

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

REL 511.001 | SPRING 2021

Dr. Michael J. Altman

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Office: 205 Presidents Hall

Office Hours: Monday 1pm-2pm (Zoom)

In-Person Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar critically examines the history of the academic study of religion from the nineteenth century to the present.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will analyze major recent works in the field of religious studies.
2. Students will investigate the history of the academic study of religion.
3. Students will evaluate the work of their peers.
4. Students will conduct research into the historiography of a topic in religious studies.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R Trask. New York: Harcourt, 1959.

Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

McGrane, Bernard. *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other*. Columbia University Press, 1992.

Morris, Brian. *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982.

Smith, Leslie Dorrough. *Compromising Positions: Sex Scandals, Politics, and American Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Turner, James. *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America*. Athens Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar Attendance and Participation

Come to class having completed the reading and prepared to engage class discussion.

Book Reviews

Each week students will turn in a 500 word (roughly 2 pages) double-spaced typed review of the book for that week. See the "Book Review Guidelines" document for details on what is needed in these reviews. **These reviews should be posted in the #rel-511 Slack channel 24 hours before class.** Students are encouraged (though not required) to read each other's reviews to prime the pump for discussion.

Recommended Book Review

Each student will choose one of the "Recommended" books for one meeting of the class, write a book review, and present a brief informal summary of the book to the class. **Students should post their review in the #rel-511 Slack 24 hours before the class meeting.** Students can complete the recommended book review any week they choose but should give me a week's notice (e.g. "I want to review X next week") so I can ensure no one duplicates reviews.

Historiographical Essay

The capstone assignment for the course is a 4000-5000 (15-20 pages) double-spaced typed essay that gives a critical historiography of a particular subfield, area, or aspect of religious studies. The topic of the essay will be chosen in consultation with me. The goal of the essay is to summarize the history of this subfield, its connection to religious studies more broadly, the key authors and works in the field, and the important debates, while also paying critical attention to how the subfield became the way it is and argue how it should move forward.

A complete rough draft of the essay is due on **March 24**. The essay drafts will be the reading for the final four weeks of the semester. These final four weeks will be a workshop format. More details will come about how the workshop will work. **Final drafts of essays are due via email by end of the day a week after we finish discussing it in class.** You should begin thinking about a topic you want to write about immediately.

GRADE SCALE

- A Satisfactory completion of all assignments
- B Satisfactory completion of at least 80% of assignments
- C Satisfactory completion of at least 60% of assignments
- D Satisfactory completion of at least 50% of assignments
- F Satisfactory completion of less than 50% of assignments

COVID-19 ADJUSTMENTS

Class Meetings

Current classroom social distancing requirements limit the number of people who can meet in-person in our assigned classroom. Being a graduate seminar, this course depends on vigorous class discussion and participation. Therefore, we will begin the course meeting on Zoom during our weekly class meeting time. **All students are therefore required to have sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in each weekly class.** Some notes about zoom class meetings:

- Students are expected to have their cameras turned on and actively participate in the discussion over zoom.
- Please find a good place (lit, free of distractions) to zoom from for our class periods.
- Zooming does this weird thing where it breaks down our usual public/private boundary as we zoom from our houses or wherever. Try to limit distractions and interruptions while also being patient with the unexpected that may drop in (cats, dogs, children, parents, etc.).

In-person Opportunities

I hope to eventually hold our class meetings in person—most likely outdoors, distanced, and masked. Until circumstances (weather, community virus spread, vaccines, etc.) make that possible, I am available for in-person consultations individually (outdoors, distanced, with masks) by appointment. I will make time to meet with you. I also hold regular zoom office hours (see top of syllabus).

After the first few weeks of the semester, depending on conditions, I hope to shift my office hours from Zoom to in-person consultations (masked, distanced, outdoors). More information on that as the semester progresses.

Flexibility

We will all need to be nimble and flexible as we make this a successful course this semester.

For more on how we are thinking about these issues please see this post from department chair, Prof. Russell McCutcheon: <https://religion.ua.edu/blog/2021/01/06/rel-update-spring-2021-semester/>

GROUND RULES

Attendance

You are expected to attend class. This is graduate school. Unexcused absences and tardiness will lead to a reduction in your participation grade. If an issue arises that requires you to miss class please let me know as soon as possible. I am happy to work with you, but you must communicate with me.

Late Work

I do not accept late work. I do give extensions in the case of extraordinary circumstances, but I expect that you will ask for the extension promptly.

UA SAFE ZONE ALLY

I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) 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 University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias

incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

University Statement on COVID-19

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 studentaccounts.ua.edu and 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 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is a schedule of readings for the course. Each week has a required reading a number of related recommended readings. These recommended readings are for those interested in more on the week's topic and are also options for the recommended book review assignment.

Jan. 13 Introductions

AAR Presidential Addresses

PART 1: The Origins of the Field**Jan. 20**

Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*

Recommended:

Samuel Preuss, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud*

Peter Harrison, *Religion and Religions in the English Enlightenment*

Jan. 27

Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy*

Recommended:

Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*

Henry Louis Jordan, *Comparative Religion: It's Genesis and Growth*

PART 2: Building a Twentieth Century "History of Religions"**Feb. 3**

Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*

Recommended:

Joseph Kitigawa, *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience*

Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

Feb. 10

Long, *Significations*

Recommended:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*

Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*

Feb. 17

Smith, J.Z., *Imagining Religion*

Recommended:

Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*

Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*

Feb. 24 Lived Religion

Brown, *Mama Lola*

Recommended:

Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*

Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*

PART 3: Twenty-First Century Approaches

March 3

Thomas, *Faking Liberties*

Recommended:

Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*

Judith Weisenfeld, *A New World A-Coming*

March 10

Smith, Leslie, *Compromising Positions*

Recommended:

Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*

Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion*

PART 4: Reassessing the Field

March 17

McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*

Recommended:

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

March 24

ESSAY DRAFTS DUE

Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*

Recommended

Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*

Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*

March 31

Essay Workshop

April 7

Essay Workshop

April 14

Essay Workshop

April 21

Essay Workshop

Final drafts of essays are due via email by end of the day a week after we finish discussing it in class.