

Honors Introduction to Religious Studies

REL 105.001 | Fall 2022

T/TH 11:00 AM-12:15 PM 151 Gordon Palmer Hall

Tutorials: Mondays 10:00 AM 210 Presidents Hall

PROFESSORS

Dr. Michael J. Altman

Associate Professor, Religious Studies

michael.altman@ua.edu

Office: Presidents Hall 205

Office Hours: Tues. 9:00am-10:00am, by appointment

Dr. Oleg Kyselov (tutorials)

Instructor, Religious Studies

okyselov@ua.edu

Office: Presidents Hall 315

Office Hours: Mondays 10:00am in PRH 210

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an introduction to the academic study of religion through a series of key terms in religious studies:

- Religion
- Definition
- Myth
- Ritual
- Belief
- Authenticity

This is not an introduction to “world religions” but rather an introduction to the ways scholars of religion approach the things they study. It also introduces students to the ways scholars of religion might find things worth studying that are not obviously “religion,” whatever that means.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will recall key terms in the study of religion
- Students will analyze films using terms from religious studies
- Students will demonstrate oral and written communication skills
- Students will investigate definitions of religion in society

BOOKS

Studying Religion: an introduction, Russell McCutcheon (London: Equinox Publishers, 2007)

Religion in 5 Minutes, Aaron W. Hughes and Russell McCutcheon eds. (London: Equinox Publishers, 2017)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 20% reading and reading questions
- 15% 4 tutorial readings and discussion meetings
- 20% 3 film assignments
- 20% 3 show and tell assignments
- 25% final essay

Reading and Reading Questions

Readings are listed next to each date on the schedule. Everything you need is in the “Assignments and Readings” folder on the Course Home Page on Blackboard. Readings outside the required textbooks can be found under the folder for each day on the course Blackboard site. Complete the readings before you come to class that day. Along with most of the readings, there is an assignment of a set of brief open-ended questions for you to answer. These should be answered thoroughly and thoughtfully. They can be found in the same folder for the class day as the readings. **These must be completed before 9am on that day of class.** (e.g. The reading and the assignment in the “Aug 23” folder should be completed by 9 am on August 23)

Tutorials

Mondays at 10-11am, Prof. Kyselov will host tutorial sessions in PRH 210. These tutorials will review the previous week’s material in the course and offer a chance for students to raise questions, seek help understanding important concepts, test out possible writing assignment answers, and get help in the course. While the tutorial will not rehearse everything covered in class, they are a good place to catch up if you are absent the previous week.

There is a very short reading from *Religion in 5 Minutes* for each of these sessions that should be read before attending the tutorial (see the tutorial schedule on Blackboard). These short readings will be a jumping off point for discussion and review themes in the class.

Students must attend at least 4 tutorial sessions during the semester.

Attendance will be taken.

Film Assignments

We will watch 3 films this semester (see schedule). For each of these, there will be a short assignment to guide your viewing found on Blackboard in the Readings and Assignments folder. Read through the assignment before you watch the film (so you know what to look for), take notes as you watch, then return to answer the questions. These are due on the days we will discuss the film. More instructions and details will be on Blackboard in the folder for that class session.

Show and Tell Assignments

There are 3 Show and Tell days on the schedule. On these class days you will present a short example related to the key terms we've been discussing in class that you find in the world around you. More details and instructions will be given as we get closer to the first one.

Example Essay

For the final capstone assignment in the course, you will write a brief essay (800-1000 words) that uses ideas, terms, and theories from the course to analyze an example you find in the world around you. A full draft of your essay will be **due Tuesday, November 29**. The final example essay will be **due Friday, December 9 at 12:30pm**. More details and an assignment sheet to come.

GRADEBOOK

I will use the gradebook on Blackboard to record your grades on assignments so you can keep up with your progress in the 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

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Regular attendance and adequate preparation are expected in this course. You have to be here to do well. If you don't come to class you will probably do very poorly. However, things happen (especially right now) so please communicate with me if you must miss class. Send me an email and give me a heads up. All of our readings and assignments are on Blackboard so you can stay caught easily up if you have to miss class. ***Please communicate.***

Late Assignments

The due dates for assignments are very clear on the syllabus and course schedule. I will accept work late, however, substantial points will be deducted for assignments that are late without a valid excuse. So if you can't get it done on time, still do get it done. Something is better than nothing.

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 & RESOURCES

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.

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).

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS DUE BEFORE CLASS
Aug. 18	Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just show up!
RELIGION		
Aug. 23	How do you study religion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Studying Religion (SR)</i>: Introduction and Ch. 1
Aug. 25	Where did "religion" come from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR Ch. 2
DEFINITION		
Aug. 30	Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Definition," Aaron W. Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon
Sep. 1	Essentialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR Ch. 3
Sep. 6	Functionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR Ch. 4
Sep. 8	Resemblances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR Ch. 5
Sep. 13	Inventing religion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch <i>Kumare</i> Film Assignment #1
Sep. 15	Show and Tell #1: Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show and Tell Assignment
MYTH		
Sep. 20	Myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Myth," Russell McCutcheon
Sep. 22	Myth as language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selections from <i>Mythologies</i>, Roland Barthes
Sep. 27	Myth as politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Politics of Myth," Bruce Lincoln
Sep. 29	Myth and the past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "<i>Gloria Patri</i>: The Construction of the Modern Self," Vaia Touna
RITUAL		
Oct. 4	Ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," Horace Miner "Ritual," Aaron Hughes and Russell McCutcheon
Oct. 6	Ritual as sacrifice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Place of Ritual in Our Time," Susan L. Mizruchi
Oct. 11	Ritual as performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Performance," Catherine Bell
Oct. 13	Film #2 TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Film Assignment #2
Oct. 18	Show and Tell #2: Myth and Ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show and Tell Assignment

BELIEF		
Oct. 20	Belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Belief,” Donald Lopez
Oct. 25	Belief as private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SR Ch. 6 • <i>Reynolds vs. United States</i> • <i>Employment Division v. Smith</i>
Oct. 27	Belief as conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You, and You, and You: Charles Grandison Finney and Democracy,” Finbarr Curtis
Nov. 1	Belief as kayfabe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Kayfabe as convergence: content interactivity and presumption in the squared circle,” Carrielynn D. Reinhard
AUTHENTICITY		
Nov. 3	Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SR Ch. 7 • “Weavers and Dealers: Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet,” Brian Spooner • “How Religion Works: Authenticity,” Craig Martin
Nov. 8	Appropriation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch <i>White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men</i> • “Anxieties over Authenticity: American Yoga and the Problem of Whiteness,” Amanda J. Lucia
Nov. 10	Good religion/Bad religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch an episode of <i>Believer</i> • “The Strange and Familiar Spiritual Journey of Reza Aslan,” Martha Smith Roberts • “Scopophilia and the Manufacture of ‘Good’ Religion,” Leslie Dorrough Smith • “Authentic Religion—or, How to Be a Good Citizen,” Steffen Führding
Nov. 15	Film #3 TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film Assignment #3
Nov. 17	Show and Tell #3:	Show and Tell Assignment
THANKSGIVING BREAK (Have lots of awkward conversations with relatives about this class.)		
EXAMPLE ESSAY		
Nov. 29	Essay workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring a rough draft of your example essay to class.
Dec. 1	Example essay show and tell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example essay final draft