

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 100-001 • Fall 2018

Professor: Dr. Russell McCutcheon
Office: Manly Hall 211 (Dept Office in 212)
TA: Savannah Finver
Keeley McMurray

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

GTA Office Hours: TBA & by appointment
Location: Manly Hall 315A

Lectures: 11:00-12:15 TTh • Farrah Hall 214

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-100-001-introduction-to-religious-studies-3/>

DESCRIPTION

As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, this section of REL 100 examines how scholars of religion in a public university define religion and study it—using the study of religion as a way into considering the practical effects of any classification system (such as sacred/profane or insider/outsider). In doing so we will survey some classic issues in the academic study of religion—e.g., essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approaches to definition, as well as familiarizing ourselves with various theories and theorists of religion—applying what we learn to wider issues outside the study of religion, where our tools may help us to understand the possible dynamics that are at work in social life. The course concludes with two case studies, taken from the US Supreme Court, in which the Court’s decision hinged on how to define religion. 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.

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 two **required** books, 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)
- *Religion in 5 Minutes* (Equinox, 2017)

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

BLACKBOARD and DEPARTMENT WEBSITE

Blackboard, a learning management system that you access through mybama or directly via ulearn.blackboard.com, has a page for our course. A brief welcome announcement is posted there as is the course's gradebook. Quizzes, administered outside class time (see below), will also be posted/taken there. Those are the only uses for Blackboard in our course. Otherwise, we will use the website for the course that is on the Department's website (see the top of this document for that URL), where some additional PDF readings are posted as well as the syllabus.

READINGS

The course website (**not** the Blackboard site) contains a few links either to online readings or PDFs that may be required along with the two course books. (There are also some links for background on various scholars discussed in class.) 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 therefore presupposes that you have come to class ready both to acquire new information and also to discuss, reinforce, and apply the information that you have already acquired by preparing for class. **The integration of the new and unfamiliar, on the one hand, with, on the other, the familiar is what this course defines as learning.**

STUDY TIPS

Like any field of study, the academic study of religion has a technical vocabulary all its own and this course focuses explicitly on students acquiring it. So, despite the fact that students routinely use many of our terms in a commonsense manner—such as the word religion itself, let alone such other terms sacred, myth, cult, or ritual, etc.—you should be prepared to entertain that this academic discipline redefines these words and uses them in various technical ways. This means learning a new vocabulary—not just memorizing isolated words and their meanings but, instead, using words, defined in new ways, in relation to other technical terms, so as to build up increasingly complex and sensible sentences. The students who excel in this course will therefore develop ways to (i) keep up-to-date with all new vocabulary/new scholars mentioned in our readings and in our lectures, (ii) be self-motivated to find and learn their meanings/contributions (with information from our course book, lectures, GTA office hours and reviews sessions) and then (iii) work to use these terms/scholars in sentences of their own creation, building upon key terms by linking them with other new items we have learned.

LECTURES/NOTE-TAKING

This is a large enrollment lecture course (our class has 150 students); although you will regularly be invited to offer feedback and comments in class, and the instructor will work to answer all questions posed in class, much of the course is a lecture format. Your job, as a student, is not just to learn the material but, to do so by learning to adapt to the instructor's style of delivery. **The instructor is therefore your data as much as the content of the course.** For in the future you will find yourself in settings with a variety of people who each present material in a variety of ways and your success will often depend upon your ability to adapt and modify in response to those changing conditions. If you are having difficulty in our class then quickly take full advantage of the GTA's weekly office hour or contact the professor—the sooner the better. Otherwise, come to class prepared, review the readings after class in the light of the lecture's emphases, and experiment with different note-taking strategies during class. **Advice: taking pictures of slides with your phone or typing notes on laptops (where you're also browsing Facebook and Twitter while also shopping for a few things...) are not nearly as effective as just paying attention after having prepared for class, taking notes by hand, and even annotating your course book while reading it and during your post-class review sessions.**

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS (GTA)

Savannah Finver and **Keeley McMurray**, both REL graduate students, will be the TAs in this course; their role will involve attending class, grading tests, maintaining our Blackboard site where you can obtain your grades and take quizzes outside class time (see below), holding weekly office hours and offering review sessions prior to tests. **Speak with them after class or contact either by email if you wish to make an appointment or ask a question.**

EXCUSED ABSENCES

If you miss a quiz or test for what you consider to be a legitimate reason then you must contact the professor **immediately** to explain your absence and to provide documentation (e.g., a Dr.'s note) to officially verify the reason for the absence; only absences deemed legitimate by the professor (which requires such a note) 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**. Missing a **quiz** for a legitimate reason means that you will not have the missed quiz count against your total quiz grade.

EXTRA CREDIT

Monthly films, shown as part of REL 360 (from 6-9 pm, on Mondays: Aug. 27, Sept. 17, Oct. 15, & Nov. 12; see the REL 360 course website for details) are all extra credit opportunities in REL 100.001 (attending both the movie and discussion afterward, led by an REL professor). In the class immediately following each of these films you must submit to one of the GTAs a one page, double-spaced, **description of the discussion** that followed the film for a possible total of 1 extra point in our course (partial points are possible). There will also be other extra credit opportunities announced in class throughout the semester. **A maximum of 5 extra points can be earned in the course** (which equals a plus or minus letter grade).

QUIZZES

Twenty multiple choice quizzes will be administered **outside class time via online questions available through the Blackboard system**. The quizzes, all of which are on readings from *Religion in 5 Minutes*, will be available online for several hours after classes but, at any time during that period, students will have only 5 minutes to take the quiz (the clock starts when you click on the link to begin the quiz); each quiz will one question taken directly from the chapter on which each quiz is based (see the schedule below for the readings and thus the dates of these online quizzes). Preparation requires reading the chapter prior to taking the quiz—these are very brief chapters, that each elaborate on class content, so this should not be an onerous task.

TESTS

Four matching tests (in which definitions must be matched to correct terms or names) will be offered throughout the course. Two review sessions will be scheduled, at different times, prior to each. These tests focus mainly on: (1) lecture material during a unit, (2) the definitions of bolded technical terms in the chapters covered in that unit, and (3) the scholars whose names appear bolded in each chapter covered in the unit; bolded technical terms are defined in the book's Glossary and scholars who are named (again, in bolded text) in the chapters are discussed in greater length in the list of scholars at the back of the book—you are expected to find and read these additional texts.

FINAL OPTIONAL EXAM

Student who wish to improve their final course grade can decide to write the optional exam at the end of the course (Fri Dec 14 at 8 am in FA 214) that covers all course material; **before the last class of the**

semester students must alert a GTA that they plan to take the exam. If a student writes the final exam then the grade earned on the exam (which will be formatted similarly to the unit tests) will replace 50% of the student's total test scores, making the final exam worth 40% of the course and the tests, taken together, worth only 40% of the course (instead of the original 80%).

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 as well as quiz dates.
2. There will be 4 equally weighted **tests**, each devoted to the material relevant to two chapters of our main course book, *Studying Religion: An Introduction*. Each test is worth **20%** of your course grade for a total of **80%** of your overall course grade (unless you opt for the voluntary final).
3. There will be a total of **20 daily quizzes** in this course (administered online, outside class through Blackboard [see above]). They will each require you to answer one multiple choice question on an assigned chapter in *Religion in 5 Minutes* as evidence of your preparation for class—doing so during a limited amount of time (5 minutes). They are each worth 1 point (no partial points) for a total of **20%** of your course grade. ***These quiz points add up so please take them seriously.***
4. There will be an **optional final exam** in this course which, if taken, will replace half the value of the tests in this course (that is, 40% of the final grade; see above).

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

Note: readings for daily quizzes, administered outside class on Blackboard, are noted via the “Rel in 5: chapter number” designations on this schedule

Aug 23	Introduction to the Course
Aug 28	Defining Religion (Rel in 5: 1)
Aug 30	Classification Matters (<i>Studying Religion</i> : Introduction; Rel in 5: 3)
Sept 4	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1: Hills & Mountains (Rel in 5: 7)
Sept 6	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1: Soil & Dirt (Rel in 5: 4)
Sept 11	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 (Rel in 5: 2)
Sept 13	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 (Rel in 5: 62)
Sept 18	Test 1
Sept 20	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Plato’s <i>Euthyphro</i> [see the link on course website]; Rel in 5: 64)
Sept 25	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Rel in 5: 68)
Sept 27	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 (Rel in 5: 12)
Oct 2	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 (Rel in 5: 75)
Oct 4	Test 2
Oct 9	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 (Rel in 5: 16)
Oct 11	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 (Rel in 5: 72)
Oct 16	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 (Rel in 5: 70)
Oct 18	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 (Rel in 5: 77)
Oct 23	Test 3
Oct 25	No Class
Oct 30	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 (Rel in 5: 58)
Nov 1	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 (Rel in 5: 49)
Nov 6	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8 (Rel in 5: 55)
Nov 8	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8 (Rel in 5: 17)
Nov 13	Test 4
Nov 15	No Class (Rel in 5: 18)
Nov 20	No Class (Rel in 5: 30)
Nov 22	No Class
Nov 27	Practical Implications: Defining Religion in the US Supreme Court
Nov 29	Case Study 1
Dec 4	Case Study 2
Dec 6	Review for Optional Final Exam

Optional Final Exam: Friday Dec 14 8:00-10:30 am in FA 214

***Inform a GTA before the last day of class
if you intend to take the exam***