

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 100-002 • Spring 2020

Professor: Dr. Russell McCutcheon

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GTA Office Hours: 11-1 Wed & by appointment

Location: Manly Hall 200

Lectures: 9:30-10:45 T/Th • Northlawn Hall 1000

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-100-002-introduction-to-religious-studies-3/>

DESCRIPTION

As an introduction to the academic study of religion, this section of REL 100 uses the academic study of religion as a way into considering the practical effects of any classification system (such as sacred/profane as well as insider/outsider). To do so we will survey some classic issues in the 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*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2019)
- *Religion in 5 Minutes* (Equinox, 2017)

**Please alert the professor if you cannot acquire the books.
They are necessary for 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 since the mybama portal will time-out), has a page for our course. A brief welcome announcement is posted there as is the course's gradebook. 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 PDF readings are posted.

READINGS

Two books are required for this course (see above) and are 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 also be required. (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.**

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 and being able to use it. This means learning a new, technical vocabulary sometimes for already familiar words (e.g., religion, myth, ritual, etc.). 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.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT (GTA)

Jeremie Nute, an REL graduate student, will be the TA in this course; his role will involve grading quizzes and tests, offering periodic guest lectures, maintaining our Blackboard site where you can obtain your grades, holding weekly office hours and offering review sessions prior to tests. He will also be regularly attending class sessions; contact him by email if you wish to make an appointment or to ask him a question (see his email at the top of page 1).

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 following test**. Missing a **quiz** for a legitimate reason means that you will not have the missed quiz count against your total quiz grade.

QUIZZES

At least **10 pop quizzes** will be administered randomly throughout the semester, and graded by the TA. (Results will be posted in the online Blackboard gradebook; make an appointment with the TA or attend his regular office hour to see the specific results of your quiz.) The quizzes will provide evidence of your preparation for class and/or attentiveness during class. They will take only a couple minutes to finish, be written on a sheet of paper that you have with you, and then handed-in with your name on it.

TESTS

Four matching tests (in which definitions must be matched to correct terms or names) will be administered throughout the course and graded by the TA. 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 all of these additional portions of the course book.

EXAM

A cumulative final exam is optional in the course, in the same format as the course’s four tests.

BONUS POINTS

The last two classes will contain bonus content, offering students who attend an opportunity to earn bonus points in the course.

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.
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 **20%** of your course grade for a total of **80%** of your final grade.
3. There will be a total of **10 unannounced, in-class quizzes** in this course. They will each require you to answer a basic question on the topic of that day’s readings. Each quiz is worth 2 points for a total of **20%** of your course grade. ***These quiz points add up so please take them seriously.*** (2 points = correct answer; 1 point = incorrect answer but quiz was taken; 0 points = quiz not taken.)
4. There will be an **optional final exam** in this course which covers the entire semester’s material and which will be in the same format as the course’s 4 unit tests. Students who opt to take the final exam will have the cumulative value of their tests reduced by half, to 40% of the course, **with the optional final counting for the remaining 40% of their 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 (visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu/> or visit Houser Hall 1000).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Jan 9	Introduction to the Course
Jan 14	The Necessity of Definition (<i>Studying Religion</i> Intro)
Jan 16	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 1 and 3
Jan 21	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 4 and 13
Jan 23	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 2 and 5
Jan 28	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 6 and 7
Jan 30	Review
Feb 4	Test 1
Feb 6	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i> link on course website)
Feb 11	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 11 and 14
Feb 13	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 12 and 17
Feb 18	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 19 and 22
Feb 20	Review
Feb 25	Test 2
Feb 27	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 18 and 20 (<i>mid-term grades due Feb 28</i>)
Mar 3	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 21 and 23
Mar 5	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 16 and 68
Mar 10*	<i>Studying Religion</i> 6 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 24 and 72
Mar 12*	Review
Mar 17	Spring Break
Mar 19	Spring Break
Mar 24	Test 3
Mar 26	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 73 and 77
Mar 31	<i>Studying Religion</i> 7 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 71 and 78
Apr 2	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 69 and 70
Apr 7	<i>Studying Religion</i> 8 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 80 and 81
Apr 9*	Review
Apr 14*	Test 4
Apr 16	Bonus Class Content
Apr 21	Bonus Class Content
Apr 23	Review for Optional Final

Optional Final Exam: Tues, Apr 28: 8-10:30 am in Northlawn 1000