
F19 Edward Wright Building, Dunbar St.  
King's College, Aberdeen, AB24 3QY, UK  
E-mail: [andrew.mckinnon@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.mckinnon@abdn.ac.uk)  
Telephone: +44 (0)1224 27 2723

##### *School Postgraduate Secretary*

Alyson Millar, Edward Wright Building, Room F48  
Dunbar St. Old Aberdeen, AB24 3QY, UK  
Email: [socscipg@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:socscipg@abdn.ac.uk)  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1224 272762

##### *School Administrative Officer*

Linda Trotter, Edward Wright Building Room F46,  
Dunbar St, Old Aberdeen, AB24 3QY, UK  
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Telephone: +44 (0)1224 272760 / 272275

## QUALITY CONTROL AND ASSESSMENT

The Department of Sociology manages the Religion and Society Programme in accordance with the University's standard procedures for quality control and assessment.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The Religion and Society Programme assesses the performance of its students exclusively by means of course work, mostly take-home essays, rather than formal examinations. Students are allowed one resubmission of failed work, but no resubmission of the dissertation.

All submitted work is assessed by two markers from the School of Social Science. For course work, one of the markers is the course convenor, and for the dissertation, one of the markers is the student's advisor. Furthermore, marks given by these internal assessors are subjected to oversight by the Department's External Examiner, Professor Elizabeth Ettore from the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Liverpool.

### **COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE**

Consistent with all departments and programmes at the University of Aberdeen, the Religion and Society Programme awards course and dissertation marks based on the Common Assessment Scale. This 20-point scale, with the following demarcations, aims to standardize the assessment process:

#### *Distinction (20-18)*

Excellent understanding of central concepts and theories; outstanding analytical ability; original, insightful and critical arguments; evidence of extensive reading.

#### *Very Good (17-15)*

Sound knowledge and understanding of most concepts and theories; able to argue logically and organise material intelligently; good use of examples to illustrate points and justify arguments; evidence of wide reading and appreciation of the subject.

#### *Good (14-12)*

Competent understanding of central concepts and theories; shows limited ability to argue logically and organise material effectively; too little critical insight; evidence of only limited reading and appreciation of the subject.

*Pass (11-9)*

Only partial grasp of concepts and theories; tendency to introduce irrelevant material; inaccuracies in reporting ideas or data; trouble developing coherent arguments; weak or careless presentation; little evidence of reading.

*Fail (8-6)*

Poor grasp of basic concepts leading to nonsensical reasoning; some attempt to complete assignment, but submitted work seriously lacks appropriate content and/or effective organization.

*Fail (5-0)*

Lacks basic knowledge of core ideas; only token submission of assignment.

**DEGREE CLASSIFICATION**

After successfully completing the programme, students will be awarded degrees falling into one of three classifications.

*Distinction:* Students receive marks of 18 or above for at least half of their assessed work (including the dissertation), marks of 15 or above for at least three quarters of their assessed work, and (normally) marks of 12 or above for all of their assessed work.

*Commendation:* Students receive marks of 15 or above for at least three quarters of their assessed work, and (normally) marks of 12 or above for all of their assessed work.

*Standard Degree:* Students receive marks of 12 or above for three quarters of their coursework, and 9 or above for all assessed work, including their dissertation.