

## REL 512 Debates in Method and Theory

Tuesday 1:30-3:20 • PRH 210

Prof. Russell T. McCutcheon

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Office Hours: by appointment

Fall 2021

### Course Description

The study of religion is often misunderstood, with students continually explaining to others that they are not necessarily training for the ministry nor intent on criticizing the beliefs or the practices of religious people. This course tackles the work of mostly younger scholars trying to address misconceptions about the study of religion while also making clear that a scholar of religion has something to add to scholarly debates—often by shifting or translating the claims from one domain to another (much as Emile Durkheim redescribed the claims from religion to that of sociology). Working with two books in particular (*Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* and *Religion in 5 Minutes*), this course provides an opportunity to read contemporary authors who see the study of religion as something more than just a descriptive and comparative exercise. A second set of books will be used as a resource throughout the course, prompting students to thicken their understanding of the technical terminology used in the course's main books. The course is comprised of weekly student-led seminars and discussions.

### Readings

All books are required:

- Craig Martin and Brad Stoddard (eds.), *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* (Bloomsbury, 2017)
- Aaron W. Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Religion in 5 Minutes* (Equinox, 2017)
- Aaron W. Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon, *Religion in 50 Words* (Routledge, 2021)
- Aaron W. Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon, *Religion in 50 More Words* (Routledge, 2021)

The first two titles are available in softcover at the campus supply store or online at a variety of vendors; the latter two (due to be published in Fall 2021) will be distributed to students as a PDF.

### Requirement

1. Regular attendance, evidence of preparation, and active participation are prerequisites for success in this course; this is all worth **100%** of the course's final grade. As part of this course, each student will (i) offer at least two seminars on a chapter in *Stereotyping Religion* (described below) along with submitting (ii) a final book review of *Religion in 5 Minutes* (also described below).

### Seminars

In this course the seminars involve the class working through the essays in *Stereotyping Religion* in order, providing each student with the opportunity to take the lead on that week's class session; lasting at least 30 minutes, each presentation will then be followed by open discussion. The seminar leader is expected (i) to familiar the class with the author of that day's chapter and (ii) to summarize the reading in question but then go on (iii) to apply or exemplify it, identifying its limitations or contributions, etc, doing so with regard to a data-domain with which the presenter is familiar. *Religion in 50 Words* and *Religion in 50 More Words* are resources for each week's presenter, to draw upon essays from each, on

any technical term used in the main reading, to them use their findings to complicate or thicken the class's understanding of the issues examined in/implications of the chapters from *Stereotyping Religion*. Students who come with handouts or PowerPoints for their seminar presentations are strongly recommended not to just read their materials as their presentation.

### Final Writing Assignment

A final piece of writing—a book review—is due in my mailbox or as email attachment on **Monday, Dec. 6, by noon**; this will focus on *Religion in 5 Minutes*, asking students to consider how the volume's chapters do or do not shift the discussion to more theoretical topics from a merely descriptive approach. This final writing assignment, of approx. 2,000 words, is an opportunity to consider how the approach of the course can impact an introductory undergraduate classroom as well as conversations with anyone new to the field. This assignment will be discussed in more detail during the class (on Oct. 12). Students are recommended to begin reading the entries in *Religion in 5 Minutes* only once the approach of the class is clear to them and at least before the mid-point of the semester.

### 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.

### Tentative Schedule

Aug 24	Introduction to the course (sign up for seminars)
Aug 31	<i>Stereotyping Religion</i> : Introduction
Sept 7	<i>Stereotyping Religion</i> 1 _____
Sept 14	<i>Stereotyping Religion</i> 2 _____
Sept 21	<i>Stereotyping Religion</i> 3 _____
Sept 28	<i>Stereotyping Religion</i> 4 _____

- Oct 5      *Stereotyping Religion 5* \_\_\_\_\_
- Oct 12     *Religion in 5 Minutes: Initial discussion*
- Oct 19     *Stereotyping Religion 6* \_\_\_\_\_
- Oct 26     *Stereotyping Religion 7* \_\_\_\_\_
- Nov 2      *Stereotyping Religion 8* \_\_\_\_\_
- Nov 9      *Stereotyping Religion 9* \_\_\_\_\_
- Nov 16     *Stereotyping Religion 10* \_\_\_\_\_
- Nov 23     No class – work on book reviews
- Nov 30     No class – work on book reviews
- Dec 6      **Book reviews due to the professor as PDFs (by noon)**

**There is no final exam in this course.**



*"Why did you become a crusader? You don't even go to church."*