

REL 504 Debates in Method & Theory

Tuesday 1:30-3:20 in Manly 210

Prof. Russell T. McCutcheon

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Manly 211

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Using the proceedings from two recent meetings of the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR)—2016 and 2017—this graduate seminar will acquaint students with contemporary debates and authors, emphasizing the work of a newer generation of scholars, in order to consider more closely the tools that scholars use to study religion, the various contexts in which they carry out their work, and some of their wider implications.

Books

This edited volume is required and widely available via online book retailers as well as at the SUPE store.

Brad Stoddard, *Method Today* (Equinox 2018)

Another edited volume's PDF first proof will be provided to the class:

Leslie Dorrough Smith (ed.), *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies: Examining the Architecture of the Academy* (Equinox, 2019)

Handbooks

Near the start of the semester, and after discussing the assignment in class, each student will be assigned one of the following handbooks, as the basis for a presentation and final essay.

Braun, Willi and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.) (2000). *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London: Bloomsbury.

Hinnells, John R. (ed.) (2005) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. New York: Routledge.

King, Richard (ed.) (2017). *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Orsi, Robert (ed.) (2011). *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Segal, Robert A. (ed.) (2006). *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Stausberg, Michael and Steven Engler (eds.) (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

-- (2011). *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, Mark C. (ed.) (1998). *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Requirements

1. Regular attendance and active participation are prerequisites for all assignments in this course.
2. *First half of the course*: although all students must read all assigned chapters for each class, each student will be assigned, in turn, one main chapter from one of the two required books and will open a class by presenting a detailed description and analysis of the chapter's argument/claims, data, and method of analysis. This student must also be prepared to reply to the commentary on that chapter offered by the respondents in the book. All students are expected to read, be familiar with, and discuss, the main chapter as well as all responses to the main chapter.
3. *Second half of the course*: adopting one handbook in the study of religion, each student is required to offer a class-length seminar on the book in question, offering an analysis of its editorial attitude and its approach to/conception of the field, the way its individual chapters support it (or not), and the type of field/research projects/classes that might result from the book's approach. The handbooks therefore become data for the analyses represented in the first half of the course.
4. A final essay, of no more than 2,500 words and worth 100% of the course grade, will systematize each student's handbook presentation, amounting to a detailed review essay of the handbook in question. This essay will be discussed in class well before the due date (Monday Dec 9 by noon).

Grading Scale

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	below 60

General Comments

1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructors suspect that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will immediately be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
2. No grades of "I" (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course. Please speak with the Instructors 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. Although we cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made for all occasions that may arise, speaking with us before a problem arises will greatly enhance our 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 should contact the Instructors outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment), 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 Instructors, ensure that you contact the Office of Disability Services.

Tentative Schedule

- Aug 27 Introduction to the Class
- Sept 3 *Method Today* Part I
- Sept 10 *Method Today* Part II
- Sept 17 *Method Today* Part III
- Sept 24 *Method Today* Part IV and Afterword
- Oct 1 *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies* Part I
- Oct 8 *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies* Part II
- Oct 15 *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies* Part III
- Oct 22 *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies* Part IV and Epilogue
- Oct 29 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation
- Nov 5 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation
- Nov 12 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation
- Nov 19 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation
- Nov 26 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation
- Dec 3 Handbooks in the Study of Religion: Presentation

There is no final examination in this course.

Final essays are due in the Professor's mail box by 12:00 pm on Mon Dec 9