

Introduction to the study of religion

REL 100.001 Fall 2020

Lectures: TR 12:30pm – 1:45 pm

Interactive audio/video

Prof. Vaia Touna

Email: vaia.touna@ua.edu

Office Hours: Email the professor to schedule a zoom meeting appointment.

Office: Manly Hall 202 – Department Office: Manly Hall 212 (348-5271)

GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants)

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Course Website

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-100-001-introduction-to-religious-studies-7/>

I. Description

As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, REL 100 focuses in detail on the problem of defining religion and identifies the theories of religion's function or purpose implicit in each, and the practical implications (that is, social, economic, political) of defining it in this or that way. Examples where this is applied will also be chosen from ancient Greece.

As a Core Curriculum Humanities course, REL 100's goal is for all students to learn to define, accurately describe, and compare in a non-evaluative manner so as to find significant similarities and differences among forms of observable human behavior.

II. Objectives

In this course students will be able to:

1. Describe scholars and schools of thought relevant to the academic study of religion.
2. Define key concepts in the study of religion.
3. Distinguish essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance definitions of religion.
4. Identify an emic and an etic viewpoint.
5. Compare and analyze between theological and anthropocentric approaches to the study of religion.

III. Class Meetings

COVID-19 Adjustments

Given the 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 student have expressed regarding the risks associated with in-person meetings, this class is now designated as **AV (Interactive AudioVisual)**, this means that the course's regular class meeting time still holds but the course is now being offered remotely and will

meet through Zoom videoconferencing. **All students are therefore required to have sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in each weekly class.** Each week there will be lecture recordings available on blackboard (see below “Blackboard Modules”) that you will be required to see prior to Thursdays’ zoom meetings during which time I will answer any question and offer clarifications regarding that week’s reading material and lecture recordings. The class will also meet every Tuesday via zoom with required reading material (see schedule) culminating in a short group writing assignment (see below “Requirements”). **For both Tuesdays and Thursdays’ zoom class meetings you will find the link to join on Blackboard home page.**

IV. Blackboard Modules

Apart from synchronous zoom class sessions, this course utilizes readings, streamed PowerPoint lectures, video clips, web pages, films, and a discussion board, available in the blackboard learning modules, to deliver the material about the academic study of religion. It is organized into weekly learning modules where you will find all course content along with various activities, assignments, and assessments that you are required to finish each Friday by 2:00 p.m.

V. 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 available:

McCutcheon, Russell (2019). *Studying Religion: An Introduction*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge. ISBN #0815353634

Hughes, Aaron and McCutcheon Russell (eds.) (2017). *Religion in 5 minutes*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing. ISBN #1781794650

VI. Readings

The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day. Further PDF readings will be available through the Blackboard site’s weekly modules. Doing all of your assigned readings well in advance of class is important because our lectures, discussions and writing assignments all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings.

VII. Excused absences and delays for Quizzes, Tests and Writing Assignments

All weekly module work must be completed by the due date/time posted in the Course Syllabus. Each Tuesday our zoom class time will culminate in a group writing assignment. If you are unable to attend for what the professor considers to be a legitimate reason you will have to work and

submit the assignment individually (see below “Requirements”). Quizzes, Writing Assignments and Exams on each module need to be done each week by Friday at 2:00 p.m., the tentative schedule below lists in detail your assignments for each week. **Late work will only be accepted with permission from the professor and only within reasonable time after the due date.** There is no guarantee that late assignments will be accepted—that is up to the professor’s discretion on a case-by-case basis and points may be deducted for late submissions. If an emergency arises, and you foresee having to miss multiple assignments, you must make arrangements with the professor.

VIII. GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants)

The course has two GTAs, **Kyle Ashley** and **Erica Bennett**, that will help with the various technical components of the course, will host review sessions, and help with Tuesday’s discussion sessions. They will have office hours so you can conduct them if you have any questions regarding class material.

IX. Requirements

1. Attendance

Attending weekly zoom sessions, purchasing the course books, and adequate preparation for each class meeting are expected and required in order to do well in this course. See the schedule, below.

2. 10 Quizzes (20%)

There will be 10 quizzes throughout the course relating to the readings and lectures of the week (See schedule below). Each quiz is worth 2% of your overall course grade and will consist of 5 multiple-choice questions related to the readings and lectures of that week. These quizzes are meant to provide you with review material for studying purposes and to reinforce certain important pieces of information that you learn each week. Prior to taking each quiz be sure that you have viewed the lectures, read all materials and completed all assignments relevant to that week’s quiz. **Do not click the quiz link unless you are ready to begin and complete the quiz at that time.**

3. 15 Group Writing Assignments (30%)

Every Tuesday during our zoom class session you are required to come prepared by reading 2-3 short chapters from the book *Religion in 5 minutes* (see schedule below). You will be divided into groups of 10 and you will be given 2-3 questions to discuss related to the readings of that day. Each group will choose two classmates that will be in the lead of that Tuesday’s discussions (every Tuesday there will be two different discussion leaders) and they will be responsible for writing down the answers to the questions that will be the result of the group discussion, and then uploading the answers to the discussion thread on blackboard that you will find on that week’s module—each group has to make two separate posts. If you won’t be able to attend a Tuesday’s zoom class session you will have to contact one of the GTAs of the course, who will give you questions to work individually and upload your posts to the discussion thread on blackboard. Each group assignment is worth 2%.

4. 3 Open Book exams (45%)

This course uses open book exams to assess your learning. Exams will be conducted in Blackboard with a time limit during regular class time (see schedule below). There will be 3 open book exams and on that day there will not be a zoom session. Each exam is worth 15% of your overall grade and will include 3 to 4 open-ended questions that you will have to answer in a critical thinking manner. Although the exams are open book, so you are allowed

to use reading material and notes while taking the exam, but given that each exam will have a time limit (75mins) in order to do well you are required to have very good knowledge of the reading material and the lectures. **Do not click the exam link unless you are ready to begin and complete the exam at that time.**

5. Final assignment (5%)

The course has one final assignment and details will be given during the last week of classes.

X. 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

XI. General Comments

1. 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/>.

2. 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.

2. You are responsible for doing class work in a timely manner during the semester in order to do well in the course. Contact the professor if you have any questions regarding class material, grades or if you are struggling with the course. You are also responsible for monitoring your grade during the semester and there are NO EXTRA credit opportunities in this course.

3. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author 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 peer, classmate, or published author), the case will immediately be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

4. 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. 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. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made for all occasion that may arise, speaking with me 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.

5. Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the professor outside of class time as soon as possible to review documentation and discuss accommodations. Also, students should familiarize themselves with the Office of Disability Services at <http://www.ods.ua.edu>.

6. UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students consult this site for further directions. Also familiarize yourselves with UA's Severe Weather Protocol at www.prepare.ua.edu

7. The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

XII. Tentative Schedule

Th Aug. 20 Introduction to the Course

You are required to read the syllabus and come prepared with any questions you may have.

First writing assignment

Week 1 Aug. 24-28

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapter 64 (p. 238-240)

Group writing Assignment.

Thursday Zoom session—**Introduction: What is the Study of Religion?** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 1

Week 2 Aug. 31- Sept. 4

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 3, 30, and 55

Group Writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 1** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 2

Week 3 Sept. 7-11

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 2, 17, and 18

Group Writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 2** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 3

Week 4 Sept. 14-18

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 8 and 63

Group writing assignment

No Thursday zoom session-**Open Book Test 1** on Chapters 1 and 2 from the book *Studying Religion* available on blackboard during Thursday's class time.

Week 5 Sept. 21-25

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 14 and 54

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 3** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 4

Week 6 Sept. 28 - Oct. 2

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 22 and 56

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 3** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 5

Week 7 Oct. 5-9

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 12, 13

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 4** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 6

Week 8 Oct. 12-16

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 16, 38

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 4** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 7

Week 9 Oct. 19-23

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 10, 29

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 5** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 8

Week 10 Oct. 26-30

Tuesday Zoom session— Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 15, 39, 36

Group writing assignment

No Thursday zoom session-**Open Book Test 1** on Chapters 3, 4 and 5 from the book *Studying Religion* available on blackboard during Thursday's class time.

Week 11 Nov. 2-6

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 62, 68 and 72

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 6** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 9

Week 12 Nov. 9-13

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 65, 77 and 78

Group writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session—**Chapter 7** from the book **Studying Religion**.

Quiz 10

Week 13 Nov. 16-20

Tuesday Zoom session—Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 17, 32 and 73

Group writing assignment

No Thursday zoom session- **Open Book Test 3** on Chapters 6, 7 and 8 from the book *Studying Religion* available on blackboard during Thursday's class time.

Week 14 Nov. 23-27

Thanksgiving Week—No Class

Week 15 Nov. 30 - Dec. 4

Tuesday Zoom session— Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 80 and 81

Group Writing assignment

Thursday Zoom session— **Afterword** from the book **Studying Religion**.

FINAL Assignment due Tuesday December 8 by 2p.m.