

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 100-001 • Spring 2019

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Location: Manly Hall 315A

Lectures: 9:30-10:45 T/Th • Northlawn Hall 1014

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-100-001-introduction-to-religious-studies-4/>

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. This course provides a Core Curriculum Humanities credit.

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.
They are needed at the start of the course**

BLACKBOARD and DEPARTMENT WEBSITE

Blackboard, a learning management system that you access through mybama or directly via ualearn.blackboard.com (the latter is preferable), has a page for our course. A brief welcome announcement is posted there as is the course's gradebook. Online 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 course page 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

Two books are required for this course (see above) and needed right from the start. The course website (**not** the Blackboard site) also 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, in their daily lives, 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, tradition, symbol, 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 116 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.** **Note:** lecture notes for this course are available at a variety of online sites—while some of this course does remain the same portions also change each semester and so, in my experience, such lecture notes are not all that helpful, especially for students who think such notes can replace regular attendance and readings. Also, taking photos of slides isn't all that helpful and I discourage you from doing it.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT (GTA)

Sierra Lawson, an REL graduate student, will be the TA in this course; her role will involve grading tests, offering guest lectures, 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. She will not be regularly attending class sessions (since she has TA'ed for this course before) so contact her by email if you wish to make an appointment or to ask her 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.

ONLINE QUIZZES

15 fill-in-the-blank quizzes (2 questions per quiz) will be administered **outside class time via online questions available through the Blackboard system** (go to: ulearn.blackboard.com [advice: avoid going through mybama]). The daily quizzes, each of which is based on readings from *Religion in 5 Minutes*, will be available online from noon to midnight after each class (see schedule, below, for quiz dates and readings) but, at any time during that period, students will have only 5 minutes to take the quiz; each of the daily quiz questions will be taken directly from the chapter on which each quiz is based. Preparation requires reading and understanding 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. You will be asked to read **two** of these brief chapters in preparation for each quiz.

TESTS AND EXAM

Four matching tests (in which definitions must be matched to correct terms or names) will be offered throughout the course. A review session will be offered prior to each. These tests focus mainly on: (1) lecture material during a unit of the course, (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 portions of the course book. Note: quiz content is not included on the tests. Also, a cumulative final exam is required in the course and will be in the same format as the course's four tests.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS

The course ends with small groups of no more than 4 people researching a question (posed by classmates and then assigned to each group, about religion) and then presenting their answer in class, in a short presentation of no more than 10 minutes. **If using multimedia then the presentations must be brought to class on a flashdrive.**

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 online quiz dates. Attendance is not taken but periodic in-class pop quizzes for bonus points in the course will be offered.

2. There will be 4 equally weighted **tests**, each devoted to the material relevant to two chapters in our main course book, *Studying Religion: An Introduction*. Each test is worth **10%** of your course grade for a total of **40%** of your final grade.

3. There will be a total of **15 daily online quizzes** in this course (administered outside class time through Blackboard [see above]). They will each require you to answer two fill-in-the-blank questions from readings in *Religion in 5 Minutes*—doing so during a limited amount of time (5 minutes). Each quiz is worth 2 points (one point per question) for a total of **30%** of your course grade. ***These quiz points add up so please take them seriously.***

4. Toward the end of the semester students will be asked to submit, to the TA, questions about religion that they wish to have answered; these questions will then randomly be assigned to groups (of no more than 4 people) who will have time to research their question and answer it, in class, as part of a **small group presentation** (of no more than 10 minutes). These presentations are worth **10%** of your final grade.

5. There will be a **final exam** in this course which cover the entire semester’s material and which will be in the same format as the course’s 4 unit tests. The final exam is worth **20%** of your final grade.

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 parenthetical "Rel in 5: chapter numbers" on this schedule

Jan 10	Introduction to the Course
Jan 15	Defining Religion (<i>Studying Religion</i> Intro)
Jan 17	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 (Rel in 5: 11 & 64)
Jan 22	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 (Rel in 5: 63 & 70)
Jan 24	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 (Rel in 5: 57 & 19)
Jan 29	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 (Rel in 5: 61 & 17)
Jan 31	Test 1
Feb 5	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i> link on course website; Rel in 5: 1 & 32)
Feb 7	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Rel in 5: 44 & 36)
Feb 12	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 (Rel in 5: 14 & 24)
Feb 14	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 (Rel in 5: 22 & 7)
Feb 19	Test 2
Feb 21	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 (Rel in 5: 18 & 23)
Feb 26	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 (Rel in 5: 39 & 49)
Feb 28	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 (Rel in 5: 30 & 42)
Mar 5	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 (Rel in 5: 28 & 46)
Mar 7	Test 3
Mar 12	Spring Break: No Class
Mar 14	Spring Break: No Class
Mar 19	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 (Rel in 5: 2 & 33)
Mar 21	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 (Rel in 5: 41 & 68)
Mar 26	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8 (Rel in 5: 73 & 3)
Mar 28	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8
Apr 2	Test 4 (By the end of the day everyone must email Sierra one question about religion/the study of religion)
Apr 4	Group Presentations Discussed/Questions Assigned
Apr 9	No Class: Research for Group Presentations
Apr 11	Group Presentations
Apr 16	Group Presentations
Apr 18	Group Presentations
Apr 23	Group Presentations
Apr 25	Review

Final Exam: Tues, Apr 30 from 8 - 10:30 am in Northlawn 1014