



**REL 226.001**  
**AFRICA DIASPORA RELIGIONS**  
FALL 2019  
Instructor: Richard Newton, PhD  
(8/22/19)

**Class Meetings:** Manly Hall 207, T/R 2:00-3:15pm

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

**Office Location:** Manly Hall 204

**Phone Number:** 205-348-9994

**Email:** RN [rwnewton@ua.edu](mailto:rwnewton@ua.edu)

**Prerequisites:** n/a

**Course Description and Credit Hours:**

This Core humanities credit draws on case studies from Hip Hop to archival finds and YouTube to explore the significance of Africa and religion in American culture. **HU INB, 3 Credit Hours**

What if the study of religion started with the African American experience? Instead of privileging a specific tradition, this course examines the history of a people who came to a new world compelled to quickly learn the significance of “religion” itself. We will follow along by plumbing the depths of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, listening to songs born of the hush harbors, visiting the black gods of American metropolises, and witnessing the diversity of black church culture. By charting the development of this worldview, we will better understand religion’s role in the human condition.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to do the following:

- (1) *Demonstrate abilities to read and interpret scholarly literature.*
- (2) *Surface main themes and trends from diaspora studies, particularly through the framework of “signification,” in a variety of primary sources.*
- (3) *Write analytically about African diasporic religions in relation to popular/professional criticism.*

(4) *Develop oral presentation skills and communicate scholarly ideas about religion effectively.*

(5) *Demonstrate (through written and oral presentation) knowledge and understanding of relationships between “Africa,” “slavery,” “God,” “religion,” and “America,” and “homeland”*

### **Required Course Materials**

The following resources are required purchases. Please bring all of these materials to class with you everyday!

### Bibliography

Paul O. Myhre, ed. *Introduction to Religious Studies* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2009).

This book is a guide to the academic study of religion. It covers a wide breadth of approaches to the field which we will consider as we theorize a study of religion that centered around the legacy of African diaspora religions. I will also assign readings and media from other sources as well. Links to these will be published on Blackboard.

### Interactive Notebook

Each student will need a College Rule Composition Book (i.e. 9.75 in x 7.5 in bound notebook). These are available at the SupeStore and other school supply retailers. This is the raw material out of which you will be creating your “interactive notebook,” a guided course research journal that you will be using regularly.

### Blackboard

This learning management software will house all of our assignments and where you will submit your completed work— barring the interactive notebook. Through it, I will also share an array of e-resources to enrich your understanding of the academic study of religion. See this site as a digital representation of our classroom community. Since we will be making use of Blackboard as our main learning hub outside of class time, make sure that you’re in the habit of checking it daily.

\*Pro Tips: You can set Blackboard to email or text you all updates. Also since we will be using Blackboard for exams, make sure that your web browser and computer hardware are fully compatible. When taking tests, make sure to review University’s guidelines here: <https://cit.ua.edu/technologies/blackboard/testing-tips-for-students/>. Failing to do so may inhibit your ability to successfully complete assignments (for which there will be no retake barring extreme situations determined at the instructor’s discretion).

**Outline of Topics:**

Below you'll find a course calendar. Each box notes the content for the day and the materials you need to prepare prior to class. So you will see the assigned reading and the title of the interactive notebook assignment (designated "IN"). These correspond to a page on Blackboard that details how to accomplish them. In class, you will complete the interactive notebook assignment listed at the top of the square. On Blackboard, the modules are divided by weeks for your convenience.

Unit Focus	Tuesday	Thursday
<p><b>Week 1</b></p> <p><i>Orientation</i></p>		<p><b>8/22</b></p> <p><b>Syllabus Day</b></p> <p>*Please bring an accessible and amendable copy of the syllabus with you to class.</p>
<p><b>Week 2</b></p> <p><i>What is the academic study of religion?</i></p>	<p><b>8/27</b></p> <p><b>Defining Religion</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: What is Religion?</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 3-14.</p> <p>Get to the Point Introduction Video</p> <p><b>**8/28 Last Day to Drop w/o a Grade of "W."</b></p>	<p><b>8/29</b></p> <p><b>Defining the Study of Religion</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: "How is Religion Studied?"</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 15-27.</p> <p>ACE Body Paragraph Video</p>

<p><b>Week 3</b></p> <p><i>Signifying Religion</i></p>	<p><b>9/3</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>Read: Long, 54-66.</p> <p>IN: Reconstruct the Get to the Point Introduction for the article.</p> <p>Take free notes on the article based upon the analysis presented in the thesis.</p> <p>*Sign up for Seminar Facilitator Blog Post</p>	<p><b>9/5</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: Signification Video— Take notes and develop questions.</p> <p>Newspaper Article TBD</p> <p>Read: Begin reading Haley, 96-156 for next week.</p>
<p><b>Week 4</b></p> <p><i>Myths and Origin Stories</i></p>	<p><b>9/10</b></p> <p><b>The Stories We Tell</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: Origin Stories and Religion: How are Religions Formed?</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 27-34.</p> <p>*Note that you are not reading the entire chapter in preparation for class, just the first seven pages. I would like you to begin reading the next assignment, taking into account what Ratke has to say about origin stories, myth, and religion.</p> <p>*Seminar Group Sign-Up Due by the end of class.</p>	<p><b>9/12</b></p> <p><b>The Stories We Live By</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>Read: Haley, 96-156.</p> <p>IN: Signifying Chart on <i>Roots</i></p>

<b>Week 5</b>  <i>Scriptures</i>	<b>9/17</b>  <b>The Texts We Read</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>  IN: Sacred Words, Stories, and Books  Read: Myhre, 53-66.	<b>9/19</b>  <b>The Texts That Read us Back</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u> IN: Signifying Chart on on Walker's <i>Appeal</i>  Read: Britt, Beal, Walker (in that order)
<b>Week 6</b>  <i>Truth Regimes</i>	<b>9/24</b>  <b>Think You Know?</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>  IN: Truth-Claims  Read: Myhre, 41-52.	<b>9/26</b>  <b>You Have No Idea?</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>  IN: Signifying Chart on Baldwin  Read: Baldwin and Baldwin
<b>Week 7</b>  <i>Midterm Review</i>	<b>10/1</b>  <b>Midterm Review/Final Prep</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>  IN: List of Smart Questions regarding what we've covered. If you have none, come up with 3 good exam worthy short answer or essay questions.	<b>10/3</b>  <b>Final Prep—Guest Lecture</b> <u>Have Prepared:</u>  TBD  <b>*Exam I due by 2pm</b>
<b>Week 8</b>  <i>Social-Work</i>	<b>10/8</b>  <b>Making a Difference</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>	<b>10/10</b>  <b>Making Difference</b>  <u>Have Prepared:</u>

	<p>IN: Social Activism and Engagement</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 115-135</p>	<p>IN: Triple Signifying Chart</p> <p>Read: King, Malcolm X, Ida B. Wells</p>
<p><b>Week 9</b></p> <p><i>Sheer Violence?</i></p>	<p><b>10/15</b></p> <p><b>Do Unto Others</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: Violence and Religion</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 97-114.</p>	<p><b>10/17</b></p> <p><b>Righteous Anger</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>Read: -Gray/Turner</p> <p>IN: Signifying Chart on Turner</p>
<p><b>Week 10</b></p> <p><i>Religious Ethics, Moral Values, and Standards for Human Conduct</i></p>	<p><b>10/22</b></p> <p><b>For the Good</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: Religious Ethics, Moral Values, and Standards for Human Conduct</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 79-96</p>	<p><b>10/24</b></p> <p><b>Obligations</b></p> <p><u>Have Prepared:</u></p> <p>IN: Signifying Chart (use quotations)</p> <p>Read/Watch Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize Speech,</p> <p>(<a href="https://genius.com/Toni-morrison-nobel-lecture-in-literature-1993-toni-morrison-annotated">https://genius.com/Toni-morrison-nobel-lecture-in-literature-1993-toni-morrison-annotated</a>)</p>
<p><b>Week 11</b></p> <p><i>Sensing Religion</i></p>	<p><b>10/29</b></p> <p><b>Sensations of the Sacred?</b></p> <p>IN: An Aesthetic Approach to Religion</p>	<p><b>10/31 No Class</b></p> <p><b>Watch: Daughters of the Dust</b></p> <p><b>IN: Double Signifying Chart comparing the film to an example of your choosing</b></p>

	<p>Read: Myhre 67-78</p> <p><b>**10/30 Last Day to Drop with a “W.”</b></p>	<p><b>(please link/cite your example).</b></p>
<p><b>Week 12</b></p> <p><i>Asceticism and Mysticism</i></p> <p>Last blog post</p>	<p><b>11/5</b></p> <p><b>The Body is a Battlefield</b></p> <p>IN: Ascetically and Mystically Removed and Engaged</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 153-162.</p> <p>Vanzant</p>	<p><b>11/7 No Class</b></p> <p><b>The Body is a Temple</b></p> <p>IN: To what extent do you see Vodou as the same as the mysticism described by Owalalu and Crews. Use Long and signifying theory (along with any other readings) to explain your answer.</p> <p>Read: Skim Owalalu, Read Crews, and watch video on “Voodoo”</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPuAJzB425I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPuAJzB425I</a>)</p>
<p><b>Week 13</b></p> <p><i>The Science of Religion 2.0</i></p>	<p><b>11/12</b></p> <p><b>Under the Dome</b></p> <p>IN: Religion and Science</p> <p>Read: Myhre, 176-193 (Read pp. 176-177; Skim 180-184; Skim 184-190; Read 191)</p>	<p><b>11/14</b></p> <p><b>In Search of Roots: Part II</b></p> <p>IN: Double Signifying Chart comparing DNA Testing to the Haley and <i>Roots</i> phenomenon.</p> <p>Read: Duster</p>

<b>Week 14</b>  <i>Case Study Analysis and Final Preparations</i>	<b>11/19</b>  <b>Discuss Case Study Assignment and Final Preparations</b>  Read: 1619 ( <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html">https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html</a> )  <b>Exam 2 Due by Sunday 11/17 at 11:59pm.</b>	<b>11/21</b>  <b>In-Class Work Day</b>
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>11/26</b>  <b>In-Class Work Day</b>  <b>*Pitch Due at 11:59pm.</b>	<b>11/28 No Class</b>
<b>Week 16</b>  <i>Final Work Week</i>  <b>No new grades this week</b>	<b>12/3</b>  <b>In-Class Work Day</b>	<b>12/5</b>  Final Project Conversation  *Attendance is part of your Final Exam grade.  <b>**Last day to Drop Class 12/6.</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	Thursday, December 12, 2019 Final Project Submissions Due at 10:30am	

### Exams and Assignments

The level to which you've met our Student Learning Outcomes will be measured by the following assignments.



## PARTICIPATION:

Learning is an active process that requires preparation, practice, and questioning. While I will not be calling roll in this large-enrollment course, your presence is assumed. Points will be assessed through “ticket out the door” completion assignments collected throughout the semester. I will also use this and other activities to take attendance for purposes of official University enrollment reporting.

## INTERACTIVE NOTEBOOK:

Notetaking is not simply recording information, but also training your mind to process it so that you can retrieve and use it as needed. The interactive notebook will help you become your best tutor. They should be brought to each class and will be graded at random throughout the semester for completion. Note that I reserve the right to determine whether an attempted entry constitutes sufficient effort so as to count as “completed.”

## EXAMS:

These short exams are your opportunity to demonstrate your handle of the course material. They will be taken via Blackboard within a designated window. The questions will be a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, matching, and essay. The exams are not cumulative but skills and theories are scaffolded so you would do well to make sure you’ve mastered prior concepts. Should you take seriously the interactive notebook assignment and class participation, you will be ready to perform well on the exam. They are closed and timed exams. You may not use or have near any resources (i.e. handouts, cellphones, books, notes, online resources). Nothing should be open on your computer beside the exam on Blackboard. In accordance with The Capstone Creed, I am trusting that you take this exam with integrity. ProTip: See ProTip about using Blackboard above. I will drop the lowest exam grade should you have an A- or above on the Interactive Notebook and Participation.

## FINAL PROJECT—Course Newspaper.

At the start of the semester, *The New York Times* (under the leadership of award-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones) launched a massive multi-media project revisiting the historical socio-historical legacy represented by the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of enslavement on what we refer to now as American shores. (Learn more here: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>) More details to come.

We will develop a version of this project by creating a single-issue print news magazine that represents research and theorizing from our course.

Each student will contribute:

- A 150 word precis/abstract
- a 750-850 word essay
- three captioned images
- and a music recording of the period

In preparation for and completion of your assignment, each individual will complete and submit the following:

- (1) one scholarly article about your select historical moment
- (2) two primary sources from an archives
- (3) gleanings from our textbook
- (4) reference to Long's article
- (5) comparative reference to at least one primary sources from class

FAQ:

You will have at least five class periods in which you will get to work on this project. Additionally, we will coordinate with our research librarian in Gorgas Library, the Alabama Digital Humanities Center, and the Sanford Media Center to assist us in creating a professional quality project. This is a very doable project, but you need to use your time wisely. (Did I say that you get around five class periods to work on this?)

GENEROSITY POINTS (aka extra credit)

Throughout the semester, I may show generosity to those attending select Religious Studies Student Association or Department of Religious Studies events (i.e. campus lectures, the Religion Goes to the Movies film series). Any extra credit points received may be designated toward your interactive notebook grade. In the case that you have completed this and all completion-based tasks at the A or A+ range, I will apply your points toward a blog post, exam or the final project (depending on the lowest weighted assignment).

The Department of Religious Studies has a very active social media presence. Should you produce knowledge (video, blogpost, etc.) of publishable quality related to "Studying Religion in Culture," you may receive additional extra credit toward any assignment. You must receive my approval should you want to take advantage of this opportunity and determine how it will impact your grade. So if you have ideas or questions, let's chat. Students have found this to be an especially worthwhile in their college experience. But do not wait until the end of the semester. There comes a time when this is no longer a tenable option.

Assignment Type	Percentage
Participation and Interactive Notebook	15%
Blog Post	15%
Exams (I and II)	40%
Final Project Individual	20%
Final Project Group	10%

### *C. Grading Scale*

- 59 > =F Unacceptable Performance
- 60-63 =D- Insufficient Performance
- 64-66 =D Needs Improvement
- 67-69 =D+ Adequate Performance
- 70-73 =C- Acceptable Performance

74-76 =C	Satisfactory Performance
77-79 =C+	Promising Performance
80-83 =B-	Good Performance
84-86 =B	Commendable Performance
87-89 =B+	Great Performance
90-93 =A-	Advanced Performance
94-96 =A	Excellent Performance
97-100=A+	Superior Performance

## **Classroom Policies**

### ATTENDANCE

This course is taught from the perspective that higher education is a professional endeavor. Just as there are ramifications for missing a job, there are ramifications for missing class. The student learning outcomes for this course presume active class attendance, so personal expectations regarding grades should be revised in light of absences. You may miss 2 (two) classes without penalty. These are to help you account for those times when life just happens (family emergencies, serious illness, etc.). Any absence thereafter will result in a deduction of half your participation grade and discount you from all extra-credit opportunities—including generosity points and exam grade drops. An absence after that will be a deduction of half of your portion final project group grade. If you know you're going to be absent/late/leaving early for a class, please email the teaching assistant and instructor (single email) as soon as possible (preferably 48 hours, but ASAP) so we can work out how to help you get credit.

### MISSED EXAMS AND COURSEWORK

Anytime you miss class, you should take the following steps (in this order): (1) meet with a classmate to copy any notes, (2) schedule an appointment with the instructor or teaching assistant to get clarity on the notes, missed lesson, and any handouts, (3) study the material and come back ready to actively participate in class.

You are still responsible for submitting assignments by their deadlines. Late work and exams are only accepted in the most extreme circumstances—that is, matters of life and death, not pass or fail. Be aware that for me to justify this decision, I will likely require external documentation of the matter in consultation with campus administrative offices and reserve the right to make any deductions. I implore you to be proactive and keep me posted within in 24 hours of the issue or as soon as circumstances feasibly allow. Tardiness here will leave me less equipped to be gracious.

I do not permit incompletes except in the most extreme circumstances. Should you find yourself considering an incomplete or dropping the class, come see me first to discuss your profess. I can only work with you if you are doing your part to work with me and with the class.

### OFFICE HOURS AND COMMUNICATION

Office hours are an opportunity for you to get one-on-one assistance with the course. I invite you to come prepared with questions and to take advantage of the opportunity. I don't worry about students who come to office hours. I worry about those who never do. As I'm often on campus, please feel free to drop by if you see my office door open. Otherwise come by during my appointed office times or make an appointment. Do not be afraid to ask for help learning something you don't know well. That's precisely what we're here to do.

Online communication is a wonderful convenience, but it can give a false impression of engagement. Please note that I will generally respond to emails within 36 hours of receipt during the work week. I may not see emails during the weekend or otherwise noted occasions, so please be patient. Similarly, my communications with you will happen primarily during the work week.

#### DEVICE/TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Technology is a tool, and in world in which digital technologies are increasingly abundant, the classroom environment must take them into account. This class will use technology in a guided way. You will certainly be using computers/devices for homework activities and exams. And I may invite you to use technology for an in-class activity. That said, digital technology is prohibited during class except in those circumstances. The only exceptions are that you may use electronic markable versions of the book and readings (but please email me to let me know that you will be doing that), and you can use any device required per documentation with the Office of Disability Services. If the instructor or teaching assistant sees you using digital technology (including but not limited to mobile devices and laptops) during a class session, you will lose participation points for that day.

Please make sure your devices are silenced or on vibrate for the duration of the class. If you need to answer a call, text, or email, quietly excuse yourself from the classroom to do so. Also note, that all PPT slides will be uploaded to class, so you do not (and should not) copy slides down. Your notes should be more engaging.

#### UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE POLICIES

##### **Notification of Changes**

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The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via Blackboard and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

##### **Statement on Academic Misconduct**

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Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Code of Academic Conduct](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

##### **Statement On Disability Accommodations**

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Contact the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

## **Severe Weather Protocol**

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Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

## **Pregnant Student Accommodations**

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Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

## **Religious Observances**

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Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).

## **UAct Statement**

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The [UAct website](#) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.