

REL 590 Capstone Graduate Seminar

Tuesday 1:30-3:20 • Presidents Hall 210

Prof. Russell T. McCutcheon

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Office Hours: by appointment

Spring 2021

Course Description

As a final graduate seminar in the field of religious studies, students will each adopt and present three different journals in the field (of their choosing and which are available via Gorgas Library's E-Journals), to develop an understanding of what, for them, constitutes this thing called "the field." Students will select representative essays for others in the course to read and discuss as part of their presentation on each journal. Each week students will also work through the draft chapters in the forthcoming book, *Religion in 50 Words: A Critical Vocabulary*, by Aaron Hughes and Russell McCutcheon, to sharpen their overall critical skills. The course culminates in a piece of writing (that draws on the semester's readings and discussions) in which students clearly articulate and then defend their own understanding of the academic study of religion—what they consider to be its history, its tools, its data, and its representatives, as well as its contributions or limits.

Readings

There are no books to be purchased for this semester; instead, the draft ms. for *Religion in 50 Words: A Critical Vocabulary* (to be published later in 2021 by Routledge) will be sent to students as a PDF (not for circulation). Other readings will be chosen by students themselves from Gorgas Library's e-Journals subscriptions, available by an alphabetical search at <https://www.lib.ua.edu/libraries/gorgas/> > Research Tools > E-Journals.

Presentations

Each week all students will read 4 entries in *Religion in 50 Words: A Critical Vocabulary* (see the tentative schedule) and come to class prepared to participate in an open discussion of the critical term examined in each along with considering the recommendations for its continued use (or not). To accomplish this, students will come prepared to discuss examples of these terms being used in the literature of the field with which they are familiar. Separate from this, each student will also identify, at the start of the semester, and then adopt for later presentations, three different scholarly journals; one student per class period will then introduce everyone to one of their journals, addressing such things as: its history, its past/present editors, who publishes it, which organization it represents (if any), whether it is peer reviewed, its frequency of publication, its place in the field, and a summary of the type of content that it publishes. The week prior to presentation the presenter will have already identified the two articles from the journal that they see as representative of the journal's place in the field and will have conveyed the PDF essays to everyone (via email), to read in preparation for their presentation. Note: the journals/essays that each student adopts may represent for them the sort of work that ought to be carried out in the field or the type of work that the field should not include.

List of Possible Journals

The following is a partial and merely suggested list of journals from which student may select their three titles; keep in mind that, when making these selections, others may have already selected a title you had in mind, so come to the second class of the semester with more than three.

African Journal of Gender and Religion
Bulletin for the Study of Religion
Culture & Religion
History of Religions
Implicit Religion
International Journal for Philosophy of Religion
International Journal for the Psychology of Religion
Interpretation
Japanese Journal of Religious Studies
Journal for Religion, Film and Media
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
Journal of Africana Religions
Journal of the American Academy of Religion
Journal of Biblical Literature
Journal of Childhood and Religion
Journal of Chinese Religions
Journal of Church and State
Journal of Communication and Religion
Journal of Ecumenical Studies
Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion
Journal of Islamic Studies
Journal of Korean Religions
Journal of Law and Religion
Journal of Media and Religion
Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion
Journal of Religion
Journal of Religion & Abuse
Journal of Religion and Business Ethics
Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses
Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science

Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace
Journal of Religion and Culture
Journal of Religion and Health
Journal of Religion, Law and State
Journal of Religion and Popular Culture
Journal of Religion and Society
Journal of Religion and Theatre
Journal of Religious History
Journal of Religious Leadership
Journal of Religious Thoughts
Journal of Scriptural Reasoning
Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis
Journal of Southern Religion
Journal of Technology, Theology, Religion
Journal of Women and Religion
Material Religion
Method & Theory in the Study of Religion
Numen
Prajñā Vihāra (“temple of wisdom”): Journal of Philosophy and Religion
Religion
Religions
Religion & Theology
Religious Studies
Religious Studies Review
Review of Religious Research
Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion
Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal

Final Essay

The final essay in the course, **due by noon on Wed. Apr 28**, is an opportunity for students to write about what they see the study of religion to be—its methods, its object(s) of study, its conversation partners, its membership, and its impact and relevance. The paper should be approx. 2,000 words in length (double spaced, 12 pt. Times Roman font, 1” margins, etc.), drawing on readings and discussions from the course as well as any past material studied as part of the degree, to arrive at their own statement about the identity of the study of religion—being sure to elaborate on their preferred name for the field (e.g., Religious Studies, Comparative Religion, the History of Religions, Critical Religion, etc.).

COVID-19 Adjustments and Style of Instruction

Given the number of continued new infections in the state and elsewhere in the country, along with UA’s response (e.g., mandated social distancing in all classrooms, thereby significantly reducing each

classroom's capacity) as well as concerns students have expressed regarding the risks associated with in-person meetings, we will at least begin this hybrid course in a remote fashion, then meeting masked and in-person (if possible) for subsequent classes, always prepared to use weekly live Zoom videoconference sessions, during our regularly scheduled time, if necessary. All students are therefore required to have masks for in-person meetings—whether in our classroom or some other venue, e.g., outside—and also sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in any remote class. When doing so, cameras are expected to be on, so please select your Zoom location wisely. If Zoom meetings are preferable, voluntary in-person tutorials and office hours will augment the class.

Requirements

1. Regular class attendance and participation, showing evidence of preparation for each class and integration of previous class content is worth **75%** of the final course grade. This includes all presentations and discussions.
2. The final piece of writing, due on Wed. Apr 28 (by noon), is worth **25%** of the final course grade. This assignment will be discussed in more detail in class.

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.
4. 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/>.
5. 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.

Tentative Schedule

- Jan 19 Introduction to the class and sign-up for presentations; this first class will meet via a pre-distributed Zoom link, to discuss the course and to convey the manner in which the remaining class sessions will meet.

- Jan 26 Religion in 50 Words: 1-4
REL Journal: Discuss Presentation Requirements

- Feb 2 Religion in 50 Words: 5-8
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Feb 9 Religion in 50 Words: 9-12
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Feb 16 Religion in 50 Words: 13-16
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Feb 23 Religion in 50 Words: 17-20
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Mar 2 Religion in 50 Words: 21-24
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Mar 9 Religion in 50 Words: 25-28
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Mar 16 Religion in 50 Words: 29-32
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Mar 23 Religion in 50 Words: 33-36
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Mar 30 Religion in 50 Words: 37-40
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

- Apr 6 Religion in 50 Words: 40-43
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

Apr 13 Religion in 50 Words: 44-47
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

Apr 20 Religion in 50 Words: 48-50
REL Journal & Presenter: _____

**Final essays due by noon Wed. Apr 28, as PDFs emailed to the professor.
There is no final exam in this course.**



"I'd read so much about it beforehand that I couldn't help being disappointed when I actually became enlightened."