

REL 100-001

Introduction to the Study of Religion

Fall 2021

T/Th, 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

◆ THIS IS A DYNAMIC SYLLABUS THAT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE ◆

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Bishop

Office: Stone Center, 310

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Office Hours: M/W, 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; T/R, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m., 2:30 – 3:45 p.m. or by appointment.

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the field of Religious Studies. This course will introduce students to important theories and theorists in comparative studies of religion, the function of religion, the history of religion, and the definition of religion. This course will put special emphasis on how ideas of religion organize social and political worlds. As a general education course, REL 100 will emphasize critical thinking, written and oral communication, reading, and note-taking skills.

Outcomes:

At the completion of the course student should be able to:

- Identify and discuss the ideas of key theorists in the academic study of religion.
- Examine various theoretical definitions of “religion,” and thoughtfully explore the implications of these meanings.
- To think critically about the ways in which religion functions as an organizing method

Instructor Statement on Student Success:

The instructor cares about each student and strives to create a learning environment that will allow each of them to become their best self. Students should remain aware:

- The office and the classroom are spaces for all students to express themselves. If a student feels, for any reason, that this is not true, ***talk to the instructor.***
- If a student needs accommodations for a documented disability, ***talk to the instructor.***
- If there is **anything** that is hindering the student from doing their best work – including mental or physical illness, loneliness, homesickness, trouble at home, trouble with relationships, trouble at work, personal safety, food insecurity, homelessness, or any other private, personal issue, ***please talk to the instructor.*** The instructor cannot help students unless there is honest, open communication. There are resources available to ensure that each student is successful, no matter their personal **issues.**

Textbook and Other Readings:

There is no required text for this course. For students who would like a textbook to use as a supplemental guide, the instructor recommends the following:

McCutcheon, Russell T., *Studying Religion: An Introduction*, 2d edition. London and New York: Routledge, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-853-5363-8

Throughout this course, there will be a series of assigned readings. The instructor has posted these readings that are in PDF format under the “Files” tab on Canvas. Links to online resources can be found on Canvas under the “Modules” tab, which will be updated weekly.

Course Requirements:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Midterm Exams: | 30% (2 @ 15% each) |
| Non-cumulative Final Exam: | 15% |
| Low-Stakes Writing Assignment | 5% |
| Analytical Essay | 15% |
| Quizzes: | 20% |
| Participation | 15% |

Grading Scale:

| | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| 90 - 100% | - | A |
| 80 - 89% | - | B |
| 70 – 79% | - | C |
| 60 – 69% | - | D |
| 59% and under | - | F |

Rounding Up Grades:

The instructor will round up grades when assigning letter grades at the conclusion of the course. If a student scores within a half point of a higher letter grade, the instructor rounds up student grades. For example, a student who earns an 89.5 average in the course will be assigned an A on their transcript. A student who scores an 89.4 average will be assigned a B for the course.

Exams:

The instructor will administer two midterm exams and a noncumulative final. Each exam will include four essay questions (25 points each) out of a possible six choices. Students are permitted to use hard copies of the document packets found under the “Files” tab on Canvas, provided that these are clean and do not include any notes or markings. Students must bring blue books for each exam.

Quizzes:

The instructor will administer six quizzes throughout the course of the semester based on content knowledge from class lectures. When calculating final grades, the instructor will drop the lowest quiz grade for each student. Each quiz will consist of ten questions in multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer format. Students will receive fifteen minutes of class time to complete all quizzes. Students will be given at least one week’s notice prior to each quiz.

Low-Stakes Writing Assignment:

Students are required to complete a short, low-stakes writing assignment. This short essay (roughly two paragraphs) will serve as practice for students so they can become better acquainted

with writing a thesis statement and supporting it with evidence. The instructor will provide each student with feedback to clarify how they should approach their longer paper. The instructor will post more specific requirements and instructions on Canvas.

Analytical Essay:

Students are required to complete one analytical essay (three to four pages) over the course of the semester. The instructor will provide three separate opportunities to complete this essay. When selecting a topic, students should consider their overall course load, schedule, and comfort with the material. While students are only required to write responses to one of the prompts, students can write responses to as many of the prompts as they wish. The instructor will only record their best score when computing final grades. Additional information for each paper can be found in Canvas under the “Writing Assignments” folder in the “Files” tab on Canvas.

Participation:

Participation grades are based on two equally weighted components: pre-class discussion boards and in-class discussions and activities.

Throughout this course, there will be a series of assigned readings, available under the Modules tab on Canvas. Prior to the start of class each reading is due, students are required to respond to a series of questions on a Canvas discussion board. Students must identify the portion of the reading assignment they found most interesting and explain why they felt this way, identify the section of the reading they found most confusing, and pose one question to facilitate class discussion. Students will be graded on the quality and thoughtfulness of their responses and **should be advised that their responses must demonstrate that they completed the assigned reading** in order to receive full credit.

Throughout the course, there will be in-class discussions and activities. All of these activities will be low-stakes and are designed to reward students who consistently attend class, are attentive, and actively engaged. Students who demonstrate engagement and thoughtfulness typically receive full credit on these assignments.

Attendance Policy:

Although the instructor will maintain attendance records, class attendance is **not mandatory** and students will incur no penalty for missing class. Students should be advised, however, that it is very difficult to perform well on exams and other activities if they are habitually absent.

In the case of borderline grades, attendance will be the determining factor in student’s final grade. A borderline grade is defined as a grade no more than two points lower from a higher letter grade. Students with borderline grades and no more than **two unexcused absences** will be rewarded for good attendance with the higher grade. The instructor will round up grades when assigning the attendance bonus. For example, if a student has at least a grade of 87.5 and two or fewer absences, they will receive an A for the course. But a student with two or fewer absences and an 87.4 average will receive a B in the class.

Absences that result from verifiable illness, family emergencies, and university-related business will be excused with valid university-approved documentation. Students must provide documentation **within one week** of returning to class in order to absences to be excused.

Attendance requires presence in both body and mind. Certain classroom behaviors demonstrate mental absence and will be interpreted by the instructor as such. Behaviors that demonstrate mental absence include (but are not limited to) sleeping, talking, web-surfing (including social media), having a chat window open on their laptop, checking, sending, or reading e-mail, playing computer games, cellphone usage and so forth. Students observed engaging in such behaviors will be marked absent by the instructor.

Submissions and Late Work:


Assignments are due in class on the dates indicated on the schedule **at the beginning of class time**. If a student cannot submit their work on time due to illness, family emergency, or other university-related business, late work will be accepted with no penalty if the student provides the instructor with a valid university-approved excuse. Students with a valid university-approved excuse should contact the instructor directly to discuss turning in an assignment late. Other late work will be accepted but will be penalized **10 points per day late**.

Make-ups:

Student who are absent on the day of an exam or quiz as a result of verifiable illness, family emergencies, and university-related business will be allowed to make-up missed work provided that they present the instructor with valid university-approved documentation. Students must complete all make-up tests and quizzes within **one week of their return to class**. Students should contact the instructor to arrange a time and a place for make-ups. Failure to complete a make-up will result in a score of zero for that exam or quiz.

Communication with Instructor:

The instructor's preferred method of communication outside of class is e-mail. Because of the risk of computer viruses, students must use their university e-mail account to communicate with the instructor. **E-mails from non-university accounts will be ignored**. The instructor will typically respond to e-mails within a few hours, but students should allow 24 hours for a response during regular weekdays. If the instructor has not responded to an e-mail after 24 hours, students are encouraged to resend the e-mail, although e-mails sent over the weekend might not receive a response until the following weekday. Students who have complicated issues or questions that cannot be clearly addressed in a written e-mail will be asked to visit the instructor during office hours. Due to privacy laws concerning student confidentiality, **no grades will be given out through e-mail**.

In addition to e-mail, the instructor will create an account on GroupMe that will allow students to easily communicate with each other and the instructor. Participation in the GroupMe is entirely voluntarily. Students should participate with the awareness that the instructor will routinely check all the messa 

Extra Credit:

No extra credit will be offered during this course.

Canvas:

Students should check Canvas regularly for class announcements and reading assignments. In addition, the instructor will post this syllabus, assignments, and student grades on Canvas.

Academic Honesty:

In a University community, true knowledge can be gained only through honest means. All academic dishonesty is expressly prohibited. This policy is applicable for campus and distance learning activities. Students who violate this Academic Honesty Policy will be subject to disciplinary actions which could range from a zero on an assignment to failure of the course; repeated offenses can result in dismissal from the university. Violations include BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, the following:

- a. The use of unauthorized materials or the receipt of unauthorized assistance during an examination or in the completion of any other assignment, exercise, experiment, or project for academic credit. Unauthorized materials may include, but are not limited to, notes, textbooks, previous examinations, exhibits, experiments, papers, or other supplementary items.
- b. Copying or utilizing information from a paper of another student during an examination.
- c. Rendering unauthorized assistance to another student by knowingly permitting him or her to copy an examination, project, paper, assignment, exhibit, exercise, or other material to be submitted for academic credit.
- d. Illegally obtaining or attempting to obtain unauthorized prior knowledge of an examination or test materials.
- e. Selling or giving to another student unauthorized copies of tests or examinations or research assignments.
- f. The use of a commercially prepared term paper or research project or the submission of a paper, project, or experiment completed by someone other than the student submitting any of the above for academic credit.
- g. Falsifying class attendance.
- h. Falsifying reasons why a student did not attend a required class or take a scheduled examination.
- i. Taking an examination in the place of another student.
- j. Making unauthorized change in any reported grade or on an official academic report form.
- k. Unauthorized collaboration between two students on an examination, paper, or project.
- l. Plagiarism, which is the deliberate act of copying, writing, or presenting as one's own the information, ideas, or phrasing of another person without proper acknowledgment of their true source.
- m. Making use of computing facilities in an academically dishonest manner.

Tutoring Resources and the Writing Center

All students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane. For more information about tutor.com, contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu. For assistance with writing, The Writing Center is available through: <http://www.jsu.edu/english/jsu-writing-clinic.html>

Disability Support Services Statement:

Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with Disability Support Services DSS and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Disability Support Services is located in 139 Daugette Hall or students can call (256) 782-8380 or email dss@jsu.edu.


Title IX Statement:

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational institution that receives federal funding. The University does not tolerate sex discrimination of any kind including: sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking or other conduct that is addressed in the university's "Title IX Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct Policy." This type of conduct may interfere with or limit an individual's ability to benefit from or participate in educational programs or activities. Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct are asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at (256) 782-5769. These incidents may also be reported to an instructor, faculty or staff member, who are required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. If a student wishes to keep the information confidential, the student may speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at Student Health Services (256) 782-5310. For more information about Title IX, please visit the Title IX webpage at www.jsu.edu/titleix.


Emergency Contingency:

If normal course activities should be disrupted due to emergency or crisis situations (pandemic outbreaks, extreme weather, or serious crises), this syllabus might be modified to allow completion of the course. Should such a situation arise, an addendum will be added to this syllabus.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Important Course Dates (Subject to Change):


 - Denotes reading assignments available on Canvas.

Week 1

Aug. 19: Course Introduction 


Week 2

Aug. 24: Writing for College Humanities Courses: Providentialism and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address 


Aug. 26: Classifications and Definitions of Religion 

Assigned Reading: "Just What Is a Restaurant?"  *The Desert Sun*, 18 Nov 1975. PDF 

Week 3

Aug. 31: **Low-Stakes Writing Assignment due**; Theoretical Approaches to Religion: The World Religions Paradigm 

Sep. 2: The World Religions Paradigm (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Excerpts from Stanley Cook, "Religion," in Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. PDF 

Week 4

Sep. 7: Theoretical Approaches to Religion: Essentialism


Sep. 9: Essentialism (cont.)

Assignment: Watch “Did I Stutter?,” *The Office* (Season 4, Episode 16). DVD – on reserve at Gorgas Library (also available on streaming service Peacock, but subscription is required)

Week 5

Sep. 14: Theoretical Approaches to Religion: Functionalism


Sep. 16: Functionalism (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Excerpts from William M. Patterson’s, *Manual of Architecture*. PDF 

Week 6

Sep. 21: Theoretical Approaches to Religion: Family Resemblance

Sep. 23: Family Resemblance (cont.)

Assigned Reading: *Spiritual Outreach Society v. Commission of Internal Revenue*. PDF 

Week 7


Sep. 28: **ANALYTICAL ESSAY 1 DUE**; Catch-up and Review

Sep. 30: **EXAM 1**

Week 8

Oct. 5: Key Topics: The Insider/Outsider Dilemma

Oct. 7: The Insider/Outsider Dilemma (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Benjamin ben Jonah of Tudela, from *Book of Travels*. PDF 

Week 9

Oct. 12: Key Topics: “Religion” as a Colonialist Project


Oct. 14: “Religion” as a Colonialist Project (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Excerpt from John Eliot, *The Day-Breaking, If Not the Sun-Rising, of the Gospel with the Indians in New-England*. PDF 

Week 10

Oct. 19: Key Topics: Religion and Public Discourse

Oct. 21: Religion and Public Discourse (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” PDF 

Week 11


Oct. 26: **EXAM 2**

Oct. 28: Mid-Semester Study Break (NO CLASS)

Week 12

Nov. 2: **ANALYTICAL ESSAY 2 DUE** Special Topics: Popular Religions

Nov. 4: Popular Religions (cont.) – Baseball as “Religion”

Assigned Reading: Roger Angell, “The ‘Go!’ Shouters,” in *The Summer Game*. PDF 

Week 13

Nov. 9: Special Topics: Civil Religion

Nov. 11: Civil Religion (cont.) – The Lost Cause

Assigned Reading: Julian Carr “Speech at the Dedication of Silent Sam.” Available online:

<https://hgreen.people.ua.edu/transcription-carr-speech.html>

Week 14

Nov. 16: Special Topic: Church and State

Nov. 18: Church and State (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Stephen Dawson “Agonistic Federalism: The Alabama Ten Commandments Controversy.” PDF

Week 15

Nov. 23: Thanksgiving Holiday (NO CLASS)

Nov. 25: Thanksgiving Holiday (NO CLASS)

Week 16

Nov. 30: Special Topic: Religion and Comedy

Dec. 2: **ANALYTICAL ESSAY 3 DUE**; “What is Religion?” and Review for Final Exam

FINAL EXAM: TBD