

# Introduction to the study of religion

REL 100.001 Spring 2021

Lectures: TR 11:0am – 12:15 pm

Interactive audio/video

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## Prof. Vaia Touna

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

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

### GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants)

Kyle Ashley ([kbashley@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:kbashley@crimson.ua.edu)) Tutorial hours: Mondays 3:30-4:30 pm  
and Erica Bennett ([embennett4@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:embennett4@crimson.ua.edu)) Tutorial hours: Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm

### Course Website

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

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## 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. 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](http://amazon.com) or [bn.com](http://bn.com); used copies are also available:

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

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

## IV. Class Meetings

### COVID-19 Adjustments

Given the numbers of infections in the state and elsewhere in the country along with UA's response (e.g., mandated social distancing in all classrooms, thereby reducing significantly each room's capacity) and concerns students have expressed regarding the risks associated with in-person meetings, this class is designated as **AV (Interactive AudioVisual)**, this means that the course's regular class meeting time still holds but the course will be 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 classes.** During our zoom class meetings, **you are expected to have your cameras on**, so please select your Zoom location wisely—the University provides safe spaces throughout campus where you can log in to your virtual class (find more info here: <https://cit.ua.edu/virtual-learning-spaces/>). **For both Tuesdays and Thursdays, you will find the link to join the zoom class sessions on our course Blackboard home page.**

## V. 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, which will be available every Monday, and which will include **various activities, assignments, and assessments that you are required to finish each Friday by the end of the day.**

## 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. If you are unable to attend a zoom class meeting for what the professor considers to be a legitimate reason you will have to work and submit the discuss assignment individually (see below "Requirements"). Quizzes, Writing Assignments and Exams on each module need to be done each week by Friday, 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 Tutorials

The course has two GTAs, **Kyle Ashley** and **Erica Bennett**, that throughout the semester they will host tutorials via zoom beginning on Week 2. The link for those tutorials will be available on Blackboard. They will also help with the various technical components of the course, and with Tuesday's discussion sessions. **Students who will attend at least 5 of those tutorials will get an extra credit.**

## IX. Requirements and Assignments

Attending the 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.

### 1. 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.**

### 2. 15 Group Writing Assignments (30%)

During our zoom class session you are required to come prepared by reading 2-3 chapters from the book *Religion in 5 minutes* (see schedule below). You will be divided into groups and you will be given 2 questions to discuss related to the readings of that day. Each group will have two classmates that will be in the lead during are zoom class discussions (every week there will be different discussion leaders) and 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—the leader has to answer each question in a separate post. If you won't be able to attend the zoom class session you will have to answer the questions in two different posts on your own and upload your answers to the discussion thread on blackboard by Friday. **Late assignments will not be accepted.** Each group assignment is worth 2%.

### 3. 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. Each exam is worth 15% of your overall grade and will include 3 open-ended questions that you will have to answer in a critical thinking manner. The exams are open book which means you are allowed to use reading material and notes while taking the exam but given that each exam will have a time limit 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.**

### 4. 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](http://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, after the end of classes.**

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](http://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](http://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](http://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 Jan. 14 Introduction to the Course**

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

#### **Group discussion assignment 1**

### **Week 1 Jan. 18-22**

**Introduction: What is the Study of Religion?** from the book **Studying Religion**.

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

#### **Group discussion assignment 2**

#### **Quiz 1**

### **Week 2 Jan. 25- 29**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 3, 30, and 55

**Chapter 1** from the book **Studying Religion**.

#### **Group discussion assignment 3**

#### **Quiz 2**

### **Week 3 Feb. 1-5**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 2, 17, and 18

**Chapter 2** from the book **Studying Religion**.

#### **Group discussion assignment 4**

#### **Quiz 3**

**Week 4 Feb. 8-12**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 8 and 63

**Group discussion assignment 5**

**Open Book Exam 1** on Chapters 1 and 2 from the book *Studying Religion*

**Week 5 Feb. 15-19**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 14 and 54

**Chapter 3** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 6**

**Quiz 4**

**Week 6 Feb. 22-26**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 22 and 56

**Chapter 3** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 7**

**Quiz 5**

**Week 7 Mar. 1-5**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 12, 13

**Chapter 4** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 8**

**Quiz 6**

**Week 8 Mar. 8-12**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 38, 39

**Chapter 4** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 9**

**Quiz 7**

**Week 9 Mar. 15-19**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 10, 29

**Chapter 5** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 10**

**Quiz 8**

**Week 10 Mar. 22-26**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 15, 16, 36

**Group discussion assignment 11**

**Open Book Exam 2** on Chapters 3, 4 and 5 from the book *Studying Religion*

**Week 11 Mar. 29-Apr.2**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 62, 68 and 72

**Chapter 6** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 12**

**Quiz 9**

**Week 12 Apr. 5-9**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 65, 77 and 78

**Chapters 7 and 8** from the book **Studying Religion**.

**Group discussion assignment 13**

**Quiz 10**

**Week 13 Apr. 12-16**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 17, 32 and 73

**Open Book Test 3** on Chapters 6, 7 and 8 from the book *Studying Religion*

**Group discussion assignment 14**

**Week 14 Apr. 19-23**

Required readings from **Religion in 5 minutes**: Chapters 80 and 81

**Group discussion assignment 15**

**FINAL Assignment due Tuesday April 27**