





# Religious Studies (RELS) 313

## Early Christians (Revision 1)

**Status:** Replaced with new revision, see the [course listing](#)  for the current revision 

**Delivery mode:** [Individualized study online](#) 

**Credits:** 3

**Areas of study:** Arts or Humanities

**Prerequisite:** None

**Precluded:** RELS 313 is a cross-listed course—a course listed under three different disciplines—with **HUMN 313** and **HIST 313**. (RELS 313 may not be taken for credit if credit has already been obtained for HIST 313, HUMN 249, 313, 321, or 350.)

**Challenge:** RELS 313 has a challenge for credit option.

**Faculty:** [Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences](#) 

## Overview

*Early Christians* was written by Dr. Lisa Micheelsen, Ph. D. (Alberta), an expert in ancient religion, philosophy, history and culture. The course helps students to explore the identity, history and thought of the early Christians from the forces that shaped the birth of Christianity down to approximately the sixth century CE.

This is not so much a course on the development of doctrine or texts, but on who the early Christians were, what they practiced, how they lived, and how they came to formulate a religious identity. The course begins with the historical context, and considers the development of Jewish monotheism, history, and conflict with the Romans. It then discusses Roman historical, cultural, and religious factors, and from there explores the development of the religion that these two cultures together produced. We will explore not only the development of religious identity, but acceptance and persecution of those who affiliate themselves with it, and the eventual rise of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Consideration will be given to the composition of key texts—their sources and social factors at work in their development—as well as controversial claims concerning “lost Christianities” and the idea that Christianity should be classified as a Roman mystery cult.

## Outline

- Unit 1: Introduction
- Skills Module 1: Library Research Skills
- Unit 2: The Historical Context: Jewish Origins
- Skills Module 2: Chicago Style Documentation
- Unit 3: The Historical Context: The Romans
- Unit 4: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth
- Unit 5: The Jewish/Christian Split, Early Christian Texts, and Communities
- Unit 6: Attitudes Towards Early Christians on the Part of the Romans: From Indifference to Hostility to Acceptance
- Skills Module 3: Organizing an Essay

- Unit 7: Did the Story of Jesus Spawn a New Mystery Cult in the Roman World?
- Unit 8: Textual Developments
- Unit 9: Christian Tolerance and Intolerance
- Skills Module 4: Using Evidence Effectively
- Unit 10: Asceticism/Monasticism
- Skills Module 5: Academic Integrity—Avoiding Plagiarism
- Unit 11: Eschatology
- Unit 12: A New Way of Viewing the World
- Unit 13: The End of Early Christianity and the Spread of the Religion

## Evaluation

To **receive credit** [↗](#) for RELS 313, you must achieve a course composite grade of at least D (50 percent) and a grade of at least **D (50 percent)** [📄](#) on the final examinations. The weighting of the course assignments is as follows:

Activity	Weight
Assignment 1: Short Essay–Primary Source Report	20%
Assignment 2: Research Plan for Long Essay	5%
Assignment 3: Long Research Essay	30%
4 Online Quizzes	10%
Final Examination	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

The **final examination** for this course must be requested in advance and written under the supervision of an AU-approved exam invigilator. Invigilators include either ProctorU or an approved in-person invigilation centre that can

accommodate online exams. Students are responsible for payment of any invigilation fees. Information on exam request deadlines, invigilators, and other exam-related questions, can be found at the [Exams and grades](#) section of the Calendar.

To learn more about assignments and examinations, please refer to Athabasca University's [online Calendar](#).

## Materials

### Digital course materials

Links to the following course materials will be made available in the course:

Burrus, Virginia, ed. *Late Ancient Christianity. A People's History of Christianity*, 2. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Horsley, Richard A., ed. *Christian Origins. A People's History of Christianity*, 1. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. 2nd. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

### Other Materials

The balance of your course materials will be accessed online.

## Challenge for credit


### Overview

The challenge for credit process allows you to demonstrate that you have acquired a command of the general subject matter, knowledge, intellectual and/or other skills that would normally be found in a university-level course.

Full information about [challenge for credit](#) can be found in the Undergraduate Calendar.

### Evaluation





To [receive credit](#) for the RELS 313 challenge registration, a student must obtain approval from the Course Coordinator and achieve at least a D (50

percent) on each of the three challenge components and a composite grade of at least a **D (50 percent)** .

Activity	Weight
Research Report	40%
Exam 1 (3 hours)	30%
Exam 2 (3 hours)	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

 [Challenge for credit course registration form](#)

## Important links

- › [Academic advising](#) 
- › [Program planning](#) 
- › [Request assistance](#) 
- › [Support services](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

*Opened in Revision 1, November 2, 2012*

*Updated January 16, 2025*