

REL 2011: Introduction to Religion

Department of Religious Studies

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Course Description

This course is a foundational course offered by the Religious Studies Department. The course incorporates the study of scripture, belief and practices, and the historical and social context of religion. This course introduces the field of Religious Studies by looking at topics and themes such as doctrine, ritual, scripture, mysticism, pilgrimage, and myth across two or more religions while also introducing methodological approaches to the comparative study of religion. In all, by studying the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religion, students will gain insights into similarities and differences across religions, as well as, exposure to the most salient elements of religious traditions such as scripture, rituals, and institutions.

Course Objectives

- 1) To analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in personal, social, and global contexts.
- 2) To understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth claims and meaning making practices.
- 3) To develop proficiency in analyzing texts, rituals, behaviors, beliefs and practices of a variety of religious traditions. Because the student will be constantly utilizing various theoretical discourses he/she will be able to analyze the many ways in which concepts, statements, beliefs, and judgments relate to practice, action, and other concepts and beliefs, as clarified through theoretical discourse. Thus the student will develop the skill of evaluating how plural theoretical structures may work together to create an adequate understanding of religion.
- 4) To better understand religious belief and practice within various religious traditions and areas of the world, as such an understanding will contribute to a richer understanding and appreciation of the diversity of religious activities throughout the world.
- 5) **Analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives** (Global Learning).
- 6) **Assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions** (Global Learning).
- 7) **Demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world** (Global Learning).

Course Requirements/Assessments

Attendance: 20%

Participation: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Exams: 25%

Three Essays: 20%

Presentation: 15%

Attendance/Participation

A daily reflection paper will be turned in at the end of class to record attendance. The reflection should be no longer than a handful of sentences to a paragraph describing what was learned in class that day, along with whatever was interesting or confusing to you. You must have your name and date on the reflection to be credited for attendance. Excessive tardiness or arriving at the end of class only to submit a reflection will not qualify as attending class. Participation is an extremely important component to creating an interactive learning environment and to get the most out of the class and counts towards your final grade.

Essays

Essay One – Choose one of the films we watched in class and apply the Smart’s six dimensions of religion to the analysis. The emphasis of the paper should be on how all six dimensions of a religion reinforce each other. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.0-inch margins. A cover page is necessary to include the title of the paper, your name, class, date, and any other identifying information you wish.

Essay Two – Describe the religion you created with your group and demonstrate how all six of Smart’s dimensions of religions are incorporated. There should be a logical reinforcement of each dimension to each other so to structure the religion into a cohesive whole. The religion should also be rational, understandable, and meaningful. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.0-inch margins. A cover page is necessary to include the title of the paper, your name, class, date, and any other identifying information you wish.

Essay Three – The third essay will be a hand written essay to be produced during the final covering topics from the textbook and discussed in class. More information on this essay will be discussed during the semester.

Quizzes and Exams

Throughout the course, quizzes will be administered at the professor's discretion. The aim of the quizzes is to assess the level of engagement by the students of the assigned reading. Quizzes will typically be given on the second Friday of the two week blocks covering a particular theme, unless changed for some reason. Any changes to the date of the quiz will be announced in class. There are no make-up quizzes, but an excuse can be given for valid reasons. Also, there will be a midterm and a final exam that will assess all of the materials discussed in class. The final exam will not be cumulative.

Group Project/Presentation

Students' will form into groups at the beginning of the semester with the intent of constructing their own religion by the end of the semester and will present their religion to the rest of the class. The group must show a mastery of the six dimensions of religion as discussed in class. There must be a rationale for the religion and each element of the religion must be reinforced somehow across the different dimensions.

Grading Scale:

94-100 = **A** 90-93 = **A-**

87-89 = **B+** 84-86 = **B** 80-83 = **B-**

77-79 = **C+** 74-76 = **C** 60-73 = **D**

0-59 = **F**

Academic Integrity

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate the truth. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating, helping another student to cheat, plagiarism, turning in the same paper for two different courses (including those in two different semesters), purchasing papers written by others, manipulating attendance records, and falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines.

Course Materials

Weekly readings will be emailed to your FIU email.

Weekly Schedule

Week of August 21st: **Introduction**

Weeks of August 28th and September 4th: **Doctrinal Dimension. Reading:** John Paul II PDF "Faith and Reason". No class Monday, September 4th.

Weeks of September 11th and 18th: **Ethics Dimension. Reading:** MacIntyre PDF "After Virtue"

Weeks of September 25th and October 2nd: **Myth Dimension. Reading:** Frankl PDF "Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning"

Weeks of October 9th and 16th: **Ritual Dimension. Reading:** Bell PDF "Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice"

Midterm on Monday October 9th

Weeks of October 23rd and October 30th: **Social Dimension Reading:** Douglas PDF "Purity and Danger"

Essay 1 Due on Friday November 3rd

Weeks of November 6th and November 13th: **Experiential Dimension. Readings:** Newberg PDF "Why God Won't Go Away"

Week of November 20th: Review and Group Workshops, No class Friday, November 24th.

Presentations: Week of November 27th

Second Essay Due on Friday, December 1st

Final Exam TBD

Syllabus Is Subject To Change