

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

REL 511.001 | SPRING 2022

Dr. Michael J. Altman

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Office: 205 Presidents Hall

Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar critically examines the history of the academic study of religion from the nineteenth century to the present.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will investigate the history of the academic study of religion.
2. Students will evaluate the work of their peers.
3. Students will conduct research into the historiography of a topic in religious studies.
4. Students will demonstrate the skill of book review writing.
5. Students will demonstrate the skill of writing a historiographical essay.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R Trask. New York: Harcourt, 1959.

Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

McGrane, Bernard. *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other*. Columbia University Press, 1992.

Morris, Brian. *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982.

Smith, Leslie Dorrough. *Compromising Positions: Sex Scandals, Politics, and American Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Turner, James. *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America*. Athens Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

#rel-511 SLACK

All of you have been added to a Slack channel for this class on the REL Slack workspace. This will be our main space for communication. I suggest you download the Slack app onto your phone. A slack DM will reach me faster than email. If you have questions about setting up Slack please let me know and I'll be happy to help you.

ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar Attendance and Participation

Come to class having completed the reading and prepared to engage class discussion.

Book Reviews

Each week students will turn in a 500 word (roughly 2 pages) double-spaced typed review of the book for that week. See the "Book Review Guidelines" document for details on what is needed in these reviews. **These reviews should be posted in the #rel-511 Slack channel 24 hours before class.** Students are encouraged (though not required) to read each other's reviews to prime the pump for discussion.

Recommended Book Review

Each student will choose one of the "Recommended" books for one meeting of the class, write a book review, and present a brief informal summary of the book to the class. **Students should post their review in the #rel-511 Slack 24 hours before the class meeting.** Students can complete the recommended book review any week they choose but should give me a week's notice (e.g. "I want to review X next week") so I can ensure no one duplicates reviews.

Historiographical Essay

The capstone assignment for the course is a 4000-5000 (15-20 pages) double-spaced typed essay that gives a critical historiography of a particular subfield, area, or aspect of religious studies. You should begin thinking about a topic you want to write about immediately. The topic of the essay will be chosen in consultation with me. We will also talk about these essays a lot in class as a group. The goal of the essay is to summarize the history of this subfield, its connection to religious studies more broadly, the key authors and works in the field, and the important debates, while also paying critical attention to how the subfield became the way it is and argue how it should move forward.

Proposal and Bibliography

A brief (one paragraph) proposal that describes the subfield and how you plan to approach it and a bibliography of at least 10 strong academic sources (books/articles) is due on **March 16** (the week before Spring Break). You will also briefly present your topic to the class. Choose whatever bibliography format

you'd like (Chicago, MLA, etc.) but be consistent. This bibliography should function as an outline of the historiography you plan to sketch out in the essay. You will probably have more than these 10 sources on the bibliography of your rough draft that comes next.

Rough Draft

A complete rough draft of the essay is due on **April 13**. The essay drafts will be the reading for the final two weeks of the semester. These final two weeks will be a workshop format. More details will come about how the workshop will work.

Final drafts of essays are due to me via email/Slack by end of the day a week after we finish discussing it in class. That is, you have a week to revise your essay in light of the workshop.

GRADE SCALE

- A** Satisfactory completion of all assignments
- B** Satisfactory completion of at least 80% of assignments
- C** Satisfactory completion of at least 60% of assignments
- D** Satisfactory completion of at least 50% of assignments
- F** Satisfactory completion of less than 50% of assignments

GROUND RULES

Attendance

You are expected to attend class. This is graduate school. Unexcused absences and tardiness will lead to a reduction in your participation grade. If an issue arises that requires you to miss class please let me know as soon as possible. I am happy to work with you, but *you must communicate with me*.

Late Work

I do not accept late work. I do give extensions in the case of extraordinary circumstances, but I expect that you will ask for the extension promptly.

UA SAFE ZONE ALLY

I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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 in class and/or via email 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 [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) 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 University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

Statement on COVID-19

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 and financialaid.ua.edu.

UA students, faculty and staff are required to comply with University Spring 2022 Operations (<https://healthinfo.ua.edu/news/university-spring-2022-operations/>) guidance regarding face coverings and other measures.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to Protect Our Herd. COVID-19 vaccines are being administered by the University Medical Center, the Student Health Center and various businesses and healthcare providers.

Wellness Resources

College can be a stressful time

If you or someone you know is facing a challenging time or dealing with academic or personal stress, anxiety, depression, or other concerns, we strongly encourage and support you to seek assistance or to help friends find the care that they may need. Also, if you are experiencing a personal crisis and need urgent assistance, you can also contact the following resources:

Counseling Center

Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-3863).

Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak with the on-call counselor).

You may also text BAMA to 741-741 to text with a trained volunteer.

Women and Gender Resource Center

Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-5040).

Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak to the on-call advocate for the WGRC).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is a schedule of readings for the course. Each week has a required reading and related recommended readings. If you do not read the recommended reading in full (which is not expected at all, but maybe it piques your interest), you should either quickly skim it (introduction/conclusion) or read a book review from a journal in the field. These recommended books are also the options for the recommended book review assignment.

All of the chapter/article required readings can be found in a Box folder:

<https://alabama.box.com/v/REL511SP2022>

INTRODUCTION: Skills for the Journey**Jan. 12 Introductions and Orientations**

In class:

Hacks for finding books/book sections online

How do you find a book review?

How do you read a book?

Jan. 19 Books, Reviews, and Academic Conversations

Reading before class:

Altman, "Introduction: Something Someone Calls Religion Somewhere Someone Calls America"

Book review guidelines document

Book review example document

How to Read a Book blog posts

In class:

What is a historiographical essay? Why would I want to write one?

How do you write a good book review? Why would I want to write one?

How do you read a book effectively?

Note: For the remainder of the syllabus, each reading listed should be done before class and our in-class work will be discussing the readings. Book reviews are also due each week from here on out.

PART 1: The Origins of the Field**Jan. 26**

Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*

Recommended:

Samuel Preuss, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud*

Peter Harrison, *Religion and Religions in the English Enlightenment*

Feb. 2

Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy*

Recommended:

Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*

Henry Louis Jordan, *Comparative Religion: It's Genesis and Growth*

PART 2: Building a Twentieth Century "History of Religions"

Feb. 9

Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*

Recommended:

Joseph Kitigawa, *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience*

Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

Feb. 16

Long, *Significations*

Recommended:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*

Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*

Feb. 23

Smith, J.Z., *Imagining Religion*

Recommended:

Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*

Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*

March 2

Brown, *Mama Lola*

Recommended:

Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*

Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*

PART 3: Twenty-First Century Approaches

March 9

PROPOSAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Thomas, *Faking Liberties*

Recommended:

Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*

Judith Weisenfeld, *A New World A-Coming*

March 16

SPRING BREAK

March 23

Smith, Leslie, *Compromising Positions*

Recommended:

Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*

Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion*

PART 4: Reassessing the Field

March 30

McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*

Recommended:

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

April 6

Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*

Recommended

Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*

Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*

April 13

ESSAY DRAFTS DUE

NO BOOK REVIEW DUE THIS WEEK

Imhoff, [“The Creation Story, or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Schempp”](#)

Wiebe “The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion”

McCutcheon, “Just Follow the Money”: The Cold War, the Humanistic Study of Religion, and the Fallacy of Insufficient Cynicism”

April 20

Essay Workshop

April 27

Essay Workshop

Final drafts of essays are due via email/Slack by end of the day a week after we finish discussing it in class.