

REL 100 Introduction to the Study of Religion

Spring 2020

Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Edith Szanto

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Office: Manly Hall 209

Phone: 205-348-5310

Office Hours: M 2 to 3 and R 12:30 to 2

Class location: Lloyd Hall 329

Class time: TR 11 to 12:15

TA: Savannah Finver

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course 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 bookstores, 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

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*, and *Religion in 5 Minutes*. 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 15 points (1.5%) for a total of 15% of your course grade. 5 points will be given for an attempt at an answer and another 10 points for correct answers/the correct answer. These quiz points add up so please take them seriously.
4. Toward the end of the semester students will be asked to sign up for a "Text in Context" projects which will be done in groups of no more than 4 people. These will be presented by the group in class. These presentations are worth 5% 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 3 other unit tests. The final exam is worth 20% of your final grade.

Assessment

4 Tests (the 4 th test is also the final exam)	200 points each for a total of	800 points
Pop Quizzes	15 points per quiz for 10 quizzes	150 points
Group Projects/Presentations		50 points
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Total		1000 points

Grading Scale

- A+ 95-100%
- A 90-94
- B+ 85-89
- B 80-84
- C+ 75-79
- C 70-74
- D+ 65-69
- D 60-64
- D- 50-59
- F below 50

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 86 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)

Savannah Finver, an REL graduate student, will be the TA in this course; her role will involve grading quizzes, tests, offering a guest lecture, maintaining our Blackboard site where you can obtain your grades and take 2 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.

Pop Quizzes

There will be at least 10 pop quizzes 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. Each of the 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 Exams

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.

Group Presentations

Towards the end of the course small groups of no more than 4 people researching the context of a “religious text.” Groups will briefly meet with the TA in order to sign up for a text and then present 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.

Policy on Missed Assessments

Do not wait until the last minute to submit your assessments. Work submitted after the due dates listed in Blackboard may result in a grade of zero. The instructor is solely responsible for determining whether provisions will be made for unforeseen circumstances. You must report these circumstances as soon as possible after the event. You will be required to produce documentation.

Please contact the instructor if there are questions about missed due dates.

Blackboard and Department Website

Blackboard, a learning management system that you access through mybama or directly via ulearn.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. Additionally, we will use the course page on the Department’s website (religion.ua.edu – look under “undergraduate” and then “courses”), where some additional PDF readings are posted as well as the syllabus.

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/>.

Notification of Changes

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 email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

Technical Support

To obtain assistance with technical issues (removing pop-up blockers, opening pages or quizzes, etc.) or if you are unable to see the course content or have other questions regarding the course itself, please visit the [College of Continuing Studies Online Course Technical Support Site](#) to submit a request, or call 205-348-9157 (Toll Free: 1-866-205-1011) during their [regular business hours](#).

System Requirements

This online course requires a modern Mac or PC computer and high-speed internet connection. Your computer must also have a [compatible browser](#), PDF viewer, speakers or headphones, microphone, and productivity software such as Office.

Minimum Student Technical Skills

Taking an online course requires a general computer literacy. Students are expected to be able to use Crimson email, Blackboard, web browsers, and general word processing programs prior to enrolling in an online course. Student needing assistance using Blackboard are encouraged to visit the [UA Blackboard support site](#).

Turnitin

The University of Alabama is committed to helping students uphold the ethical standards of academic integrity in all areas of study. Students agree that their enrollment in this course allows the instructor the right to use electronic devices to help prevent plagiarism. All course materials are subject to submission to TurnItIn.com for the purpose of detecting textual similarities. Assignments submitted to TurnItIn.com will be included as source documents in TurnItIn.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. TurnItIn.com will be used as a source document to help students avoid plagiarism in written documents.

The Capstone Creed

The Capstone Creed was created by the Student Leaders Council. In the spring of 2000, a discussion of campus culture among student leaders led to an effort to identify the core values

that sustain us as members of the University community. The Student Leaders Council recognized that the Capstone experience is not limited to our formal affiliation with the University during enrollment and that the University community does not end at the geographic boundaries of campus. As members of the Capstone community, there is a common thread that unites us all, and the Student Leaders Council has endeavored to make those core values manifest through the implementation of a campus-wide creed with which all Capstone stakeholders can identify.

The Capstone Creed reads: As a member of The University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge; act with fairness, integrity and respect; promote equity and inclusion; foster individual and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence in all I do.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

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

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

Severe Weather Protocol

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

Pregnant Student Accommodations

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

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

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

Schedule

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Note: readings are noted via the parenthetical “Rel in 5: chapter numbers” on this schedule

- 1) Thursday, January 9, 2020 Introduction to the Course
- 2) Tuesday, January 14, 2020 Defining Religion (Studying Religion Intro)
- 3) Thursday, January 16, 2020 Studying Religion 1 (Rel in 5: 1 & 3)
- 4) Tuesday, January 21, 2020 Studying Religion 1 (Rel in 5: 4 & 13)
- 5) Thursday, January 23, 2020 Studying Religion 2 (Rel in 5: 2 & 5)
- 6) Tuesday, January 28, 2020 Studying Religion 2 (Rel in 5: 6 & 7)
- 7) Thursday, January 30, 2020 Review
- 8) Tuesday, February 4, 2020 Test 1
- 9) Thursday, February 6, 2020 Studying Religion 3 (Plato’s Euthyphro link on course website, or: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>)
- 10) Tuesday, February 11, 2020 Studying Religion 3 (Rel in 5: 11 & 14)
- 11) Thursday, February 13, 2020 Studying Religion 4 (Rel in 5: 12 & 17)
- 12) Tuesday, February 18, 2020 Studying Religion 4 (Rel in 5: 19 & 22)
- 13) Thursday, February 20, 2020 Review
- 14) Tuesday, February 25, 2020 Test 2
- 15) Thursday, February 27, 2020 Studying Religion 5 (Rel in 5: 18 & 20)
(mid-term grades due Feb 28)
- 16) Tuesday, March 3, 2020 Studying Religion 5 (Rel in 5: 21 & 23)
- 17) Thursday, March 6, 2020 Studying Religion 6 (Rel in 5: 16 & 68)
- 18) Tuesday, March 10, 2020 Studying Religion 6 (Rel in 5: 24 & 72)
- 19) Thursday, March 12, 2020 Review

20) Tuesday, March 17, 2020	Spring Break: No Class
21) Thursday, March 19, 2020	Spring Break: No Class
22) Tuesday, March 24, 2020	Test 3
23) Thursday, March 26, 2020	Studying Religion 7 (Rel in 5: 73 & 77)
24) Tuesday, March 31, 2020	Studying Religion 7 (Rel in 5: 71 & 78)
25) Thursday, April 2, 2020	Studying Religion 8 (Rel in 5: 69 & 70)
26) Tuesday, April 7, 2020	Studying Religion 8 (Rel in 5: 80 & 81)
27) Thursday, April 9, 2020	Review and Texts and Contexts
28) Tuesday, April 14, 2020	Group Presentations
29) Thursday, April 16, 2020	Group Presentations
30) Tuesday, April 21, 2020	“Hail Satan?” (2019)
31) Thursday, April 23, 2020	Savannah Finver, Guest Lecture and Review

Final Exam (Test 4): TBA in TBA