



REL 100.002
INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES

FALL 2020

Instructor: Richard Newton, PhD

Graduate Teaching Assistants: Joe DeFrank, Allison Isidore, Judah Siekinnen, Emma Welch
(v. 8/24/20)

Class Meetings: ONLINE (with dated assignments and expectations)

Office Hours: See Below

Office Location: MA 204, but office meetings will be remote via Blackboard Collaborate link

Phone Number: 205-348-9994

Email: rwnewton@ua.edu

Prerequisites: n/a

Course Description and Credit Hours:

This Core Humanities course surveys debates in the history of the field, definition of religion, insider/outsider problem, theories of religion, and religion and law. It is an ideal introduction to the study of religion as practiced in a public university. **HU INB, 3 Credit Hours**

For many, religion is a captivating topic; for others, a controversial one. In this class we'll examine the modern history of this subject matter and the social dynamics behind its cultural impact. As an academic course, we will calibrate our investigation around the aims and methods of the human sciences. Finally, we will consider the ways in which religion's legacy helps and hinders us in observations of the world around us—even and especially in instances that seemingly have no relation to "religion."

Student Learning Outcomes:

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

1. *Recognize the deployment of essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance definitions of religion.*
2. *Distinguish between theological and anthropocentric approaches to the study of religion.*
3. *Differentiate emic and etic explanations of religion.*
4. *Define key concepts such as classification, essentialism, structure, habitus, legitimization, authority, authenticity.*
5. *Identify key scholars and their contributions to the academic study of religion.*
6. *Redescribe historical moments using social theories from the broader academic study of religion.*

Required Course Materials

BIBLIOGRAPHY (available at the SupeStore)

Craig Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2017).

This book is a guide to the academic study of religion. It frames the aims of the discipline while introducing you to the methodological concerns, nuances, and subtleties to which students and scholars alike should be privy. I will also assign readings and media from other sources as well. Links to these will be published on Blackboard.

PRO TIP: With each unit I provide learning objectives and key terms to help you focus on the most pertinent elements for our course. Take notes accordingly and use them as a checklist for your comprehension.

Aaron W. Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. *Religion in 5 Minutes* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2017).

This is a collection of short essays that answer around 80 questions often raised by students in introductory courses in the academic study of religion. You are encouraged to read essays pertaining to your interest as we will not be able to cover all of the questions you or your predecessors have raised in the main of our course. For your final project, you will be engaging essays from this volume, so I encourage to become familiar with it prior to the semester.

PRO TIP: Choose one essay per week to read. I will recommend some that go along with each weekly unit, but follow your curiosity.

Class Resources

BLACKBOARD

All assignments and online interaction exchange for our course will happen via Blackboard. We will make great use of this tool, so you will need to make sure that you are checking it frequently. I highly recommend you set alerts so that you receive all correspondence to a device that you check. Please make sure that you engage Blackboard through a desktop or laptop computer rather than a mobile device or tablet--especially for testing. To learn how to use Blackboard and assure that your technology is compatible, please consult the links [on this page from UA's Center for Instruction Technology](#) or [contact them directly](#).

PRO TIP: Make sure to have a steady connection to the internet and always login through the [Blackboard link](#) (rather than MyBama, which signs you out after a short amount of time.)

COURSE FLOW

WEEKLY UNITS:

This course is divided into units to be completed weekly with learning objectives for you to meet. In every unit/week, you can expect to do the following:

1. **Watch** a short video (no longer than 20 minutes)--giving you an overview of the content for the week.
2. **Read** a chapter from Martin (no more than 20 pages)--deepening your encounter with the content for the week.

Take notes on the above, review, and study because you will also...

3. **Complete** a short required quiz--helping you to determine what you are coming to understand and what you need to review in order to meet our student learning outcomes.

In the case that you want or need additional review, I have created optional interactive notebook assignments (guided activities) for you to complete and upload to Blackboard.

Quizzes are due by Sunday at 11:59pm of the assigned week (think Monday - Sunday for each unit).

Interactive Notebook assignments are due on a designated day prior to each exam.

EXAMS AND QUIZZES:

There are three closed-note exams in this course, each of which are keyed to a set of units. The questions are similar in format to the reading quizzes and while each exam assumes you know content tested in prior unit exams, the exams focus on the particular learning objectives of the covered units. Quizzes and exams questions are timed and comprise of a combination of fill-in-the-blank, matching, true and false, and multiple choice questions.

PRO TIP: The quizzes are the best indicator of test performance, but you will need to spend time reviewing for each test--*time which is built into the schedule, so use it wisely.*

FINAL EVALUATION AND ASSIGNMENTS:

This course culminates in the demonstration of your ability to redescribe a cultural object or historical moment using tools from the academic study of religion while engaging essays in McCutcheon and Hughes. You will receive details on this assignment later in the semester and *will have roughly two weeks of class time dedicated to its completion.*

During Unit 4, you will complete an assignment called "Redescribing the Nacirema," which is a case study analysis that will introduce you to the tools necessary to the final project.

PRO TIP: Taking seriously the Nacirema assignment, reading *Religion in 5 Minutes*, and taking good notes are the best thing you can do to prepare for the final. "A" students will practice applying course concepts throughout the semester to examples beyond the class.

SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT COURSEWORK

If you have attempted all quizzes AND have completed all Interactive Notebook Assignments by their respective due dates, you may either: a) replace your lowest exam grade with the final project grade OR b) if you are pleased with your grade prior to the final project, you can elect to be exempt--save for a short assignment that you will submit at the end of the semester. Should scenario b) apply to you, you can elect to complete the final project, but it cannot lower your grade.

GRADES

Assignment Breakdown

Assignment Type	Percentage
Weekly Quizzes (by due date) or Interactive Notebook Assignments (by deadline) *whichever is higher	20% (each weekly unit is 2% of your overall grade)
Redescribing the Nacirema (completion grade)	5%
Exams I, II, and III	60% (each exam is 20% of your overall grade)
Final Project	15%

Grading Scale --*(Final Average is Rounded up at .5)

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

COURSE LOGIC

If you've read closely, you will realize that a considerable amount of course credit ($\frac{1}{4}$) is completion and that there are numerous opportunities to review and improve. My course is designed in this way for four reasons:

- 1) All Student Learning Outcomes are tested and measured at multiple points in the course. If you've proven competency, I would rather you deepen your knowledge elsewhere.
- 2) There are plenty of opportunities for you to improve and grow.
- 3) I want to reward those who have committed to the learning process.
- 4) You are ultimately in charge of your learning, and course design should reflect that responsibility.

TUTORIAL AND ONE-ON-ONE OFFICE HOUR SESSIONS

This class provides a lot of resources to help you be successful, but learning is a process. If and when you find yourself stuck, please proceed in the following manner to get answers to your questions.

DISCUSSION BOARD

As you are working through the course content for the week, we will have a running discussion board where you can post questions about anything related to the unit or course. Dr. Newton and the instructional team will answer your questions promptly. **Please look and see that your question hasn't already been answered in the thread before posting.**

TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Each week one of our instructional team members will offer an open, one-hour tutorial session where they will review course content from the prior week. These interactive sessions assume that you have read, taken the quiz, and are seeking extra help. Note that these sessions are designed to review content after a unit quiz is due. They will take place on Blackboard Collaborate (which is like Zoom/Google Meet/Skype but in Blackboard).

Optional Open Tutorial Sessions	Instructional Team Leader
Monday 12:00-1:00pm	Allison Isidore
Tuesday 11:00am-12:00pm	Dr. Newton
Wednesday 10:00-11:00am	Joe DeFrank
Thursday 2:00-3:00pm	Emma Welch
Friday 2:00-3:00pm	Judah Siekinnen

Our instructional team members are also available for 30 minute, one-on-one appointments to discuss content and study skills for the class. Please email each member should you want to schedule a time, and please describe the question or issue you are having. We expect that you have made use of the above opportunities before scheduling. If you haven't, you may be directed to do so if your questions is better addressed there.

One-on-One Office Hours (30 minute sessions, by appointment)	Instructional Team Leader
Monday 10:00-11:00pm	Joe DeFrank
Tuesday 4:00-5:00pm	Dr. Newton
Wednesday 4:00-5:00pm	Emma Welch
Thursday 12:00-1:00pm	Joe DeFrank
Friday 3:00-4:00pm 4:00-5:00pm	Judah Siekinnen Allison Isidore
By limited appointment for those who can't meet in the above times...	Dr. Newton Joe De Frank

COURSE DUE DATES:

Below you'll find a course calendar with due dates for each assignment. **These are not all the elements of the class--simply the due dates. Consult Blackboard for the breakdown of each unit and the materials related to them.**

Unit Focus	Monday *Schedule Amended to Reflect COVID-19 Remote Sessions
Unit 0 <i>Course Orientation</i>	Classes start on 8/19. Please review the syllabus and orientation video. Reading Quiz on “Studying Religion <i>in Culture.</i> ” (Complete by Sunday, August 23 at 11:59pm)
Unit 1 <i>Religion and the Problem of Definition</i>	Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 1. (Complete by Sunday, August 30 at 11:59pm) *August 26 is the last day to add a course or drop a course without a grade of “W” for the Fall Full Term.
Unit 2 <i>Functionalism and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion</i>	Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 2. (Complete by Sunday, September 6 at 11:59pm)
Unit 3 <i>How Society Works: Classification</i>	Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 3. (Complete by Sunday, September 13 at 11:59pm) Optional Interactive Notebook Assignments (Complete by Sunday, September 20, 11:59pm) Exam 1. (Completed by Sunday, September 20, 11:59pm)
Unit 4 <i>How Society Works: Essentialism?</i>	Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 4. (Complete by Sunday, September 27 at 11:59pm) Redescribing the Nacirema Assignment (Complete by Sunday, September 27 at 11:59pm)

<p>Unit 5</p> <p><i>How Society Works: Structure</i></p>	<p>Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 5. (Complete by Sunday, October 4 at 11:59pm)</p>
<p>Unit 6</p> <p><i>How Society Works: Habitus</i></p>	<p>Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 6. (Complete by Sunday, October 11 at 11:59pm)</p> <p>Optional Interactive Notebook Assignments (Complete by Sunday, October 18, 11:59pm)</p> <p>Exam 2. (Completed by Sunday, October 18, 11:59pm)</p>
<p>Unit 7</p> <p><i>How Religion Works: Legitimation</i></p>	<p>Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 7. (Complete by Sunday, October 25 at 11:59pm)</p> <p>*October 28 is the last day to drop a course with a grade of “W” for the Fall Term.</p>
<p>Unit 8</p> <p><i>How Religion Works: Authority</i></p>	<p>Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 8. (Complete by Sunday, November 1 at 11:59pm)</p>
<p>Unit 9</p> <p><i>How Religion Works: Authenticity</i></p>	<p>Reading Quiz on Martin Ch. 9. (Complete by Sunday, November 8 at 11:59pm)</p> <p>Optional Interactive Notebook Assignments (Complete by Sunday, November 15, 11:59pm)</p> <p>Exam 3. (Completed by Sunday, November 15, 11:59pm)</p>
<p>Unit 10</p> <p>Final Course Evaluations</p>	<p>Final Project Proposal--Sunday, November 22, 11:59pm</p> <p>Final Project Progress and Reflections--TBD</p> <p>Final Project and Questionnaire-- Sunday, December 11, 10:30am</p> <p>*December 4 is the last day to withdraw from the Fall.</p>

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Active Participation

This course is taught from the perspective that higher education is a professional endeavor that you've chosen. Just as there are ramifications for not completing assignments at a job, there are ramifications for not completing assignments in the class. Your weekly participation is assumed as they are central to the course. While there are measures in place allow for some flexibility (i.e. Interactive Notebook assignments), **there is no late work offered in this class except in emergency and/or life and death situations (not to be confused with pass or fail situations).** Should you find yourself in such a position, contact the instructor within **48 hours or as soon as possible.** The instructor reserves the right to make or not make any alterations in accordance with university policy. If you are not making progress toward the completion of our SLOs and not showing satisfactory improvement or effort, I will recommend that you retake or drop the course.

I generally do not offer 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 progress.** 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. 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 48 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. Please use the discussion board for information not of a personal/private nature as others may have similar questions.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

COVID-19 Adjustments

Given numbers of new infections in the state and elsewhere in the country along with UA's response (e.g., mandated social distancing in all classrooms, thereby reducing each room's capacity by 80%) and concerns students have expressed regarding the risks associated with in-person meetings, this large enrollment course has become a fully online course offering. All students are therefore required to have sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in each weekly class.

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at <https://studentaccounts.ua.edu/> and <https://financialaid.ua.edu/>.

All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at <http://ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability>), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

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

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.