

Religious Studies 105: Honors Introduction to Religious Studies

Spring 2017

Prof. Bagger

Manly Hall 315B; Office Hours: T,R 5-6, and by appt.

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This course carries a University Core Humanities [H] designation and has no prerequisites.

Course Description

This course familiarizes students with examples of the sorts of phenomena studied by scholars of religion (at the University of Alabama and elsewhere) and with some of the concepts and theories they employ when studying them. It attempts neither a comprehensive account of the world's religions, nor an exhaustive survey of theoretical approaches. Rather, the course especially dwells on puzzling or, in some cases, disturbing phenomena, deriving from a variety of historical and geographic settings, to display both the challenges and virtues of religious studies.

Course Objectives

- 1) To gain familiarity with diverse religious phenomena.
- 2) To gain practice critiquing and applying theoretical concepts.

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Distinguish a humanistic orientation to the study of religion from a theistic orientation.
- Explain the roles of understanding and explanation in the study of religion.
- Use comparison to illuminate social and cultural phenomena, both familiar and unfamiliar.
- Reflect on the relative merits of different theoretical approaches to religion.
- Analyze the political aspects of religious phenomena.
- Speak intelligibly about a variety of topics in the history of religion.

Course Requirements

- An in-class midterm exam (Feb. 23). You will be asked to "identify" five quotations out of twelve taken from the readings. You should have no difficulty recognizing the sources of the quotations. Prepare to explain the import, ideas, and circumstances pertinent to each quotation as fully as you can. In grading your responses I will look to see how much information you convey (the more the better). This exercise is your opportunity to display what you have learned from the readings and from class. You must bring a bluebook to the exam. If you must miss the exam for a legitimate reason, you may take the exam at a time of mutual convenience. (25%)
- One 4-page paper, hard copy due 3:30 PM April 21 in my mailbox in 212 Manly Hall. No electronic submissions. I penalize late submissions ½ letter grade per day. You must compose your own paper topic in consultation with me. The papers are your opportunity to argue for a position and/or apply some of the theoretical concepts to a new case. You should feel free to argue for a position with which (you believe) I disagree. Disagreement with me will NOT affect your grade (as long as you take account of the ideas and arguments we have studied). I will grade the papers on a) the quality of your argument, and b) the quality of your prose. If you do not feel confident in your ability to write this kind of paper, you should seek help from me during office hours. (40%)
- A 2 ½ hour final exam scheduled by the registrar. I do not have authority to reschedule your exam in case of a conflict. The final consists of two parts. The first is identical to the midterm, except the quotations will be drawn (exclusively) from the texts that follow the midterm. The second part will ask you to choose one essay topic from three choices. These topics will force you to discuss texts and topics from the first half of the course in relation to texts and topics from the second half. I grade the essays on two criteria: 1) how well-informed the response, and 2) how well-argued the response. You must bring a bluebook to the exam. (25%)

- Five very short exercises to help you improve your prose. I have put “Writing Well: An Incomplete Set of Guidelines” on Blackboard for you to use as a reference text. I will announce the assignment in class. They are due in my mailbox in 212 Manley Hall on Jan.27, Feb. 10, March 3, March 31, and April 14. You will receive a check or check minus. (2% each)
- Students who make positive contributions to the learning environment, particularly through constructive participation in class discussions, may receive a premium of up to 2.5 points toward their final grade.

Texts available for purchase

Salvation and Suicide, Chidester (Indiana)

Holy Terrors, Lincoln (Chicago)

The remaining readings (as well as some other readings of interest) are available on Blackboard.

Reading Assignments

A. Case Study # 1: Thuggee

1. Wagner—*Thuggee*, pp. 91-102, 103-111, 173-182, 190-205, 205-218. (Jan. 19)
2. Gupta—“A Critical Study of Thugs and Their Activities;” Bayly—*Empire and Information*, pp. 170-176. (Jan. 24)
3. Humes—“Wrestling with Kali.” (Jan. 26)
4. “Amir Ali” and Rappoport—“Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions.” (Jan. 31)

B. Methodological Interlude

5. Lincoln— “Theses on Method.” (Feb. 2)

C. Case Study # 2: Vedic Sacrifice

6. *The Rig Veda*, 10:90. (Feb. 7)
7. Figueira—“Aryans and Others.” (Feb. 14)
8. Lubin— “Veda on Parade: Revivalist Ritual as Civic Spectacle.” (Feb. 16)

D. Case Study # 3: Malcolm X on Hajj

9. Denny—*An Introduction to Islam*, pp. 99-124. (Feb. 28)
10. Muhammad—*Message to the Blackman in America*, chs. 55, 125, 132. (March 2)
11. Malcolm X— “Mecca.” (March 9)

E. Case Study # 4: Jonestown

12. J. Z. Smith— “Appendix 2” [transcript of final moments of “White Night” at Jonestown]. (March 21; March 23 at 6:30—Film: “Jonestown;”)
13. Chidester— *Salvation and Suicide*. (March 28)

F. Case Study # 5: Genesis

14. *Genesis* 1:1-4:16, 6-9. (April 6)
15. Cartwright—“Unity of the Human Race Disproved By the Hebrew Bible” (Aug. 31)

G. Case Study: # 6: Religion and 9/11

16. Bruce Lincoln— *Holy Terrors* (April 18)

Notes

- I expect you to bring the assigned reading to class.
- Responsibility for the success of our discussions rests on your shoulders. If you are not willing to ask questions or converse with one another, the discussions will fail.
- You are responsible for announcements I make in class.
- I use Blackboard as a file distribution system only. If you need to reach me, do not message me through Blackboard. I will not see it.
- You must bring a bluebook to the exams.
- I have no attendance policy. From experience I know you will regret missing class come exam time.

Emergency Contact Information: UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. Additional course information will be posted using Blackboard Learn.

Severe Weather Guidelines: The guiding principle at The University of Alabama is to promote the personal safety of our students, faculty and staff during severe weather events. It is impossible to develop policies which anticipate every weather-related emergency. These guidelines are intended to provide additional assistance for responding to severe weather on campus.

UA is a residential campus with many students living on or near campus. In general classes will remain in session until the National Weather Service issues safety warnings for the city of Tuscaloosa. Clearly, some students and faculty commute from adjacent counties. These counties may experience weather related problems not encountered in Tuscaloosa. Individuals should follow the advice of the National Weather Service for that area taking the necessary precautions to ensure personal safety. Whenever the National Weather Service and the Emergency Management Agency issue a warning, people in the path of the storm (tornado or severe thunderstorm) should take immediate life saving actions.

When West Alabama is under a severe weather advisory, conditions can change rapidly. It is imperative to get to where you can receive information from the [National Weather Service](http://www.nws.gov) and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take.

The Office of University Relations will disseminate the latest information regarding conditions on campus in the following ways:

- Weather advisory posted on the UA homepage
- Weather advisory sent out through UA Alerts to faculty, staff and students
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA at 90.7 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over Alabama Public Radio (WUAL) at 91.5 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA-TV/WUOA-TV, and on the website at <http://wvuatv.com/content/weather>. WVUA-TV Home Team Weather provides a free service you can subscribe to which allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail or cell phone. Check <http://wvuatv.com/content/free-email-weather-alerts> for more details and to sign up for weather alerts.

In the case of a tornado warning (tornado has been sighted or detected by radar; sirens activated), all university activities are automatically suspended, including all classes and laboratories. If you are in a building, please move immediately to the lowest level and toward the center of the building away from windows (interior classrooms, offices, or corridors) and remain there until the tornado warning has expired. Classes in session when the tornado warning is issued can resume immediately after the warning has expired at the discretion of the instructor. Classes that have not yet begun will resume 30 minutes after the tornado warning has expired provided at least half of the class period remains.

Policy on Academic Misconduct: All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. At the beginning of each semester and on examinations and projects, the professor, department, or division may require that each student sign the following Academic Honor Pledge: "I promise or affirm that I will not at any time be involved with cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation while enrolled as a student at The University of Alabama. I have read the Academic Honor Code, which explains disciplinary procedure resulting from the aforementioned. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as indefinite suspension from the University."

See the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for more information.

Disability Statement: If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary.

If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call (205) 348-4285 (Voice) or (205) 348-3081 (TTY) or visit 1000 Houser Hall to register for services. Students who may need course adaptations because of a disability are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services, 1000 Houser Hall, before receiving academic adjustments.

UAct: Ethical Community Statement: The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (<http://www.ua.edu/uact>) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.