

# Introduction to Religious Studies

REL 100.001 | Spring 2023

T/TH 11:00 AM-12:15 PM | NL 2005

## PROFESSOR

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## TEACHING ASSISTANTS

*CC Prof. Altman on all emails to TAs*

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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

- Religion
- Definition
- Classification
- Myth
- Ritual
- Belief
- Authority
- 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 written communication skills
- Students will investigate definitions of religion in society

## BOOKS

*Required*

*A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Craig Martin (New York: Routledge, 2017)

*Optional*

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

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Readings**

You should do the readings. Seriously.

Readings are listed next to each date on the Course Schedule below. You should carefully read the readings listed on each date before you come class to that day. Readings outside the required textbooks can be found under the folder for each week on the course Blackboard site.

### **Assignments**

These assignments will be posted and turned in via the course Blackboard page.

#### **10 Weekly Short Answer Questions (4 points each, 40 points total)**

For most weeks of the semester there will be a set of short answer questions for that week's readings and lectures posted on Blackboard. ***These are due by Friday at midnight.*** These questions ask you to identify important ideas, terms, people, and events from the readings and lectures for the week. Each question should be answered in one or two complete sentences (25-50 words). I will drop your lowest grade on these assignments, thus counting 10 out of the 11 assignments.

These assignments are graded according to the following rubric:

- 4 points: Uses specific terms and concepts from the reading to answer the questions correctly and demonstrates thorough reading and attention to lectures.
- 3 points: Answers are vague but correct, lack specificity, but demonstrate some reading and engagement with the course content for the week.
- 2 points: Answers are incorrect, confused, or very vague. Demonstrates little reading comprehension or engagement with course materials. May or may not have done the reading and come to class.
- 1 point: Something was turned in but it was very wrong and demonstrated no reading and no engagement with course content. At least you turned something in.

#### **3 Film Analyses (10 points each, 30 points total)**

We will watch 3 films this semester outside of class via links posted on Blackboard. For each of these, there will be a short assignment to guide

your viewing. 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 at 9am on the days we will discuss the film in class.** Each question on the film analysis should be answered in a short paragraph of 100-150 words. These are graded for their specific use of course materials and content to answer the questions.

### **3 Show and Tells (10 points each, 30 points total)**

Three times during the semester you will complete a show and tell assignment where you find an example of one of the key terms or ideas we have discussed in class and write a brief paragraph of 100-150 words explaining why it is a good example of that term or idea. Students will also briefly and informally present their show and tell to the class.

These examples can be anything. ANYTHING. They can range from TV shows to films to memes to songs to videos to news stories to something you see on the side of the road. More details will come as we get closer to the first show and tell assignment. These are graded for their specific use of course materials and content to analyze the example. **They are due at 9am on the days we will discuss them in class.**

### **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 Points | 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**

I don't take attendance...BUT, 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. If you feel behind please make use of my office hours or email me to schedule a time to meet and catch up.**

#### **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](http://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

Readings or assignments can be changed because who knows where this class might go. You will be given plenty of notice of any changes to this schedule via your Crimson email.

| DATE              | TOPIC   | READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS DUE BEFORE CLASS  |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Jan 12            | Introductions                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just show up!</li> </ul>  |
| <b>RELIGION</b>   |   |  |
| Jan 17            | How do you study religion?                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Religion in 5 Minutes (R5M)</i> Chapter 1 (p. 3-7)</li> <li><i>R5M</i> Chapter 64 (p. 238-240)</li> </ul>  |
| Jan 19            | Where did religion come from?                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>R5M</i> Chapter 2 (p. 8-11)</li> <li><i>R5M</i> Chapter 18 (p. 73-76)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #1 due Friday Jan 20 at midnight</p> |
| <b>DEFINITION</b> |   |  |
| Jan 24            | Defining "religion"                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion (CI)</i> Chapter 1 (p. 1-18)</li> </ul>   |
| Jan 26            | Functionalism                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>CI</i> Chapter 2 (p. 19-32)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #2 due Friday Jan 27 at midnight</p>   |
| Jan 31            | Classification                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>CI</i> Chapter 3 (p. 33-50)</li> <li><i>CI</i> Chapter 4 (p. 51-63)</li> </ul>   |
| Feb 2             | Essentialism                                      | <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #3 due Friday Feb 3 at midnight</p>   |
| Feb 7             | Inventing a religion?                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watch <i>Kumare</i></li> <li>Film Assignment #1 due at 9am</li> </ul>   |
| Feb 9             | Show and Tell #1: Definitions and Classifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show and Tell Assignment due at 9am</li> </ul>  |
| <b>MYTH</b>       |   |  |
| Feb 14            | Myth  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Myth," Russell McCutcheon</li> </ul>   |
| Feb 16            | Myth as language                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selections from <i>Mythologies</i>, Roland Barthes</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #4 due Friday Feb 17 at midnight</p>                       |

|               |  |  |
|---------------|--|--|
| Feb 21        | Myth as politics                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Politics of Myth,” Bruce Lincoln</li> </ul>  |
| Feb 23        | Myth as structure                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>C/</i> Chapter 5 (p. 65-83)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #5 due Friday Feb 24 at midnight</p>   |
| <b>RITUAL</b> |  |  |
| Feb 28        | Ritual                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema,” Horace Miner</li> <li>• “Ritual,” Aaron Hughes and Russell McCutcheon</li> </ul>  |
| Mar 2         | Rituals or Habits?                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>R5M</i> Chapter 13 (p. 51-56)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #6 due Friday Mar 3 at midnight</p>  |
| Mar 7         | Ritual as performance                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Performance,” Catherine Bell</li> </ul>  |
| Mar 9         | Habitus                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>C/</i> Chapter 6, (p. 85-102)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #7 due Friday Mar 10 at midnight</p>   |
| Mar 21        | The Myths and Rituals of a Plastic Woman | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch <i>Lars and the Real Girl</i></li> <li>• Film Assignment #2 due at 9am</li> </ul>   |
| Mar 23        | Show and Tell #2: Myth and Ritual        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show and Tell Assignment due at 9am</li> </ul>  |
| <b>BELIEF</b> |  |  |
| Mar 28        | Belief                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Belief,” Donald Lopez</li> </ul>   |
| Mar 30        | Belief as private                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reynolds vs. United States</i></li> <li>• <i>Employment Division v. Smith</i></li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #8 due Friday Mar 30 at midnight</p> |
| Apr 4         | Belief as kayfabe                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Managing Doubt: Professional Wrestling Jargon and the Making of ‘Smart Fans,’” Marion Wrenn</li> </ul>   |

|                                     |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Apr 6                               | Legitimizing Beliefs                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C/ Chapter 7 (p. 103-120)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #9 due Friday April 7 at midnight</p>  |
| <b>AUTHORITY &amp; AUTHENTICITY</b> |   |   |
| Apr 11                              | Authority   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C/ Chapter 8 (p. 121-142)</li> </ul>   |
| Apr 13                              | Authenticity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C/ Chapter 9 (p. 143-158)</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #10 due Friday April 14 at midnight</p>  |
| Apr 18                              | Appropriation                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Anxieties over Authenticity: American Yoga and the Problem of Whiteness,” Amanda J. Lucia</li> </ul>  |
| Apr 20                              | Good religion/Bad religion                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Strange and Familiar Spiritual Journey of Reza Aslan,” Martha Smith Roberts</li> <li>• “Scopophilia and the Manufacture of ‘Good’ Religion,” Leslie Dorrough Smith</li> <li>• “Authentic Religion—or, How to Be a Good Citizen,” Steffen Führding</li> </ul> <p>Weekly Short Answer Questions #11 due Friday April 21 at midnight</p> |
| Apr 25                              | The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch <i>I, Pastafari</i></li> <li>• Film Assignment #3 due at 9am</li> </ul>  |
| Apr 27                              | Show and Tell #3: Belief, Authority, & Authenticity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show and Tell Assignment due at 9am</li> </ul>   |