REL2011 | Introduction to Religion

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Course Description and Purpose

Why should we care about religion? Why do bad things happen to good people? Is religion irrelevant in our fast-paced technological world? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? How can the study of religion help us understand current events? Is religion a creative or destructive force? How does the study of religion relate to your major? These are just some of the questions that we will explore throughout the semester.

This course is interested in examining the different expressions, practices, and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular tradition will be favored, materials from several traditions will be chosen to exemplify thematic topics in the experience of the Sacred. We will also focus on the tenets of religions, dispelling common misconceptions and assumptions and looking into the emergence of new practices among the post-denominational generation.

We will utilize our textbook, videos, internet sources, and discussions to explore these topics. Your grade will include exams, class discussions, and essays to develop your critical thinking skills and writing abilities. This course fulfills the Gordon Rule requirement. Aspects of this course will be facilitated using a team-based learning approach. All students will be placed on a team for the entire term. Students will be responsible for preparing for course activities in advance of each session.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain the basic history, development, and belief system of various religious traditions.
- Recognize religious themes and concepts found in other cultures.
- Identify the meaning behind religious concepts and symbols.
• Evaluate their own religious views in regards to other cultures and paradigms of religious thought.
• Apply critical thinking to various topics in the field of religious studies.
• Think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.
• Perform field research to better understand a particular religious community.

Global Learning Objectives Targeted

• Analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
• Assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions.
• Demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Proctored Exam Policy

This course does not require proctored exams.

Textbook and Course Materials

**Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion**  
*(Required)*

James C. Livingston Emeritus  
ISBN-10: 013600380X  
You may purchase your textbook online at the [FIU Bookstore](https://www.fiu.edu/bookstore).

Course Modality & Expectations

This course will be taught in hybrid mode. In a hybrid class, the face-to-face meeting time (or Zoom in this case) is reduced by 50%. The other 50% of the class takes place outside of the classroom, whether online, in the field, in the community, or some place else. It is important to note that this out-of-class “meeting time” is in addition to the homework and preparation that are assigned in all classes regardless of format. If you take a hybrid course, you will need to self-regulate your out-of-class time so that you can keep up with both the face-to-face and out-of-class assignments and preparation.
Some tasks must be completed prior to class and some after class. Paying attention to how the in- and out-of-class materials are connected is important.

You are responsible for carefully reading the syllabus and weekly calendar, meeting deadlines as posted, and submitting mature, thoughtful work. Some of this material may be new, personal, or controversial, so please maintain an open-minded and considerate attitude, allowing others time to reflect and communicate. The online portion of the class is required and constitutes the online attendance. Please review additional expectations below.

Important Information

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- Policies
- Technical Requirements and Skills
- Accessibility and Accommodation
- Academic Misconduct Statement
- Panther Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place via the Inbox. Check out the Canvas Conversations Tutorial (Links to an external site.) to learn how to communicate with your instructor and peers using Announcements, Discussions, and the Inbox.

As a student in this course, you are expected to:

- Review the Getting Started information located in the Modules.
- Introduce yourself to the class during the first week in the appropriate discussion forum.
- Take the Practice Quiz to ensure that your computer is compatible with Canvas.
- Interact online with instructor and peers.
- Log in to the course at least 3-4 times per week, if not daily.
- Respond to Canvas Messages within 1 day.
- Check regularly for any announcements.

I, the professor, will:

- Log in to the course at least 6 days per week.
- Respond to Canvas Messages within 1 day.
- Respond to General Discussion posts within 2 days.
- Provide feedback on assignments within 7 days of submission.
- Provide an opportunity for you to give individual and group feedback as to how you think your group is doing at the midway point.
- Generally, I send messages with descriptive subject lines and any updates or pertinent class information, but, because so many of your classes are likely remote
this semester, I will try and stick to announcements unless something is urgent. That way, you have somewhere to look without getting overwhelmed by messages from all of your classes.

Attendance & Participation

Since we have limited Zoom sessions, you are expected to do your best to attend every session, arrive on time, and stay for the duration of the class. Attendance will be taken during each session. Arriving late, leaving early, or stepping out of the class for long periods of time may incur an absence penalty. Please refrain from texting and emailing in class. Please inform the instructor immediately if a situation develops that will impact your performance or attendance.

Participation includes reading for class, contributing to discussions, and being attentive to lectures and student presentations. **Participation also includes introducing yourself in the online forum.**

Zoom participation

Things are different for all of us this semester but I encourage you to have fun with the Zoom format, taking advantage of the opportunity to use backgrounds (if you can) and profile photos. It is more challenging for us to get to know each other only through the computer but I am confident that we can do it. By the way, as someone with a mini-zoo at home, I have no problem with animals wandering past the camera. If I thought chaos wouldn't ensue, I'd have a few of mine on the desk. Instead, I just hope we can avoid my dogs barking, at least during class time.

Also, because you do receive credit for attendance and participation, it is important that I hear from you (mic) from time to time if I cannot see you (camera). Aside from that, I love seeing your smiling faces and encourage all of you to use gallery view so that you can get to know your classmates.

Discussions

Film Discussions

You are required to participate in **five (5) online discussions about historical films**, documentaries, and particular concepts or issues covered in the course. You will also have one (1) film discussion as a make-up option. There may be some substitutions below based on current library availability. I never want you to have to spend money to see one of the films. It is possible that we may substitute an article for one or more of the films depending on availability.

**Historical Films Used**

1. The Mission (1986 with Robert De Niro)
2. Video on Santeria
3. Luther (2003 with Joseph Fiennes)
4. Gandhi (1982 with Ben Kingsley)

Make-up Discussion

- The Ten Commandments (1956, Cecil B. DeMille)

The films will not be shown in class; you are responsible for watching the films on your own time as part of the hybrid online work. The films will be available on library reserve or through a shared link.

Since these are intended to be online “discussions” (similar to conversations), late submissions or make ups will not be allowed under any circumstances. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Video Discussions

Four additional short video-discussions (first three listed below) are also included in the course content.

1. Do you believe that God exists?
2. Where do Good & Evil come from?
3. Are people born good?

Discussion Posting Guidelines

Each discussion (film or video) requires that you answer the discussion prompt and then comment on a peer's post. Discussion prompts will open on Monday the week they are assigned and close on Saturday at 11:59 pm that same week. You must answer the prompt early enough in the week (at least by Wednesday) to allow others the opportunity to comment on your post before the due date. See discussion forums for detailed instructions. Please keep in mind that you are responding in an academic forum so you want to pay attention to grammar and punctuation.

Discussion Grading Guidelines

- **Response to prompt (80%)**: post length (minimum 300 words), content, grammar, and punctuation
- **Reply to peer (20%)**: should be at least 50 words or 3 complete sentences and should mention something specific from the post that you are responding to (more than "Good job!" or "Good analysis.")

Keep in mind that your discussion forum postings will be seen by other members of the course. Care should be taken when determining what to post.

Essays

As this is a Gordon Rule course, you are required to complete a minimum of three major writing assignments.
Writing Assignments | Notes
--- | ---
Writing Assignment 1 | *Religion in the time of COVID-19.* For this first writing assignment, you’ll first be sharing your own faith-tradition or non-faith tradition and how that has been helpful or not helpful as you’ve dealt with COVID-19 and its effect on our lives. Additionally, you should discuss some aspect of how religious leaders or communities have responded to the pandemic either in the United States or elsewhere. This short essay should utilize MLA formatting, be double-spaced and include 800 - 1,000 words.

Writing Assignment 2 | *Virtual Pilgrimage.* For this writing assignment, you will need to visit three of the nine provided virtual sites and write an insightful essay that demonstrates a general understanding of the importance of each of the sites within its religious tradition (1,500 – 1,800 words, double-spaced, MLA formatting). Detailed instructions will be provided in the assignment link.

Writing Assignment 3 | *Topic Essay.* This essay will be a topic of your choice related to religion - hopefully something fun that you would like to explore. The topic will be approved by the professor and you must utilize at least one scholarly or academic source. Other additional sources are fine, but the one scholarly source is a must. This essay is 1,200 - 1,500 words and should also be double-spaced and use MLA formatting, which includes a works cited page.

**Essay General Guidelines**

- Source material must be cited correctly using [MLA Style](#), and long quotes should be avoided.
- Papers need to be submitted in Canvas through Turnitin. Be sure to review the detailed [Turnitin Instructions](#) on how to submit your assignments and how to review the Grademark comments (feedback) from me.
- Please do NOT send any writing assignments as email or message attachments. All writing assignments must be submitted in the proper drop box in Canvas; there are no exceptions.
- Papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity in Turnitin will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points).
- Late papers may be accepted with a legitimate excuse and a 10% penalty for late submission at the professor’s discretion. After more than two weeks, papers will either be refused, or will be discounted by fifty percent at the professor’s discretion.
- Please review the [common grammar mistakes](#) in case it is helpful.
Group Discussion (Via Zoom)

You will have two group assignments over the course of the semester. The first one is to lead a class discussion on a topic related to course readings. Each group will be responsible for asking questions about a particular chapter and helping to lead the conversation on that chapter. You are welcome to use a kahoot or any similar tool as part of the discussion. You are encouraged to be creative and informative.

Group Discussion General Guidelines

• Each group member should participate in the class discussion itself in some way.
• As a group, you are responsible for signing up for discussion slots, which will be done in one of the early classes this semester.
• If you miss your discussion slot and there is no other available slot, you will receive 0 points for the presentation.

Group discussions are evaluated based on content, creativity, and cooperation among group members. Further assignment details will be discussed during a Zoom session.

Group Religion Project

This is your second group assignment and is a lot of fun. Each group will collaborate to design their own sect, church community, or religion. The following components of the sect/church/religion must be thought out and articulated in writing: definition, myth, rituals, scriptures, community practices, deity(ies), cosmogony, the human dilemma, and paths of salvation.

The project will be graded on organization, creativity, and clarity of understanding the key concepts from each chapter and will cover chapters 3 through 13. This assignment is due online, here in Canvas, and will be presented in class. Further assignment details will be provided in Canvas and discussed during Zoom sessions.

Weekly Chapter Quizzes

There are 15 weekly chapter quizzes (one quiz per textbook chapter). The lowest two grades from the quizzes may be dropped. Please review the specifics for each quiz below:

• Open from Monday, 8:00 am, until Thursday at 11:59 pm EST. The first quiz on chapter 1 will be during the first week of the course, but will stay open until Saturday at 11:59 pm EST.
• 10 multiple-choice and true/false questions
• 15 minutes to complete
• Total score is available immediately upon submission; answers feedback is available in My Grades after quiz due date
In order to mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is very important that you take the Practice Quiz from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams.

Assessments in this course are not compatible with mobile devices and should not be taken through a mobile phone or a tablet. If you need further assistance please contact FIU Canvas Help Center (Links to an external site.).

Exams

The Midterm and Final Exams will be available online during their respective scheduled dates. Please review the specifics for each exam below.

**Midterm Exam**

- Covers the first half of the course, from Chapter 1 through Chapter 7
- Administered online in Canvas
- One hour and thirty minutes allowed to complete
- Total score is available immediately upon submission

**Final Exam**

- Covers the second half of the course, from Chapter 8 through Chapter 15
- Administered online in Canvas
- One hour and thirty minutes allowed to complete
- Total score is available immediately upon submission

Students who miss the exam and request make-ups must provide valid documentation for appropriate emergencies. “Forgetting” is not an excuse.

Reflections

There will be seven short reflection opportunities over the course of the semester. Each one is a chance to pause for a moment and share a few sentences about your own thoughts or experiences related to one of the topics from the course.

Extra Credit

No extra credits or make-ups will be accepted after a designated due date

**Extra-Credit Film Review**

Review a movie and write a 300-word forum post describing the role that religion plays in the story or event. Focus on religious symbols, rituals, myths or the ways in which religious beliefs or practices influence the plot or meaning of the movie. Do not tell the whole story of the movie, but just enough so that your points are clear. The movie selection must be approved by the instructor. The extra credit paper is worth 1% of the final grade.
**Extra-Credit Current Events Participation**

Extra credit (1% on the final grade) will also be given to students who share a current news article (cut and paste and include a link to the original article) relevant to the class via the discussion forum (start a new thread) and include at least five to ten complete sentences commenting on the article.

**Extra-Credit if I know Your Name**

Yes, that’s right. You will get extra-credit if I can connect your name to your face. It’s relatively easy to learn names and faces but connecting the two can be a challenge, especially when a professor has several large classes. That being said, it’s very important to me to make the connection so, if you help me do it, you’ll get extra-credit. This might be particularly challenging in our new Zoom world, but let’s see how it goes!

**Everybody Knows Your Name**

**Grading** *(slight oddities in tables below as cut and pasted from Canvas)*

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