

Introduction to Religious Studies
REL 100.002-Fall 2018
T/R, 9:30-10:45, Farrah Hall 214

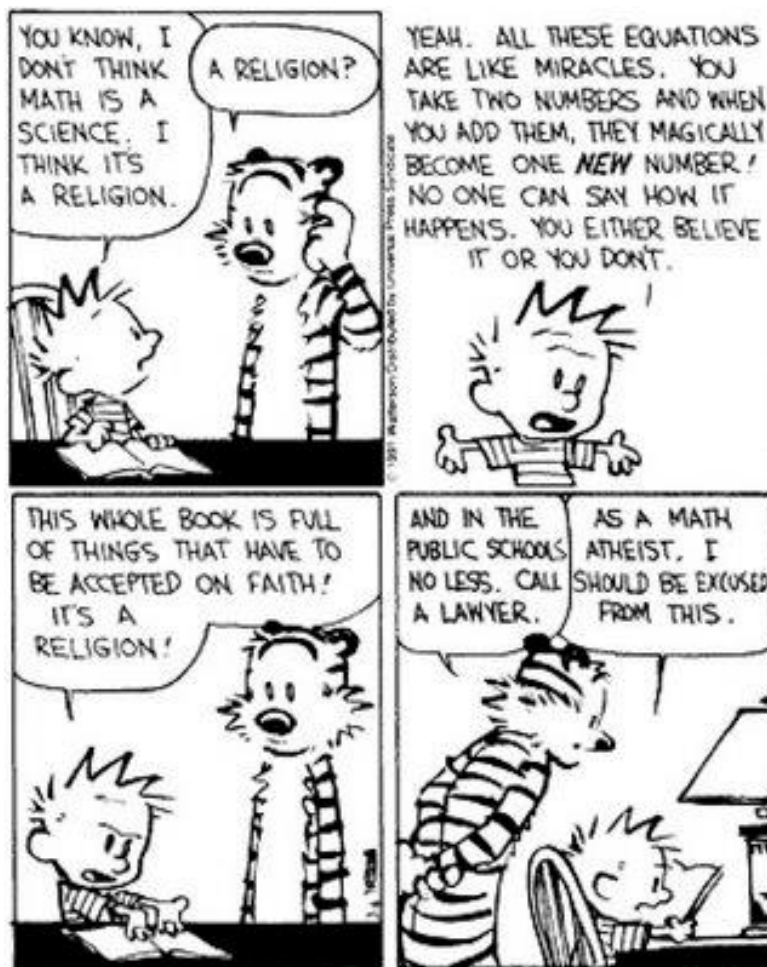
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DESCRIPTION

As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, REL 100 examines the ways in which the term “religion” is identified and used to organize social worlds. The course surveys a broad number of important debates in the history of Religious Studies, such as the definition of religion, theories on the origins of religion, the comparison of religions, and religion's psychological, sociological, and political functions. The course emphasizes general critical thinking skills essential throughout the human sciences.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students in REL 100 will be able to

1. Identify and analyze the complications in and implications of defining “religion” in an academically sophisticated manner
2. Distinguish between essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approaches
2. Discuss the history of the study of religion, along with its key theorists
3. Distinguish and apply an emic and an etic perspective
4. Apply scholarly readings/discussions to popular culture

TEXT

Russell McCutcheon, *Studying Religion: An Introduction*

*Other readings will be available online through Blackboard (accessible through mybama).

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 well in advance of class is important because our lectures and discussions all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings. Although regular attendance is mandatory, alone it will not suffice. Regular attendance and informed class participation (i.e., bringing the readings with you to class, taking notes, asking questions, etc.) are necessary for a satisfactory grade in this course.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT

Sierra Lawson is working as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for this section of REL 100. She is currently a MA student in the Religion in Culture program. She will attend and assist with some class lectures, grade quizzes, assist with maintaining class records, and hold an office hour each week in the Department of Religious Studies. I recommend and encourage students to meet Sierra and learn more about her own studies beyond what we talk about in class. She is a valuable resource regarding different ways in which identity and classification are studied in another discipline. If our office hours do not coincide with the times when you are available, contact either of us to arrange another time to meet.

CONSULTATIONS/ SAFE ZONE

When you have logistical questions about an assignment or what was covered in a particular class, first contact Sierra. She will be able to help you on most any topic. If you have specific questions regarding your grade, ability to complete assignments, etc., you should talk with me directly. In that event, students are encouraged to set up an appointment to meet on Tuesdays, and/or contact me by phone or email for assistance or with any questions. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Keep in mind that office hours are times I have set aside specifically for meeting with students. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

GRADING

Online quizzes (10 at 15 pts. each, given randomly)	150 points
Weekly work (Blackboard responses)	200 points
Blackboard group discussions	100 points
2 Tests (150 pts. each)	300 points
Final Exam	250 points

Final grades will be based on the following ranges out of the 1000 possible points:

1000-970- A+; 969-930- A; 929-900- A-; 899-870- B+; 869-830- B; 829-800- B-; 799-770 - C+; 769-730 - C; 729-700- C-; 699-600- D; 599-0- F

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

QUIZZES

I will give ten quizzes (each worth 15 points) sporadically throughout the semester, each taken the day it is announced in class. Each quiz's questions will come from the material covered in reading(s) and lecture for that day. Quizzes will be posted in Blackboard, and will be available ASAP after class until 11pm. Near the end of the semester, I will give a make-up quiz that, unlike the others, I will announce in advance. This quiz will replace a zero if you were absent on any day a quiz was announced. For those who have all their quiz grades, this make-up quiz is a chance to replace the lowest grade.

**If you miss the announcement of a quiz due to tardiness or leaving early, it is still your responsibility, so make every effort to be on time!*

WEEKLY WORK

Weekly work (worth a total of 20 points) will come from weekly postings to Blackboard. You will have from Thursday after class until Monday at 5pm to post two different things (*Each must be a thorough paragraph*):

1) **"Web Response" (10 points)**— I will introduce you to the blog "Culture on the Edge," which provides real-time data relevant to our class discussions. Each Tuesday, there will be a new post linked to Blackboard that Sierra and I find relevant to the week's readings/ideas. Engage with it in relation to the topics and questions we cover together in class. You may use this response as an opportunity to include your own questions or work out some of your own ideas about the readings or lectures, a point you think warrants more explanation or clarification, etc. We will discuss some of these responses in class if/ when possible throughout the semester (especially ideas that come up again and again, those that will best benefit the whole class, etc.).

2) **"Reading Review" (10 points)**— Respond specifically to one of the readings you had for that particular week. You might say what you enjoyed or what confused you about the reading, what questions you still have about the reading, how you think the text relates to our unit topic, etc. This assignment should help you retain info about the readings as we go, "studying" for the tests a little each week.

Grading: Each component of the weekly postings will be graded as Acceptable (check worth full credit) or Unacceptable (minus worth 0 points). In other words, the possible grade for each assignment is 0, 10, or 20. Acceptable paragraph postings show deliberate and genuine thought. Your responses do not receive checks just for being completed.

* **Alternate Assignments:** Depending on where our conversations go and what kinds of topics come up or elicit strong class response, some weeks (not too often), we may have a different assignment that will stand in for the usual weekly work. This is one of the many reasons that regular class attendance is vital. These may be relatively spontaneous substitutions and not announced in advance.

BLACKBOARD GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Four times through the semester, we will spend the class time together virtually rather than in person. You will be sorted into small groups on Blackboard and will respond to a prompt relevant to our course discussions. In these small groups, you will talk with each other (and Sierra, who will be monitoring and mediating), seeing where the conversations go in these smaller settings. *Robust participation is required for credit.* Each discussion is worth 25 points. We will follow-up on these discussions in the next Tuesday's class.

TESTS

There will be two in-class tests and a final exam. The final will be comprehensive and will be given at the time set by the University: *Wednesday, December 12, 8-10:30am.* You must arrange your schedule accordingly.

*Note: During the week before each test, Sierra will manage and monitor online review sessions via the Discussions feature on Blackboard. Make use of this valuable resource by asking any questions you might have that come to you outside of class.

MAKE-UP TEST POLICY

If you miss a scheduled test, you may only make it up with a documented, excused absence. In the event of a scheduling conflict, you must contact me at least one week prior to the test date to schedule a make-up exam. In the event of an illness or other unforeseen circumstances, you must contact me via email within one day of the scheduled test date.

EXTRA CREDIT

You may complete/submit up to TWO extra credit assignments by the end of the semester. Each will come from attending and writing a response to a film shown in REL 360, "REL Goes to the Movies." The dates for film showings are: **Aug. 27, Sept. 17, Oct. 15, and Nov. 12. They take place in MA 207, 6:30-9pm.**

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

REL 100 is a combined lecture and discussion course. This means that, in part, all students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that makes other students feel uncomfortable in their learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

CELL PHONES/LAPTOPS

Cell phones must be on silent or turned off completely in class, and texting is prohibited. Laptops are not prohibited but may be used **ONLY** for the purpose of in-class note-taking.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATION

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services (located in Houser Hall), 348-4285. Thereafter, you are invited to schedule appointments to see me during my office hours to discuss accommodations and other special needs.

SEVERE WEATHER PROTOCOL

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.

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](#) and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take. The Office of Public 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 Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign [up at myBama](#))
- 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 7. WVUA 7 Storm Watch provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone. Check <http://www.wvu a7.com/stormwatch.html> for details.

TENTATIVE LECTURE SCHEDULE:

August

23 (R) Introduction to the course

First Things First: Identifying Our Terms

28 (T) McCutcheon, "Preface," "Introduction"

**Aug 24: last day to add/drop a course without a 'W' grade*

30 (R) McCutcheon, "What's in a Name?"

September

4 (T) McCutcheon, "The History of 'Religion'"; Smith, "Religion, Definition of" (Blackboard)

UNIT 1: Approaches to Naming

Essentialism

6 (R) McCutcheon, "The Essentials of Religion"; *Crimson White* "True Fan" article (Blackboard)

11 (T) Rudolph Otto, "Religion is an Experience of Awe and Mystery" (Blackboard)

13 (R) **Blackboard group discussion**

Functionalism

18 (T) Paul Tillich, "Religion is an Expression of Ultimate Concern" (Blackboard)

Noam Chomsky on sports!

20 (R) McCutcheon, "The Functions of Religion;" *Batman Begins*

25 (T) Karl Marx, "Religion is the Opium of the People" (Blackboard)

27 (R) **Blackboard group discussion**

October

2 (T) Test 1 Review

4 (R) **Test 1**

9 (T) Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices" (Blackboard)

** Midterm grades will be posted by Oct. 10 by 11:59pm*

11 (R) McCutcheon, "The Resemblance among Religions"

UNIT 2: Religion and Inventions of "Self/Other"

16 (T) Smith, "Existentialism" (Blackboard), *I Heart Huck1bees* clip

18 (R) Jean-Paul Sartre, "Religion is an Attempt to Escape Responsibility" (Blackboard)

23 (T) McCutcheon, "Religion and the Insider /Outsider Problem"

25 (R) NO CLASS, Mid-Semester Study Break

30 (T) Smith, "Church/Sect", "Cult" (Blackboard); **"Cult" Case Study**

** Oct. 31: last day to drop a course with grade of 'W'*

November

1 (R) Mark Muesse, "Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange" (Blackboard)

6 (T) "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (Blackboard)

8 (R) **Blackboard group discussion**

13 (T) Smith, "Myth"; Smith, "Cosmogony"; Smith, "Ritual" (including "Ritual as System" and "Theories of Ritual" ["Mythbusters"-myths and pop culture])

15 (R) Test 2 Review

20 (T) **Test 2**

22 (R) NO CLASS-Thanksgiving holiday

27 (T) McCutcheon, "The Public Discourse on Religion"

29 (R) **Blackboard group discussion**

December

4 (T) Kearny High School readings (Blackboard)

***make-up quiz**

6 (R) Review, part 2

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, December 12, 8-10:30am