

REL 590 Capstone Graduate Seminar

Wednesday 1:30-3:20 • Manly 210

Prof. Russell T. McCutcheon

russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu • Manly 211

Office Hours: by appointment

Spring 2020

Course Description

This required course is designed as a final, culminating experience for all graduating M.A. students; each semester it adopts a critical topic of broad relevance in the field and, after familiarizing them with it, invites students to explore ways in which it impacts, or can be discussed and examined in the light of, each of their own individual research interests. The course culminates with a series of seminar presentations in which students share the results of their research. For the Spring 2020 semester the topic is normativity in the academic study of religion.

Readings

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

- **Asma T. Uddin, *When Islam is Not a Religion* (Pegasus Books, 2019)**

Any additional readings will be posted as PDFs on the course website.

Guests

At several points in the course the second half of each class will involve an REL faculty member invited to discuss the role of normativity in their own research – e.g., advocating for or criticizing a specific form of religion or reading of a text or action. Given the final project in the course, these visits are meant to prompt students to identify problematic issues of normativity in their own research area.

Requirements

1. Regular attendance and active participation are prerequisites for all assignments in this course; this is worth 50% of the course grade.
2. *First half of the course*: a variety of case studies, involving the academic study of Islam as our specific example, will set the table for our discussion of normativity in the study of religion. Although there will be no formally assigned presentations during this portion of the course, students will be prepared to summarize the arguments of daily readings, if called upon, and to comment on the readings.
3. *Second half of the course*: by the mid-point of the course students will have identified (and initially present briefly on) how debates over scholarly normativity impact or are exemplified within their own research areas; the remainder of the course is an opportunity for students to delve more deeply into this issue, via individual research on a specific e.g., while preparing a final presentation.
4. A final presentation, a full 30 minutes in length and worth 50% of the course grade, is due on the last class of the semester, on normativity as it applies to their individual research interests. The requirements of these presentations will be discussed in class early in the semester.

Grading Scale

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

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

Jan 8	Introduction to the course
Jan 15	"Identifying the Meaning and End of Scholarship" (guest: Edith Szanto)
Jan 22	Case 1: Normativity in the Study of Islam (3 articles; guest: Richard Newton)
Jan 29	Case 2: <i>When Islam is Not a Religion</i> (guest: Vaia Touna)
Feb 5	Case 3: Religious Studies Project Interview (guest: Merinda Simmons)
Feb 12	Steven Ramey, "Accidental Favorites" (guest: Steven Ramey)
Feb 19	Discussion: Normativity & student research topics
Feb 26	Discussion: Initial presentations on student research topics
Mar 4	Individual Research (meet with Professor as needed during this phase of the course)
Mar 11	Individual Research
Mar 18	Spring Break
Mar 25	Individual Research
Apr 1	Individual Research
Apr 8	Individual Research
Apr 15	Individual Research
Apr 22	Student Presentations

There is no final examination or final paper in this course.