

REL 100.001 Introduction to the Study of Religion

T/Th 9:30-10:45 • Fall 2021

Prof. Brooke Kathleen Brassard



Course Description

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion. What are the fundamental questions in the study of religion? Can we define religion? How do people experience religion? How do we study religion? What is “a scholar of religion”?

Investigating specific examples and case studies help illustrate the history of religion in North America and the history of religion in North America teaches us about power, identities, community, boundaries, and classifications, among many other things, but all important to the study of religion. While this is an introduction to the study of religion, there will be a heavy emphasis on the history of religion in North America with special attention to both Canada and newer religious movements such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or Mormonism). Why? Because this is my “example” (or case study) to help illustrate some of the common approaches to and theories guiding the study of religion.



Since I am introducing you to the study of religion, I will show you exactly how a scholar of religion (me!) develops research questions, gathers data (from the archives to the built environment), analyzes said data, and communicates findings and conclusions. We will examine a variety of approaches, including feminism, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, and then test these approaches on our own case studies in several workshops throughout the term. Students are not restricted to religion in North American contexts when selecting their own case studies, but to perceive this as a “restriction” might be a mistake and spark an interesting discussion of our understanding of not only diversity and religion, but also North American culture and society.

Goals/Outcomes

1. Encounter a range of approaches to the academic study of religion
2. Become familiar with the kinds of questions religious studies scholars ask and investigate
3. Intelligently discuss the roles and representations of religion in culture and society
4. Promote the understanding of general religious literacy
5. Appreciate the complexity and diversity of religious studies

Books




- Hillary Rodrigues and John S. Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Routledge, 2009)



Attendance and Participation Policy

Attendance is mandatory for all classes. Please be considerate of your fellow classmates and instructor and arrive on time. Assigned readings and participation in class discussions and workshops are also mandatory. Your engagement will be graded by attendance and short, written responses at the end of *some* classes. You will write a total of ten engagement assessments (“exit tickets”) throughout the semester, but you will not know in advance when these are scheduled.

Requirements



Assessment	Date of evaluation	Weighting
Engagement	Various	20%
Case Study #1	October 7, 2021	15%
Case Study #2	October 28, 2021	15%
Case Study #3	November 16, 2021	15%
Final Exam	December 9, 2021	35%
Total		100%

Course Schedule



Date	Topic	Readings/Assessments
Th Aug 19	Course introduction	Syllabus
	Unit 1: Introduction	
T Aug 24	Defining religion	Rodrigues & Harding, 1-6
Th Aug 26	Religious education and religious studies	Rodrigues & Harding, 6-12
T Aug 31	Patterns in the study of religion	Rodrigues & Harding, 12-17
Th Sep 2	Case study example: Buddhist monks and French-speaking fishermen on Cape Breton	<i>The Trap</i> (NFB doc)
	Unit 2: Traditional perspectives	
T Sep 7	Philosophical approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 18-34
Th Sep 9	Case study example: tbd	
T Sep 14	Theological approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 34-48
Th Sep 16	Case study example: Indigenous-settler relations and conflict	<i>Honour Thy Father</i> (NFB doc)
	Unit 3: Feminist approaches	
T Sep 21	What is feminism?	Rodrigues & Harding, 104-112
Th Sep 23	Religious studies and feminism	Rodrigues & Harding, 112-119
T Sep 28	Case study example: Women’s history is American religious history	Braude, “Women’s History <i>Is</i> American Religious History”
Th Sep 30	Case study example: gendered roles in Mormonism	<i>Where We Stand</i> documentary

T Oct 5	Case study workshop: Feminist approaches	
Th Oct 7	Case study workshop: Feminist approaches	Case Study #1 Due
	Unit 4: Social and cultural perspectives	
T Oct 12	Anthropological approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 49-66
Th Oct 14	Case study example: non-monogamy in Mormonism	Episode of <i>Big Love</i>
T Oct 19	Sociological, political, and economic approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 66-73
Th Oct 21	Case study example: economic communalism and cooperation in Mormonism	
T Oct 26	Case study workshop: Social and cultural perspectives	
Th Oct 28	Case study workshop: Social and cultural perspectives	Case Study #2 Due
	Unit 5: How people experience religion	
T Nov 2	Phenomenological approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 74-83
Th Nov 4	Psychological approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 83-103
T Nov 9	Case study example: architecture and sacred space in Mormonism	
Th Nov 11	Case study example: cemeteries and the built environment in Mormonism	
T Nov 16	Case study workshop: Psychological approaches	Case Study #3 Due
	Unit 6: Conclusions	
Th Nov 18	Historical approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 134-136
T Nov 23	Comparative approaches	Rodrigues & Harding, 136-140
Th Nov 25	American Thanksgiving	
T Nov 30	Emphasizing relevance	Rodrigues & Harding, 127-133
Th Dec 2	Final exam review, part 1	
T Dec 7	Final exam review, part 2	
Th Dec 9	Final exam	