

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 100-002 • Spring 2017

Professor: Dr. Russell McCutcheon
Office: Manly Hall 211

Email: russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu
Office Hour: by appointment

REL Department Office: Manly Hall 212

Lectures
11:00-12:15 TTh • Gordon Palmer 208

Course Website:
www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100mccutch.html

DESCRIPTION

As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, this section of REL 100 focuses on studying how we define religion and—more importantly, perhaps—the practical effects of those definitions. The course, then, is on **the practical implications of classification**, using the common act of calling something *religious* as our way into this complicated topic. **Our goal is therefore to consider whether classification may be about the classifier as much as the thing being classified.** To prepare, we will survey some classic issues in the academic study of religion—e.g., identifying an essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approach to definition, as well as familiarizing ourselves with various classical theories and theorists of religion. We will then apply these skills to the analysis of two U.S. Supreme Court decisions whose outcomes depended on how the Justices defined something as *religion*. The course concludes not with a final exam but, instead, with a group project in which students must identify and then analyze a contemporary example of their own, found in the news (whether in or outside of the U.S.) where the practical effects of defining some claim, action, or group as *religious* can be made evident if read using the critical tools acquired in the course.

As a Core Curriculum Humanities course, REL 100's goals are therefore for all students to learn about issues involved in attempts to define, accurately describe, and compare in a non-evaluative manner so as to find what they think to be significant similarities and differences among forms of observable human behavior. And, although focusing on what's involved in designating some human action or institution as *religious*, the course's focus on classification and comparison can be applied to a variety of other human actions and institutions.

OBJECTIVES

Among this course's many objectives are the following goals:

1. To learn to identify/distinguish between essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance definitions
2. To learn to identify/distinguish between theological & anthropocentric approaches to religion
3. To learn to identify/distinguish between an emic and an etic viewpoint.
4. To learn to define key concepts and identify scholars relevant to the academic study of religion

BOOKS

The course has one **required** book, that can be purchased at the University Supply Store, local book stores, or at such sites as amazon.com or bn.com; used copies are also widely available:

Studying Religion: An Introduction (Equinox/Routledge, 2007)

Please alert the professor if you are having trouble acquiring the book.

READINGS

The course website (**not** the Blackboard site) contains links either to online readings or PDFs that may be required along with the course books. The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day. **Doing all of your assigned readings in advance of class is important because our lectures and discussions all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings.** This course presupposes that you have come to class ready both to acquire new information and also discuss (and thereby reinforce) the information that you have already acquired by doing your preparation. The integration of the new and unfamiliar, on the one hand, with, on the other, the familiar is what this course defines as learning.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Lynn Funkhouser, an Anthropology graduate student, will be the TA in this course; her role will be limited to grading and maintaining our Blackboard site where you can obtain your grades. She will hold office hours but mainly to return graded items to students. **Contact the professor or Lynn (lynnfunkhouser@gmail.com) by email if you wish to make an appointment or ask a question.**

EXCUSED ABSENCES DURING QUIZZES, TESTS, AND EXAMS

If you miss a quiz or a test, you must contact the professor **immediately** to explain your absence and, for example, provide a Dr's note to document the reason for the absence; only absences deemed legitimate by the professor will be allowed. Make-up tests are **not** an option in this course; instead, for test absences that the professor deems legitimate, the portion of the grade dedicated to the missed test **will be completely transferred to the next test.** Failing to participate in the final group project for a reason deemed legitimate by the professor will result in that portion of the grade being evenly divided among all previous course work (i.e., not just the test portion of the course grade).

EXTRA CREDIT

There are 5 films, shown as part of REL 360 (see the course website here, for dates/times/locations: <https://religion.ua.edu/rel360film.html>); students in REL 100.002 are welcome at these evening films, attending both the movie and discussion afterward (led by an REL professor). In the class immediately following each of these films you must submit a one page, double-spaced, description of the discussion that followed the film for a possible total of 1 extra points in our course. There will also be an opportunity for extra credit on March 21 at 7:00pm in the Ferguson Center 3104, when we offer our annual Aronov Lecture. Finally, our Dept. is celebrating its 50th anniversary this semester, and those events (one on Mar 28 [2 pm] and two on Mar 29 [9 am-noon and 6 pm]) will constitute another opportunity. More information on these events will be provided later in the semester.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance and adequate preparation for each day's readings are expected and required to do well in this course. See the schedule, below, for each day's readings.
2. There will be four equally weighted tests (each devoted to two chapters of our course book) that focus mainly on the bolded technical terms and scholars who appear in each chapter; bolded technical terms are defined in the book's Glossary and scholars who are named in the chapters are discussed in greater length in the list of scholars at the back of the book. Content from class that is relevant to these technical terms and scholars is also testable material. Each test is worth **15%** of your course grade for a total of **60%** of your overall course grade.

3. There will be a total of 10 unannounced pop quizzes in this course, with at least one per chapter of the course book. They will each require you to answer a basic question on the chapter's content as evidence of your preparation for that class. They are each worth 2 points (partial points will be possible to earn) for a total of **20%** of your course grade. These quiz points add up so please take them seriously.

4. There is **no final exam** in this course; instead, a final group project is worth **20%** of your course grade. By Th Apr 6 students must form groups of no more than 4 people—these groups will work together for the last two units of the course. Although more information will be distributed concerning this final assignment, it will involve each group finding and analyzing a contemporary example of the practical implications of defining religion. The final written version of the assignment will be due by noon on Mon May 1 at Manly 212. This final assignment must be neatly typed, stapled, have a title page (with all group members' names in alphabetical order [by surname]), a print-out of the story to be examined, a description of the datum, and then the group's analysis (applying skills acquired in class). The submitted assignment must be double-spaced and typed (12 point Times New Roman font, one inch margins).

GRADING SCALE

A+	95-100%	C	70-74
A	90-94	D+	65-69
B+	85-89	D	60-64
B	80-84	D-	50-59
C+	75-79	F	below 50

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author as if it is ones own, doing so without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructor suspects that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a friend, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

2. No grades of "I" (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course. In my experience, when awarded at the 100-level a grade of "I" rarely leads to the completion of course requirements. So please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate your absence from class becoming routine and thus a problem. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made for all occasions that may arise, speaking with your professors before a problem arises will greatly enhance their ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

3. Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities are advised to contact the professor (not a GTA) outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment to see me at my office), as soon as possible, to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodation(s) that can be made to meet their needs. However, prior to contacting the professor, ensure that you first contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located at 133B Martha Parham Hall East (on the corner of 6th Ave. and Bryant Dr.); call them at 348-4285 or visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu/>.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Th Jan 12 Introduction to the Course

T Jan 17 Definition as Social Engineering (*Studying Religion*: Introduction)

Th Jan 19	<i>Studying Religion 1: Hills & Mountains</i>
T Jan 24	<i>Studying Religion 1: Soil & Dirt</i>
Th Jan 26	<i>Studying Religion 2</i>
T Jan 31	<i>Studying Religion 2</i>
Th Feb 2	Test 1
T Feb 7	<i>Studying Religion 3 (Plato's Euthyphro [link on course website])</i>
Th Feb 9	<i>Studying Religion 3</i>
T Feb 14	<i>Studying Religion 4</i>
Th Feb 16	<i>Studying Religion 4</i>
T Feb 21	Test 2
Th Feb 23	<i>Studying Religion 5</i>
T Feb 28	<i>Studying Religion 5</i>
Th Mar 2	<i>Studying Religion 6</i>
T Mar 7	<i>Studying Religion 6</i>
Th Mar 9	Test 3
T Mar 14	Spring Break
Th Mar 16	Spring Break
T Mar 21	<i>Studying Religion 7</i>
Th Mar 23	<i>Studying Religion 7</i>
T Mar 28	<i>Studying Religion 8</i>
Th Mar 30	<i>Studying Religion 8</i>
T Apr 4	Test 4
Th Apr 6	Religion & the US Courts: Introduction
T Apr 11	Religion & the US Courts: Case 1
Th Apr 13	Religion & the US Courts: Case 2
T Apr 18	Group Projects: Introduction
Th Apr 20	Work in class on Group Projects
T Apr 25	Work in class on Group Projects
Th Apr 27	Q&A on Group Projects

No Final Exam
Final Group Projects Due: Monday, May 1 by noon
at Manly 212 (REL main office) in Prof. McCutcheon's mail box
or submitted to him directly at MA 211