

# **REL 100 Introduction to the Study of Religion**

Spring 2021

## **Contact Information**

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Professor: Dr. Edith Szanto

Email: [eszanto@ua.edu](mailto:eszanto@ua.edu)

Office: Presidents Hall 209

Phone: 205-348-5310

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 11 to 12 on Zoom  
Thursdays from 11:30 am to 1 pm on Zoom or in person  
(please let me know ahead of time which you prefer)

Class: Zoom on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 10:45

Zoom link: <https://uasystem.zoom.us/j/2534968518>

GTA: Joseph (Joe) Defrank [jtdefrank@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:jtdefrank@crimson.ua.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays from 10 to 11 am or by appointment

GTA: Peyton Mitzel [pmitzel@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:pmitzel@crimson.ua.edu)

Office Hours: Thursdays from 4 to 5 pm or by appointment

## **Course Description**

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As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, this section of REL 100 examines how scholars of religion in a public university define religion and study it—using the study of religion as a way into considering the practical effects of any classification system (such as sacred/profane or insider/outsider). In doing so we will survey some classic issues in the academic study of religion—e.g., essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approaches to definition, as well as familiarizing ourselves with various theories and theorists of religion—applying what we learn to wider issues outside the study of religion, where our tools may help us to understand the possible dynamics that are at work in social life. This course provides a Core Curriculum Humanities credit.

Please note that this is an AV course, which means that we will be meeting synchronously on Zoom during scheduled class times. This is the Zoom link: <https://uasystem.zoom.us/j/2534968518>. Please also note that even though we're AV, the Professor is willing to meet in person on campus.

## **Objectives**

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Among this course's many objectives are the following goals:

1. To learn to identify/distinguish between essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance definitions.
2. To learn to identify/distinguish between theological & anthropocentric approaches to religion.
3. To learn to identify/distinguish between an emic and an etic viewpoint.
4. To learn to define key concepts and identify scholars relevant to the academic study of religion.

## **Books**

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The course has two required books, that can be purchased at the University Supply Store, local bookstores, or at such sites as amazon.com or bn.com; used copies are also widely available:

- Studying Religion: An Introduction (Equinox & Routledge, 2007)
- Religion in 5 Minutes (Equinox, 2017)

Please alert the professor if you are having trouble acquiring the books. They are needed at the start of the course.

## **Requirements**

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1. Regular attendance and adequate preparation for each day's readings are expected and required to do well in this course. See the schedule below for each day's readings. Attendance will be recorded and graded as part of daily group discussion and writing assignments (see number 2 below).
2. There will be a total of 21 group discussions. We will have group discussions in every class, except on days dedicated to exams. Each student must submit 15 voice recordings of the group's discussion. The voice recording doesn't have to be longer than 2 minutes and should summarize the group discussion and answers to the questions posed. Voice recordings should be emailed to your assigned GTA. Your GTA will respond to you and record your grade.
3. These group discussions will be an integral part of the class and may happen in either the first or second part of class, either before or after the lecture. Hence, it is important that students sign in to Zoom and attend the entire class.
4. There will be 4 equally weighted tests. The first three are devoted to the material relevant to two chapters in our main course book, Studying Religion: An Introduction, and Religion in 5 Minutes. Each test is worth 15 points (which is 60% of your course grade) for a total of 60 points. The fourth test will serve as the final exam in this course and will cover the entire semester's material. It will be in the same format as the course's 3 other unit tests.
5. Toward the end of the semester students will be asked to sign up for a "Text in Context" projects which will be done in groups of no more than 4 people. These will be presented by the group in class using a power point and each student will be responsible for one topic/aspect and

at least 2 slides. These presentations constitute the culmination of the project and are worth 10% of your final grade.

## Assessment

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4 Tests (the 4 <sup>th</sup> test is also the final exam)	15 points each for a total of	60 points
Attendance and podcast discussions	2 points each for 15 meetings	30 points
Text in Context Projects		10 points
Total		100 points

## Grading Scale

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A+	95-100%	A	90-94
B+	85-89	B	80-84
C+	75-79	C	70-74
D+	65-69	D	60-64
D-	50-59	F	below 50

## Readings

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Two books are required for this course (see above) and needed right from the start.

The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day. Doing all of your assigned readings in advance of class is important because our lectures and discussions all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings. This course therefore presupposes that you have come to class ready both to acquire new information and also to discuss, reinforce, and apply the information that you have already acquired by preparing for class. The integration of the new and unfamiliar, on the one hand, with, on the other, the familiar is what this course defines as learning.

## Study Tips

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Like any field of study, the academic study of religion has a technical vocabulary all its own and this course focuses explicitly on students acquiring it. So, despite the fact that students, in their daily lives, routinely use many of our terms in a commonsense manner—such as the word religion itself, let alone such other terms sacred, myth, cult, or ritual, tradition, symbol, etc.—you should be prepared to entertain that this academic discipline redefines these words and uses them in various technical ways. This means learning a new vocabulary—not just memorizing isolated words and their meanings but, instead, using words, defined in new ways, in relation to other technical terms, so as to build up increasingly complex and sensible sentences. The students who excel in this course will therefore develop ways to (i) keep up-to-date with all new vocabulary/new scholars mentioned in our readings and in our lectures, (ii) be self-motivated to find and learn their meanings/contributions (with information from our course book, lectures, GTA office hours and reviews sessions) and then (iii) work to use these terms/scholars in sentences of their own creation, building upon key terms by linking them with other new items we have learned.

## **Lectures/Note-Taking**

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A large part of the course is a lecture format, though you will regularly be invited to offer feedback and comments in class, and the instructor will work to answer all questions posed in class. Your job, as a student, is not just to learn the material but, to do so by learning to adapt to the instructor's style of delivery. The instructor is therefore your data as much as the content of the course. For in the future you will find yourself in settings with a variety of people who each present material in a variety of ways and your success will often depend upon your ability to adapt and modify in response to those changing conditions. If you are having difficulty in our class then quickly take full advantage of the GTA's weekly office hour or contact the professor—the sooner the better. Note: lecture notes for this course are available at a variety of online sites—while some of this course does remain the same portions also change each semester and so, in my experience, such lecture notes are not all that helpful, especially for students who think such notes can replace regular attendance and readings. Also, taking photos of slides isn't all that helpful and I discourage you from doing it.

## **Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)**

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We have two GTAs. They will be involved in recording grades, grading tests, holding office hours, and leading review sessions. They will also be involved in the managing of the AV class on Zoom by joining break out rooms for class discussions.

## **Excused Absences**

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Tests will be online and will be available for two days. Exams are timed and students have one attempt. If you miss a test for what you consider to be a legitimate reason then you must contact the professor immediately to explain your absence and to provide documentation (e.g., a Dr.'s note) to officially verify the reason for the absence; only absences deemed legitimate by the professor (which requires such a note) will be allowed. Make-up tests are not an option in this course; instead, for test absences that the professor deems legitimate, the portion of the grade dedicated to the missed test will be completely transferred to the next test. If a student misses the final and has an excused absence, the average grade of the previous exams will be counted.

## **Tests and Exams**

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Four online tests consisting mainly of short essay questions will be scheduled throughout the course. A review session will be offered prior to each. These exams will be timed but students will be allowed and even encouraged to use their notes and books. The tests will be offered for two days including a day of the class. Please contact the Professor immediately if you think that you might miss a test for any reason.

## **Group Projects: “Sacred Text” in Context**

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Towards the end of the course small groups of no more than 4 people researching the context of a “religious text.” Groups will briefly meet with the Professor in order to sign up for a “sacred text” chosen from a list. Groups will meet online in class on April 15<sup>th</sup> to work together on the

project. The group will then work on a common power point and present their work in class via Zoom. Groups will submit their power point and presentation outlines to the Professor.

## **Policy on Missed Assessments**

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Do not wait until the last minute to submit your assessments. Work submitted after the due dates listed in Blackboard may result in a grade of zero. The instructor is solely responsible for determining whether provisions will be made for unforeseen circumstances. You must report these circumstances as soon as possible after the event. You will be required to produce documentation. Please contact the Professor or the GTAs if you have any questions about missed due dates.

## **Blackboard**

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Blackboard, a learning management system that you access through mybama or directly via ualearn.blackboard.com (the latter is preferable), has a page for our course. The page has the syllabus, grades, possible documents or instructions, and recordings of the lecture parts of the AV course.

## **General Comments**

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1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author as if it is ones own, doing so 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 friend, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
2. 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. So 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 and thus a problem. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made for all occasions that may arise, speaking with your professors before a problem arises will greatly enhance their 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 are advised to contact the professor (not a GTA) outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment to see me at my office), 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 professor, ensure that you first contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located at 133B Martha Parham Hall East (on the corner of 6th Ave. and Bryant Dr.); call them at 348-4285 or visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu/>.

## **Notification of Changes**

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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.

## **Technical Support**

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To obtain assistance with technical issues (removing pop-up blockers, opening pages or quizzes, etc.) or if you are unable to see the course content or have other questions regarding the course itself, please visit the [College of Continuing Studies Online Course Technical Support Site](#) to submit a request, or call 205-348-9157 (Toll Free: 1-866-205-1011) during their [regular business hours](#).

## **System Requirements**

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This online course requires a modern Mac or PC computer and high-speed internet connection. Your computer must also have a [compatible browser](#), PDF viewer, speakers or headphones, microphone, and productivity software such as Office. A smart phone where you can record yourself speaking is helpful, but not necessary.

## **Minimum Student Technical Skills**

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Taking an AV course requires a general computer literacy. Students are expected to be able to use Crimson email, Blackboard, web browsers, and general word processing programs prior to enrolling in an online course. Students needing assistance using Blackboard are encouraged to visit the [UA Blackboard support site](#). Students are also required to be able to record themselves and email that recording to the instructor/GTA.

## **The Capstone Creed**

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The Capstone Creed was created by the Student Leaders Council. In the spring of 2000, a discussion of campus culture among student leaders led to an effort to identify the core values that sustain us as members of the University community. The Student Leaders Council recognized that the Capstone experience is not limited to our formal affiliation with the University during enrollment and that the University community does not end at the geographic boundaries of campus. As members of the Capstone community, there is a common thread that unites us all, and the Student Leaders Council has endeavored to make those core values manifest through the implementation of a campus-wide creed with which all Capstone stakeholders can identify.

The Capstone Creed reads: As a member of The University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge; act with fairness, integrity and respect; promote equity and inclusion; foster individual and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence in all I do.

## **Statement on Academic Misconduct**

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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**

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Contact the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

## **Severe Weather Protocol**

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Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

## **Pregnant Student Accommodations**

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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**

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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**

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The [UAct website](#) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.

## **COVID-19 Statement**

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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. 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 sessions; and (2) adhere to social distancing standards. 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.

## Schedule

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Note: readings are noted via the parenthetical “Rel in 5: chapter numbers” on this schedule

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|---------------------------------|---|
| 1) Thursday, January 14, 2021   | Introduction to the Course  |
| 2) Tuesday, January 19, 2021    | Defining Religion (Studying Religion Intro, pp. 1-12)<br>(Rel in 5: 3)  |
| 3) Thursday, January 21, 2021   | Studying Religion chap. 1, pp. 13-20 (Rel in 5: 1 & 8)  |
| 4) Tuesday, January 26, 2021    | Studying Religion chap. 1, pp. 21-24 (Rel in 5: 4 & 13)   |
| 5) Thursday, January 28, 2021   | Studying Religion chap. 2, pp. 25-29 (Rel in 5: 2 & 5)  |
| 6) Tuesday, February 2, 2021    | Studying Religion chap. 2, pp. 30-35 (Rel in 5: 6 & 7)  |
| 7) Thursday, February 4, 2021   | Review (and Rel in 5: 49 & 61)  |
| 8) Tuesday, February 9, 2021    | Test 1<br>Test 1 will be available online from Monday, February 8 at 9 am till Tuesday, February 9 at 9 pm  |
| 9) Thursday, February 11, 2021  | Studying Religion chap. 3, pp. 37-48 (Plato’s Euthyphro:<br><a href="http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html">http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html</a> ) |
| 10) Tuesday, February 16, 2021  | Studying Religion chap. 3, pp. 49-54 (Rel in 5: 11 & 14)  |
| 11) Thursday, February 18, 2021 | Studying Religion chap. 4, pp. 55-64 (Rel in 5: 12 & 17)  |
| 12) Tuesday, February 23, 2021  | Studying Religion chap. 4, pp. 65-70 (Rel in 5: 19 & 22)  |
| 13) Thursday, February 25, 2021 | Review (and Rel in 5: 47 & 55)  |
| 14) Tuesday, March 2, 2021      | Test 2<br>Test 2 will be available online from Monday, March 1 at 9 am till Tuesday, March 2 at 9 pm  |
| 15) Thursday, March 4, 2021     | Studying Religion chap. 5, pp. 71-77 (Rel in 5: 18 & 20)<br>(mid-term grades due March 5)   |
| 16) Tuesday, March 9, 2021      | Studying Religion chap. 5, pp. 78-81 (Rel in 5: 21 & 23)  |
| 17) Thursday, March 11, 2021    | Studying Religion chap. 6, pp. 83-90 (Rel in 5: 16 & 68)  |

- 18) Tuesday, March 16, 2021      Studying Religion chap. 6, pp. 91-96 (Rel in 5: 24 & 72)
- 19) Thursday, March 18, 2021      Review (and Rel in 5: 9 & 10)
- 20) Tuesday, March 23, 2021      Test 3  
Test 3 will be available online from Monday, March 22 at 9 am till Tuesday, March 23 at 9 pm
- 21) Thursday, March 25, 2021      Instructions for “texts in contexts”, visit by librarian
- 22) Tuesday, March 30, 2021      Studying Religion chap. 7, pp. 97-104 (Rel in 5: 73 & 77)
- 23) Thursday, April 1, 2021      Studying Religion chap. 7, pp. 105-109 (Rel in 5: 71 & 78)
- 24) Tuesday, April 6, 2021      Studying Religion chap. 8, pp. 111-117 (Rel in 5: 69 & 70)
- 25) Thursday, April 8, 2021      Studying Religion chap. 8, pp. 118-122 (Rel in 5: 65 & 76)
- 26) Tuesday, April 13, 2021      Review (and Rel in 5: 80 & 81)
- 27) Thursday, April 15, 2021      Group Meetings and Project Planning during class
- 28) Tuesday, April 20, 2021      Group Presentations
- 29) Thursday, April 22, 2021      Group Presentations
- Final Exam (Test 4): online from April 26 at 9 am to April 28 at 9 pm