The Social Sciences and the Study of Religions in Latin America
RLG 5937 C/L REL 4937 (Hybrid Course)

Course Information
Semester: Fall, 2017
Room: GC 271 A
Days: Wednesday
Times: 1 pm – 3:15 pm
(Blackboard Schedule is indicated below)

Professor: Dr. Ana María Bidegain
Office: DM 305B
E-mail: bidegain@fiu.edu, please use Blackboard course messages
Office Hours: By appointment made 48 hours in advance.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The main question for this course is: How do the Social Sciences and the Humanities study religions, in a specific socio-political context? In our case, we will focus on the Latin American context. Although this course will analyze a variety of disciplinary approaches and key relevant issues to study religions, we will focus on practical examples. How can we study, in the Latin American socio-political context, the interplay of religions, society and politics? We will analyze the Social Sciences and Humanities’ methodologies that Ph.D and Masters’ students have been using to resolve research problems. Those who are preparing their research proposal will be able to share their research problems and questions, and their search for key concepts, and appropriate methodology. This means that the course will focus mostly on how to do research from a practical experience.

The study of Latin American religions is a very broad area of study that requires an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective. At the same time, it demands from the researcher the capacity to focus on particularities required for the deeper understanding of this complex reality. It requires also identifying a main disciplinary perspective from where to start a dialogue with other disciplines. Selecting the appropriate methodology is essential for developing a good research on any of the Latin American religions’ problems.

COURSE GOALS

This course intends to expose students to the diversity of methods that the Social Sciences and the Humanities have been developing to resolve problems and research questions posed by the study of religions. Students will exercise skills such as establishing hypotheses, selecting key concepts, identifying primary and secondary sources, and building a targeted bibliography. The course supports students interested in the study of religions as they design their thesis research proposals.
**COURSE OUTCOMES**

At the end of the course, students should be able to develop a sound research proposal for their thesis or major research paper, in compliance with the FIU Graduate School Guidelines: https://gradschool.fiu.edu/documents/Proposal_Guidelines.pdf.

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

Even though the research proposal is due at the end of this course, on Dec. 4, each student must develop it through three stages.

First: Each student must select a research topic, including the research questions and the research hypothesis. This topic has to be adequate for development either as a final research paper or as a master’s thesis. Due Sep. 16.

Second: Students identify the appropriate methodology and sources for their academic research. Due Oct. 29.

Third: Students will present a research proposal on Latin American studies, to be developed as a final research paper or as a master’s thesis. Due on Dec. 4.

If possible, students may select the thesis committee and major professor to supervise the research process.

The final paper must be typed, double-spaced, using Times New Roman 12-point font (written work submitted in large font will not be acceptable). Citations must follow the MLA format.

The paper must be submitted by the deadline. Late work will result in the reduction of half a letter grade per day, unless arrangements with professor were made prior to deadline.

Through three short videos each student will share orally the progress, challenges and difficulties found during the development of their research proposal.

**TEACHING METHODOLOGY**

The course will be taught in a hybrid seminar format. Therefore, students are expected to be active participants in the process, by engaging the class community online and in the classroom, and by taking part actively in the discussions that will surface throughout the semester. Active student participation is expected as an essential component of the course. As a hybrid course, it will be taught partially in person, partially online and based on the students’ personal work.

a) In-person: Through the meeting in person, the professor will provide a guide on the seven units proposed on the syllabus. The students will have the opportunity to meet and listen first-hand how other researchers have resolved their research questions with appropriate methodologies.

b) Online and personal work: Readings, contents, information and audiovisuals will be provided through Blackboard. All the instructional materials and activities are delivered through Blackboard,
and other online media. Should you have any questions, please contact the professor, preferably through the Blackboard course message.

Keep in mind that other members of the course will likely see your discussion forum postings. Care should be taken when determining what to post. Discussion topics for the semester are listed. You are expected to post your initial response on Wednesday (by 23:55 for the week listed; you should respond to at least 3 other posts by Sunday at 23:55 of the same week). The possible total score from postings is 10 points. Thus, by the end of the week you should have a total of four posts on your thread. The approximate length of a response is 100 words, 10 lines.

**COURSE COMMUNICATION**

Communication will take place via Blackboard messages. Occasionally, the professor will send messages if something unexpected occurs. The messages feature is a private and secure text-based communication system, which occurs within a course among its members. Users must log on to Blackboard to send, receive, or read messages. The Messages tool is located on the Course Menu, on the left side of the course webpage. It is recommended that students check their messages routinely to ensure up-to-date communication.

The Email feature is an external communication tool that allows users to send emails to users enrolled within the course. Emails are sent to the students' FIU email on record. The Email tool is located on the Course Menu, on the left side of the course webpage.

Visit our Writing Resources webpage for more information on professional writing and technical communication skills.

**ADOBE CONNECT**

Adobe Connect is an online meeting room where you can interact with your professor and fellow students by sharing screens and files, chatting, broadcasting live audio, and taking part in other interactive online activities. We will be utilizing this tool to conduct presentations by FIU Alumni who are now leaders on the topic of immigration.

Requirements for using Adobe Connect:
- Disable any window pop-up blocker.
- Adobe Flash Player is required to successfully run your Adobe Connect meeting. You can test your computer to make sure your computer and network connections are properly configured to provide you with the best possible Adobe Connect meeting experience.
- Use of a combination headset and microphone with USB connection is recommended to ensure quality sound and reduce technical difficulties.

Reference Adobe Connect (Tutorials & Help) to learn about the tool, how to access your meeting rooms and recordings.
EXTRA CREDIT

Volunteers who would like to become editors of the blog will earn five extra points toward the final score. This opportunity is open to only two candidates. Responsibilities include: uploading daily news and commenting on some of the stories. They will also be more active in adding sources to the “Sites you want to visit” category. If you are interested, send a message to the instructor for more information.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This is a hybrid course that promotes an active approach to learning. The class physically meets only once a week. However, students are expected to intensively engage course work online through Blackboard.

The professor will: Introduce the material in person at the beginning of each learning unit; teach and steer learning activities through the discussion board; Select and invite researchers to share their experiences with the class; Log in to the course weekly to follow the discussion board, blogs and journal posting; respond to emails/messages within three days; grade assignments within ten days of the assignment deadline; and provide guide and support toward the development of the final research proposal throughout the semester.

Students must: Review the “how to get started” information located on the course content; introduce themselves to the class during the first week, by posting a self-introduction on the appropriate discussion forum; interact online with instructor and peers through the Discussion Board and Adobe Connect; review and follow the course calendar; log in to the course at least once a week; respond to discussion boards, blogs, and journal postings each week; respond to emails/messages; submit assignments by the corresponding deadline.

Note: I reserve the right to alter this syllabus if and whenever necessary.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Please review FIU’s Policies webpage. The policies webpage contains essential information regarding guidelines relevant to all courses at FIU, as well as additional information about acceptable netiquette for online courses.

Technical requirements and skills: One of the greatest barriers to taking an online course is a lack of basic computer literacy. By computer literacy we mean being able to manage and organize computer files efficiently, and learning to use your computer’s operating system and software quickly and easily. Keep in mind that this is not a computer literacy course, but students enrolled in online courses are expected to have moderate proficiency using a computer. Please go to the “What’s Required” page to find out more information on this subject.

This course utilizes the following tools:
1. Discussion Board or Discussion Forum
2. Meetings through Adobe Connect
4. Turnitin
5. YouTube

ACCESSIBILITY

Please refer to our ADA Compliance webpage for information about accessibility involving the tools used in this course. You may also visit Blackboard’s Commitment to Accessibility webpage for more information. For additional assistance, please contact FIU’s Disability Resource Center.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course.

READINGS


Other readings will posted through Blackboard.

GRADING

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<td>71-73</td>
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SCHEDULE

UNIT 1 – Concepts and Seminar Foundations.

WEEK 1 (Aug. 21-26) and WEEK 2 (Aug. 28 – Sep. 2)

GOALS: To understand key aspects in the study of religions and practical guideline to prepare a research proposal. IRB Requirements.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, August 23, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
   Review PPP.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.
   Post personal introduction video.

READINGS

Hinnells – Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

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UNIT 2 – Literature, History, Theology and Philosophy of Religion.

WEEK 3 (Sept. 4-9) and WEEK 4 (Sept. 11-16)

SUBJECTS: The role of the Humanities in the study of religion.

GOALS: Understanding the dialogue between the Humanities and the study of religion.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, Sept. 6, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
   Review and analyze PPP.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.
   Video presentation on the Justification and relevance of the research topic selected. Due Sept. 8.
   Comments on 2 Student’ presentation video. Due Sept. 14.

3) Research Tasks
   Selecting a Research topic paper. Due Sept. 16.

READINGS

Hinnells – Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

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UNIT 3 – Sociology and Anthropology of Religion.

WEEK 5 (Sept. 18 -23) and WEEK 6 (Sept. 25-30)

SUBJECTS: Survey of the main methods of the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion.

GOAL: To understand the usefulness for the study of Religion of different concepts, theories, and sociological and anthropological methods, and to appropriate them, in function of the chosen research topic.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, September 20, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
   Review and Analyze PPP on Blackboard.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.

READINGS

Hinnells – Chapters 7 and 8.

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UNIT 4 – Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Study of Religion.

WEEK 7 (Oct. 2-7) and WEEK 8 (Oct. 16-21)

SUBJECT: The contribution of quantitative and qualitative methods to the study of religion.

GOALS: Identifying how different quantitative and qualitative methods adequate to diverse research goals.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, October 4, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
   Review and analyze PPP on Blackboard.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.

READINGS

To be posted on Blackboard.

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UNIT 5 – The Insider/Outsider Perspective // RESEARCH WEEK.

WEEK 9 (Oct. 16-20) and WEEK 10 – RESEARCH WEEK (Oct. 23-28)

SUBJECT: The personal religious experience in the study of religion.

GOALS: To understand the value of personal experience without losing objectivity.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, Oct. 18, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
Review and Analyze PPP on Blackboard.
Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.
Post a video presentation with a progress report on your proposal. Due Oct. 22.
Comment on 2 Students’ presentations videos. Due Oct. 27.
Second Stage: Literature review and sources on the selected topic. Due Oct. 29.

READINGS
Hinnells: Chapters 13, 9 and 10

UNIT 6 – When Economic and Political Power Collide with Religion.

WEEK 11 (Oct. 30 – Nov.4) and WEEK 12 (Nov. 6- 11)

SUBJECT: Analyze the interplay of powers in Latin American societies.

GOALS: Identify methods and concepts for the study of the relationship between political/economic power and religion.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

Meeting in person: Wednesday, Nov. 8, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

Online Tasks
Review and Analyze PPP on Blackboard.
Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.

READINGS
Hinnells – Chapters 24 and 16.
UNIT 7 – Gender and Sexuality in the Study of Religion.

WEEK 12 (Nov. 13-18) and WEEK 13 (Nov. 20- 25)

SUBJECTS: Gender, ethnicity and social class as analytical categories in the study of Latin American religions.

GOALS: To understand the role of women in Latin American religions.

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS
1) Meeting in person: Monday, Nov.5th, Room GC 271 A, 1:00 pm – 3:15 pm.

2) Online Tasks
   Review and Analyze PPP on Blackboard.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.

READINGS

Hinnells – Chapter 12.

UNIT 8 – Conclusions and Proposal Presentation

WEEK 14 (Thanksgiving Break) and WEEK 15 (Dec. 4-9)

SUBJECTS: Ethical challenges to take into account in research. IRB Requirements.

GOALS: Presenting student’s research proposals

ACTIVITIES AND TASKS
1) Meeting in person: Wednesday, Dec 6, Room GC 271 A, 1:00PM - 3:15PM

2) On-line Tasks
   Review and Analyze PPP on Blackboard.
   Participate and respond to questions through the Discussion Board.
   Upload video presentation on the research proposal.

READINGS

Hinnells – Chapter 30.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION DUE DEC. 4.