



**REL 501.001**  
**SOCIAL THEORY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

FALL 2021

Instructor: Richard Newton, PhD  
(v. 8/8/21)

**Class Meetings:** Wednesday 1:30-3:30pm Presidents Hall 210

**Office Hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 10:00am-11:00am by online appointment (please email to schedule)

**Office Location:** MA 204

**Phone Number:** 205-348-9994

**Email:** [rwnewton@ua.edu](mailto:rwnewton@ua.edu)

**Prerequisites:** n/a, Contact the main office for permission to enroll.

**Course Description and Credit Hours:**

Required foundation seminar introduces students to critical terms & ideas from social theory, demonstrating their wide relevance to the academic study of religion. **Foundation Course, 3 Credit Hours**

This seminar introduces the history of “religion” as an opportunity for theorizing social formations, cultural productions, and the politics of identification. Students will read broadly in the humanities and social sciences to gain insight into critical terms and arguments pertinent to the anthropocentric study of religion. Participation in the seminar includes the composition of lead seminar papers, presentations of cultural examples of social theory, and analytical notes. The course culminates with each student developing a position paper on a key term of potential interest to the student’s future work in the academic study of religion.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to do the following:

1. *Define keywords in the academic study of religion.*
2. *Present cultural examples to illustrate social theoretical insights.*
3. *Read sophisticated literature in social theory from across the human sciences.*
4. *Write a cohesive and compelling argument that advances a position in social theory for the purposes of scholarly research and inquiry.*

### **Required Course Materials**

BIBLIOGRAPHY (available at the SupeStore)

Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, 2nd ed., trans. Steven Rendall, Cynthis Schoch, and Jonathan Derrick (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Fordham University Press, 2013).

Rogers Brubaker. *Trans.: Gender and Race in the Age of Unsettled Identities*. (Princeton University Press, 2017).

\*Other materials, such as the articles below, will be distributed via Blackboard throughout the semester.

Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) <http://www.criticaltheoryindex.org/assets/MythToday---Barthes-Roland.pdf>

David Chidester, "Anchoring Religion in the World: A Southern African History of Comparative Religion," *Religion* 26 (1996): 141-160. <https://www-tandfonline-com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/doi/abs/10.1006/reli.1996.0012> (download through library)

Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 1-88. [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrativeandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly\\_haraway\\_----\\_a\\_cyborg\\_manifesto\\_science\\_technology\\_and\\_socialist-feminism\\_in\\_the\\_....pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrativeandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf)

Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 225-227. <https://religion.ua.edu/links/theses-on-method/>

Malory Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," *Open Library of the Humanities* 5.1 (2019), <https://olh.openlibhums.org/article/id/4580/>.

Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious." *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284. [https://womrel.sitohost.iu.edu/Rel433%20Readings/SearchableTextFiles/Smith\\_ReligionReligionsReligious.pdf](https://womrel.sitohost.iu.edu/Rel433%20Readings/SearchableTextFiles/Smith_ReligionReligionsReligious.pdf)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). [http://abahlali.org/files/Can\\_the\\_subaltern\\_speak.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf)

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Baby: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2, 64-81. [https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense\\_spillers\\_-\\_mamas\\_baby\\_papas\\_maybe.pdf](https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense_spillers_-_mamas_baby_papas_maybe.pdf)

## **Course Meetings**

As infections from the novel coronavirus continue to produce public health hardships in the state, nation, and world, the success of our course will require us to stay attentive to the COVID-19 situation as it develops. The University of Alabama has initiated various measures (listed and updated at [healthinfo.ua.edu](http://healthinfo.ua.edu)) to help our community stay safe and learning actively. As always the course instructor will also implement measures to utilize classroom time and space so as to maximize learning for all participants. Please stay informed via your own inquisitiveness and the link listed above, and stay in contact with the instructor as you take care of yourself so that we can all remain as responsive and nimble as possible in these difficult times.

## **Class Resources**

### **Blackboard**

This in-person course is enhanced by a number of online platforms to enhance learning. Blackboard will be where you manage and share course files. You will need to activate notifications so that you regularly get course announcements and other vital information that will keep you current and connected. And should we need to meet for office hours or otherwise in a digital manner, we will use Blackboard as well. Blackboard is integrated with your UA email account.

All students are therefore required to have sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in each weekly class. If you have a problem or foresee a hardship in this regard, please contact me as soon as possible so we can develop contingencies together.

## **COURSE FLOW**

This course is generally divided into units made up of roughly 3-4 weeks. For every class session, you can expect to do the following:

1. **Review** the course announcement on Blackboard with notes and objectives about the reading for the coming session and confirming your assignment for the coming class.
2. **Read** the assigned work, always looking for the work's topic, research question, thesis statement, argument structure, key and key assertions. Make a list of questions you have from the reading (with pagination as best as possible). Summarize the work into your own words. I never expect you to understand everything, but your job is to commit to working through the reading as best as you can.
3. **Prepare** your assignment for class, whether it be the seminar paper, cultural example, or blog post.
4. **Submit** your assignment one hour before class starts in Blackboard. This allows the instructor to predict the flow of our seminar session.
5. **Participate** in class as we will actively work through the material noted in [1], [2], and [3], drawing upon case study analysis to help us synthesize information. Amend your study notes in class accordingly.

## **CULTURAL EXAMPLE**

Once per unit you will be required to find some instance from the news that you see as illustrative of the dynamics we are studying for the week. You will bring a clipping, link, video (etc.) to class and connect it to the reading, referencing a passage you find especially pertinent to our discussion. For your submission on Blackboard, you simply need to present the example, quotation, and a very brief outline that will help you during your presentation.

## **BLOG POST**

Once per unit you will write a 750-word blog post using a cultural example of your choosing to advance a single argument pertinent to a key concept or argument from our reading for the week. This piece should include embedded dynamic media that helps to acquaint us with the example and it should be of publishable quality. Please consult the [edge.ua.edu/blog](http://edge.ua.edu/blog) and

religion.ua.edu/blog for examples. Pieces may be published to the department blog and your personal blog.

## SEMINAR PAPER

Three times during the semester, you will take the lead in leading a portion of our seminar discussion. These 1250-word (max), thesis-driven papers should construct (a) a definition of a keyword of interest to the author we are reading, (b) draw upon evidence from the author's work to support the definition you've constructed, and (c) your researched and informed evaluation of that definition for the purposes of the academic study of religion. For part (c), you may reference other works but only in a way that helps to support your engagement (and the reader's engagement) of the main author we are reading. Please use Chicago author-date style for your references.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

To help you navigate social theory as a scholarly enterprise, this course has the practical benefit of helping you develop research skills. Throughout the course you will be developing an annotated bibliography designed to help you in your active research (i.e. your thesis project or developing area of expertise). In addition to required seminar readings, you will be reading (at minimum) the following additional sources on your select keyword: 1 pivotal/foundational monograph 2 book reviews on that monograph 5 peer-reviewed journal articles 2 scholarly encyclopedia entries You and your advisor may negotiate which, what, and when you read these works throughout the semester. But the weeks you are not leading the seminar are designated to this aspect of your study of social theory as it pertains to your research interests. On Update Days, we will discuss progress and problems faced in your research. Toward the end of the semester, you will submit a working annotated bibliography in the citation style of your choice. Following the citations, each entry will include: • Topic • Research Question • Thesis • How do you see this work relating to religious studies and social theory? • How's this work relate to my on-going research? • Where do I go next in my research? • Pertinent Quotations/Summations

## SOCIAL THEORY POSITION PAPER:

Using the works on your annotated bibliography, along with the readings from class, you will develop an essay centered around a single theoretical concept or argument in which you will (a) present the select keyword of interest (i.e. What is this term and what's it mean?) , (2) situate it in relation to the literature you've read and other concepts you've encountered (i.e. What does it do for us in the human sciences?), (3) argue the pertinence of this term in the academic study of religion (Why should we care in the academic study of religion, especially as you hope to conduct your work at the University of Alabama?). This paper should be between 3250-3750 words and formatted according to the style requirements you will use in ongoing research.

## KEYWORD PROSPECTUS AND OUTLINE

At the end of the semester, you will submit a 500-word prospectus & outline for your SOCIAL THEORY POSITION PAPER, detailing the elements enumerated in the SOCIAL THEORY POSITION PAPER description and using what you've learned from your ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY. I will give you substantive feedback on this so that you may use this as a guide for your final course submission. This assignment's completion is worth 10% of your Keyword Essay

## GRADES

### *Assignment Breakdown*

<b>Assignment Type</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cultural Examples (Three Required- I'll average the top two for your grade.)	10%
Blog Posts (Three Required- I'll average the top two for your grade.)	15%
Seminar Paper (Three Required- I'll average the top two for your grade.)	25%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Keyword Prospectus and Outline	15%
Social Theory Position Paper	20%

*Grading Scale* --\*(Final Average is Rounded up at .5)

- <59 =F Unacceptable Performance
- 60-69 =D Needs Improvement Performance
- 70-79 =C Adequate Performance
- 80-89 =B Promising Performance
- 90-100=A Superior Performance

COURSE DUE DATES:

Below you'll find a course calendar with due dates for each assignment. **Please keep up with Blackboard for updates on scheduling, meetings, etc.**

Unit Focus	Class Sessions
<p><b>Unit 1</b> <i>Course Orientation</i></p>	<p><b>Classes start on 8/18.</b> Syllabus Access Blackboard</p> <p>Smith</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with the following short pieces:  <a href="https://religion.ua.edu/social-theory-and-religious-studies/">https://religion.ua.edu/social-theory-and-religious-studies/</a>  <a href="https://religion.ua.edu/links/religious-studies-a-part-of-the-human-sciences/">https://religion.ua.edu/links/religious-studies-a-part-of-the-human-sciences/</a>  <a href="https://religion.ua.edu/links/the-students-desk/what-is-the-academic-study-of-religion/">https://religion.ua.edu/links/the-students-desk/what-is-the-academic-study-of-religion/</a></p> <p>*Table of Contents of Keyword Volumes (to be given in class)</p>
<p><b>Unit 2</b> Myths</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 8/25</b></p> <p>Barthes</p> <p>*August 25 is the last full day to drop a course without a grade of a “W.”</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i> <i>Blog Post:</i> <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>
<p>Gender-Race</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/1</b></p> <p>Brubaker (Intro. and Part I)</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i> <i>Blog Post:</i> <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>

<p>Classification</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/8</b></p> <p>Brubaker (Part II and Conclusion )</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i>  <i>Blog Post:</i>  <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>
<p>(Post)human</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/15</b></p> <p>Update Day</p> <p>Haraway</p>
<p><b>Unit 3</b></p> <p>State</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/22</b></p> <p>Chidester</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i>  <i>Blog Post:</i>  <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>
<p>Culture</p> <p>Nation</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/29</b></p> <p>Bayart (Intro. and Part I)</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i>  <i>Blog Post:</i>  <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p> <p><b>Wednesday 10/6</b></p> <p>Bayart (Part II and Concl.)</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i>  <i>Blog Post:</i>  <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>



<p>Subaltern</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/13</b></p> <p>Update Day</p> <p>Spivak</p>
<p><b>Unit 4</b></p> <p>Method and Decolonization</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/20</b></p> <p>Lincoln Nye</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i> <i>Blog Post:</i> <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>
<p>Secularism</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/27</b></p> <p>Asad, Brown, Butler, Mahmood (1-94)</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i> <i>Blog Post:</i> <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p> <p>October 27 is the last day to drop the course with a “W.”</p>
<p>Critique</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 11/3</b></p> <p>Asad, Brown, Butler, Mahmood (95-146)</p> <p><i>Cultural Example:</i> <i>Blog Post:</i> <i>Seminar Paper:</i></p>

Theory-Grammar	<p><b>Wednesday 11/10</b></p> <p>Update Day</p> <p>Spillers</p>
<p><b>Unit 5</b></p> <p>Craft and Field Talk</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 11/17</b></p> <p><b>Annotated Bibliography Due</b></p> <p><b>Craft and Field Talk</b></p> <p><b>Reading TBD</b></p> <p><b>(Monday 11/29 at 11:59pm Keyword Prospectus and Outline Due)</b></p>
	<p><b>Wednesday 11/24 [no class]</b></p>
	<p><b>Wednesday 12/1</b></p> <p><b>No Class--Paper Conferences</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>*Class Celebration TBD</b></p>
<b>Final Project</b>	<p><b>Due on Blackboard by Wednesday, December 8, 2021, 11:59pm.</b></p>

## CLASSROOM POLICIES

### **Attendance and Active Participation**

This course is taught from the perspective that higher education is a professional endeavor that you've chosen. Just as there are ramifications for not completing assignments at a job, there are

ramifications for not completing assignments in the class. Your participation is assumed as they are central to the course. **There is no late work offered in this class except in emergency and/or life and death situations (not to be confused with pass or fail situations).** Should you find yourself in such a position, contact the instructor within **48 hours or as soon as possible.** The instructor reserves the right to make or not make any alterations in accordance with university policy. If you are not making progress toward the completion of our SLOs and not showing satisfactory improvement or effort, I will recommend that you retake or drop the course.

I generally do not offer incompletes except in the most extreme circumstances. Should you find yourself considering an incomplete or dropping the class, **come see me first to discuss your progress.** I can only work with you if you are doing your part to work with me and with the class.

### **Office Hours and Communication**

Office hours are an opportunity for you to get one-on-one assistance with the course. I invite you to come prepared with questions and to take advantage of the opportunity. I don't worry about students who come to office hours. I worry about those who never do. Do not be afraid to ask for help learning something you don't know well. That's precisely what we're here to do.

Online communication is a wonderful convenience, but it can give a false impression of engagement. Please note that I will generally respond to emails within 48 hours of receipt during the work week. I may not see emails during the weekend or otherwise noted occasions, so please be patient. Similarly, my communications with you will happen primarily during the work week. Please use Blackboard for information not of a personal/private nature as others may have similar questions.

### UNIVERSITY POLICIES

#### **COVID-19 Adjustments**

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](http://studentaccounts.ua.edu) and [financialaid.ua.edu](http://financialaid.ua.edu).

UA students, faculty and staff are required to comply with [UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Task Force](#) guidance regarding social distancing, face coverings and other measures.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to [protect yourself and our herd](#). COVID-19 vaccines are being administered by the [University Medical Center, the Student Health Center](#) and various businesses and healthcare providers. Students who [report proof of their vaccination status](#) will receive Bama Cash as a thank you gift for doing their part.

### **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 via Blackboard 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 [Code of Academic Conduct](#) 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 [UAct website](#) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.