

**REL 100.001 Introduction to the Study of Religion**  
**T/Th 9:30-10:45 • Fall 2021**  
**Prof. Candace Lukasik**

**Course Description**

Religion continues to shape challenges and conflicts, political events and crises around the world. When we speak about religion as a force impacting social and political processes and events, however, it is often unclear what kind, or different kinds, of force we are referring to: the force of deeply held beliefs, of institutions, of moral commitments, of political rhetoric, or the force of habits formed within religious communities? How does the idea of religion (and the forms of life cultivated within different religious traditions) help us to understand aspects of the contemporary world, and where does its use only serve to obscure social and political processes?

The aim of this course is to introduce students to a variety of theoretical approaches in the study of religion. It is not a survey of different religious traditions. We will begin by interrogating some of the basic concepts which have classically informed studies of religion, noting both their genesis in the context of early modern Christian Europe and the problems entailed in applying them outside that context. The historical issues raised here will provide a basis from which to question the meaning of such key terms as belief, experience, religion, and law as they have been discussed in different scholarly traditions. We will then turn to a more in-depth analysis of specific problems and debates within the contemporary study of religion as they have been formulated in different ethnographic and historical works on religion.

**Goals/Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Show critical thinking through analysis of the various ways ideas of religion have shaped identity and belonging
- Critically discuss the intersection of religion and politics
- Connect different geopolitical contexts of religion
- Describe contemporary American influence over the global reshaping of religion

**Course requirements:**

Students will be graded on their participation in class discussions. Students must come to class prepared to discuss the readings scheduled for that day, and must post a response to the readings once a week on Canvas. As part of your participation grade, each Thursday, a student, or a pair of students, will be responsible for leading class discussion.

Two response papers (2-3 double-spaced pages) on the readings will be due during the course of the semester on the dates specified below. The response papers should be written as a critical engagement with one or two of the class readings, as explained on the first day of class. If you do not turn in the response papers on time, you will not be given credit for the assignment.

There will be a take-home midterm and final. The midterm will be a take-home short-answer/essay exam. The final will also consist of a number of short answers and an essay and will be handed out on the last day of class. We will devote the final two classes to collectively discussing and preparing for the final.

**Grading for Class:**

Participation in class:	25%
Response Papers:	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	35%

**Course Policies:**

*Participation:* Aside from weekly Canvas responses to the readings and class presentation, student participation plays a crucial role in the success of the course. Students are expected not just to be present in class, but to be awake and aware, to participate in informal discussions and debates, and generally illustrate that you have prepared the required material. Attending class is more like exercise, in which benefit is directly related to participation, than it is like television, where information is passively absorbed. Students should be aware that both attendance and preparation (i.e. having the readings done on time) are necessary for participation; chronic lateness, high absentee rates and/or unpreparedness will inevitably lead to a poor participation grade.

*Office hours:* Please come with questions regarding readings, writing assignments, or material covered in class. If my normal office hours prove impossible to attend because of a class or work scheduling conflict, I am also available by appointment. The time may be subject to change pending student availability. I am also available to answer pressing questions via email, but please be sensitive to the fact that due to receiving a great volume of emails from students, as well as having other responsibilities, I may not be able to answer immediately.

*Classroom Etiquette:* A safe, comfortable classroom is essential to a successful learning environment. Students are expected to treat each other and the instructor with respect, courtesy, and consideration. Disagreements are perfectly acceptable – they are the grist for learning, and I will actively encourage them where appropriate – but should never lead to personal attacks, generalizations, or treating a student or group with contempt.

*A note on academic integrity and plagiarism:* Students are warned in advance that I take plagiarism and academic integrity very seriously. Plagiarism is the use without citation of another person's spoken or written words, research, theories, ideas, opinions and/or facts (including statistics). Cutting and pasting from a site on the internet into one's paper without citation is plagiarizing. Plagiarism is cheating, and is considered academic misconduct. Anyone caught committing academic misconduct may receive a failing grade in the course (not just on the assignment). Please note that academic misconduct is a broader category than plagiarism, and includes the use of a paper written by someone else, whether purchased or not, and many other things. Be conscientious and use proper citation. If in doubt, speak with the instructor.

*Policy on Extensions and Late Assignments:* Deadlines for course assignments have been carefully selected because the assignments directly complement the content of the course. However, given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, extensions will be granted on a case by

case basis.

*Accommodations:* If you have any problems over the semester – academic or personal – that affect your ability to participate in class or complete the course requirements, please speak to me as soon as you can.

### **Course Outline:**

This list is presented as a tentative outline of planned readings. Note that we will inevitably stray from the planned outline at particular points: the instructor may spend extra time with some topics based on student need or interest, etc. Students are responsible for all readings. If there are changes to the course schedule, this will be announced in class or via email announcement. **All readings should be completed each Tuesday for the week.**

### **Module 1: Ideas of Religion**

*Thursday August 26*

Initial Discussions

*Tuesday August 31/September 2*

Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage” (1990), *The Atlantic*

Edward Said, “The Clash of Ignorance” (2001), *The Nation*

*Tuesday September 7/Thursday September 9*

Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*” (2001)

*Tuesday September 14/Thursday September 16*

Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion (1985)

*Tuesday September 21/Thursday September 23*

Donald Lopez, “Belief” in Critical Terms for Religious Studies (1998)

Film: Silence (2016)

*Tuesday September 28/Thursday September 30*

Robert H. Sharf, “Experience” in Critical Terms for Religious Studies (1998)

### **Response Paper 1 Due September 30**

*Tuesday October 5/Thursday October 7*

Robert Orsi, “Snakes Alive: Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth” in Between Heaven and Earth (2004)

*Tuesday October 12/Thursday October 14*

**Susan Harding**, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other” (1991)

Recommended: Susan Harding, “Getting Things Back to Normal: Populism, Fundamentalism, and Liberal Desire” (2021)

*Tuesday October 19/Thursday October 21*

Charles Hirschkind, “What is Political Islam?” *Middle East Report* (1997)

Media: The Family (2019)

## **Midterm Distributed**

### **Module 2: Debates of Religion**

*Tuesday October 26/Thursday October 28*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Time of the Gods” in The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital (1997)

## **Midterm Due October 28**

*Tuesday November 2/Thursday November 4*

Yahya Hakki, “The Lamp of Umm Hashim” (2004) 45-88.

*Tuesday November 9/ Thursday November 11*

Talal Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe” in Formations of the Secular (2003)

*Tuesday November 16/Thursday November 18*

Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?” (2009)

*Tuesday November 23/Thursday November 25—Thanksgiving*

Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency” (2002)

## **Response Paper 2 Due November 23**

*Tuesday November 30/Thursday December 2*

Zareena Grewal, Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority, selections (2013)

*Tuesday December 7/Thursday December 9*

Final Exam Review/Distributed