

# *Honors Intro to the Study of Religion*

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 105-002 • Fall 2022

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Professor: Dr. Russell McCutcheon  
Office: Presidents Hall 211

Email: russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu  
Office Hour: by appointment

T/Th 2:00-3:15 • Gordon Palmer Hall 231

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-105-002-honors-introduction-to-religious-studies-11/>

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## DESCRIPTION

As an Honors introduction to the academic study of religion, this section of REL 105 uses the study of religion as a way into considering the practical effects of any classification system (such as, but not limited to, sacred/profane). To do so we will first survey some classic issues in the study of religion—e.g., essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approaches to definition, as well as familiarize students 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 broader social life. This course also provides a Core Curriculum Humanities credit.

## OBJECTIVES

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
4. To learn to define concepts and identify scholars relevant to the academic study of religion

## 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 or bn.com; used copies are also widely available:

- *Studying Religion: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge, 2019)
- *Religion in 5 Minutes* (Equinox, 2017)

Please alert the professor if you cannot acquire the books. **They are necessary for the course.**

## BLACKBOARD and DEPARTMENT WEBSITE

We will not be using the Blackboard Learn site for this class; the syllabus is instead posted on the page for the course at the REL website (see top of this page for the URL).

## READINGS

Two books are required for this course (see above) and are needed right from the start. The course website (**not** the Blackboard site) also contains links either to online readings or PDFs that may also be required at some point in the course. 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.**

## STUDY TIPS

Like any field of study, the academic study of religion has its own technical vocabulary and this course focuses explicitly on students acquiring it and being able to use it. This often means learning a new understanding for already familiar words (e.g., religion, myth, ritual, sacrifice, pilgrimage, etc.). 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 technical meanings/contributions (with information from our course book and lectures) 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 that we have learned.

## EXCUSED ABSENCES

If you miss a quiz or test for what you consider to be a legitimate reason then you must contact the professor **immediately** to explain your absence; only absences deemed legitimate by the professor will be allowed. There are **no make-up tests in the course**; an alternate time to take the test will therefore need to be identified, as soon as possible following the test.

## REQUIREMENTS

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, from *Studying Religion* and/or *Religion in 5 Minutes*. Each class any student can be called upon to describe aspects of any reading assigned for that class, so students must always come prepared to discuss parts of the readings that they found interesting or in need of further elaboration or explanation. Evidence of preparation and active participation in class discussions is worth **20%** of your final grade.
2. There will be **two** equally weighted **tests**, each devoted to the material relevant to four chapters in our main course book, *Studying Religion*. Each test is worth **30%** of your overall grade for a total of **60%** of your final grade in the course. The format will be discussed in class in advance of the tests—they are likely to be comprised of short questions and/or long answers to open-ended questions about the course's material that provide students with an opportunity (i) to demonstrate their acquisition and retention of new material as well as the ability (ii) to synthesis and apply that material in novel situations.
3. There will be **five** opportunities across the semester for students to come to class with examples from the recent or current news, when a dispute over classification (and thus a dispute over identity, status, access to resources, etc.) impacts life in the US (whether or not it is a debate over something being religious or secular). On each of these days there are no prior readings for the class; instead, on those days examples from several students will each be described for the benefit of the class and presenters will be prepared to lead a brief informal discussion of the example's background and significance. Students must therefore come to class each of these days (see the schedule) prepared and as many students as time allows will make their presentation; those who do not will reserve their example for the next opportunity in class. Presenters may bring handouts for others in the class or use the classroom's multimedia system to show an item on the web. There is no limit to the number of these that students can present throughout the course but students are expected to offer examples on **at least two occasions** throughout the course. Collectively, this portion of the class is worth **10%** of your final grade.
4. There will be **four** days set aside at the end of the course when students present on at least one video on a topic relevant to class that is featured at the YouTube channel, **Religion for Breakfast**. Students

must therefore browse that channel to identify at least a couple videos and come to those classes prepared to show at least one video (that no one else has already discussed) and lead a brief discussion on its relevance for class and ways of using it to discuss topics of relevance to the study of religion. This portion of the class is the student's opportunity to integrate and apply knowledge gained from across the course and is worth **10%** of your final grade. **There is no final exam in this course.**

**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

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

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 (visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu/> or visit Houser Hall 1000).

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

Aug 18	Introduction to the Course
Aug 23	The Necessity of Definition ( <i>Studying Religion</i> Intro)
Aug 25	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 1 and 3
Aug 30	<i>Studying Religion</i> 1 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 4 and 13
Sept 1	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 2 and 5
Sept 6	<i>Studying Religion</i> 2 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 6 and 7
Sept 8	Classification in the News Presentations 1
Sept 13	Classification in the News Presentations 2
Sept 15	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 (Plato's Euthyphro link on course website)
Sept 20	<i>Studying Religion</i> 3 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 11 and 14
Sept 22	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 12 and 17
Sept 27	<i>Studying Religion</i> 4 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 19 and 22
Sept 29	Classification in the News Presentations 3
Oct 4	<b>Test 1 (Midterm Grades Due to UA by Oct 5)</b>
Oct 6	<i>Studying Religion</i> 5 & <i>Religion in 5 Minutes</i> 18 and 20

Oct 11 *Studying Religion 5 & Religion in 5 Minutes 21 and 23*  
 Oct 13 *Studying Religion 6 & Religion in 5 Minutes 16 and 68*  
 Oct 18 *Studying Religion 6 & Religion in 5 Minutes 24 and 72*  
 Oct 20 Classification in the News Presentations 4  
 Oct 25 Classification in the News Presentations 5  
 Oct 27 Studying Religion 7 & Religion in 5 Minutes 73 and 77  
 Nov 1 Studying Religion 7 & Religion in 5 Minutes 71 and 78  
 Nov 3 Studying Religion 8 & Religion in 5 Minutes 69 and 70  
 Nov 8 Studying Religion 8 & Religion in 5 Minutes 80 and 81  
 Nov 10 **Test 2**  
 Nov 15 Religion for Breakfast Presentations 1  
 Nov 17 Religion for Breakfast Presentations 2  
 Nov 22 **Thanksgiving Break**  
 Nov 24 **Thanksgiving Break**  
 Nov 29 Religion for Breakfast Presentations 3  
 Dec 1 Religion for Breakfast Presentations 4

There is no final exam in this Honors course.



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