

REL 2011 Introduction to Religion  
Fall 2021 Syllabus

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Instructor: Eric Isaac

**When and Where do we meet?**

U01: TU-TH 9:30-10:45 PC 431

U03: TU-TH 12:30-1:45 PC 428

U05: MWF 9-9:50 PC 424

U06: MWF 10-10:50 PC 424

Contact: Please use Canvas Messages. Alternatively use: [Eisaac@fiu.edu](mailto:Eisaac@fiu.edu)

**Office Hours:**

Due to Coronavirus ONLY by appointment. I'll work around your availability.

Feel free to ask me any questions after class observing physical distancing & mask wearing if you are taking an in person course. I am very accessible, please feel free to reach out any time.

**A note about COVID & Modality:**

Due to the nature of COVID in person courses may be forced to move to a remote teaching modality. If this were to happen, we would continue meeting via Zoom during the same course hours.

**What is this Course about?**

This course will look into a pantheon of interdisciplinary thinkers such as Marx, Jung, and Weber to analyze salient theories about the patterns and paradoxes of sacred experiences across religions. We will explore how communities from various times and geographies express their sacred experiences through symbols, myths, scriptures, time, and space and how these are accessed and transformed through diverse interpretations. Our fundamental aim will be to discover the intrinsic connection between the sacred and our notions of self, nature, society, reality, and so on.

Ultimately, this course will prepare you to formulate your own theoretical questions and methodology to create and apply new knowledge in any field of study. It will also provide you with the necessary tools to guide your individual quest. Welcome!

## **Why Should I Care about Religion?**

Why do I struggle to lead a meaningful life? How do I determine what makes life worth it in the face of suffering and evil? Is religion irrelevant in our fast-paced technological world? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? Is religion a creative or destructive force? 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 religion will be favored, materials from several religions 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.

## **How can this course help you advance in your career?**

You do not need to be personally religious, majoring in religious studies, or in a field within humanities to benefit from this course. Whatever your academic field is, this course will train you to make important connections between your career and the world of the sacred and the profane. You will be able to understand the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization, and the role religion plays in local and international affairs.

Religious illiteracy can greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies. Religion greatly influences one's epistemology, or the way they deal with what is true or false, as well as the way they look at the world. If we fail to understand religion & secularization, we may fail to understand people.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study such as philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, among others. This enhances your ability to think critically, communicate effectively, respond sensitively, collaborate with others and creatively resolve conflict.

## **I. How will you succeed in this course?**

### **1. Buy the required text**

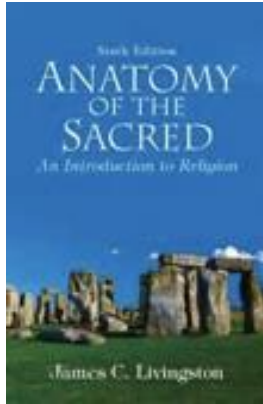
Feel free to buy older editions to save, but you are still responsible for the material in the below edition.

Anatomy of the Sacred: An introduction to

Religion by James C. Livingston

ISBN 978-0-13-600380-9 ISBN 0-13-

600380-x



**2. Take good notes in class & show up! so you can do well on the exams, and discussion portions!**

Examinations (17.5%)

Discussions (17.5%)

Attendance (15%)

50% of total course weight

**3. Do not procrastinate on the writing assignments or the site visit!**

First Draft Site Visit Essay (10%)

Final Draft Site Visit Essay (15%)

First Draft Personal Analysis Essay (10%)

Final Draft Personal Analysis Essay (15%)

50% of total course weight

**II. Course Objectives, Goals, & Plagiarism Statement**

**Objectives**

1. Identify key thinkers such as Marx, Jung, and Weber and their interdisciplinary theories about the patterns and paradoxes of sacred experiences across traditions
2. Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to ethnographic, psychological, sociological, ethical, phenomenological, and so on.
3. Compare and contrast the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern, Western, indigenous and shamanic religions.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.

5. Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film, and so on.
6. Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
7. Correctly distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources, and scholarly vs journalistic sources.

### **Goals**

- Foster tolerance of and appreciation for differences in human culture and diverse religious expressions.
- Develop fluency in ancient and contemporary religious history.
- Expand ability to apply different methodologies to the study of religion.
- Create an atmosphere of self-exploration and self-understanding.
- Nurture creative and critical thinking.
- Identify the relevance of studying religion to contemporary life, human thought, and professional development

### **Global Learning Objectives**

As a Global Learning course, students will meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:

1. Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
2. Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions
3. Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.

### **Statement on Plagiarism**

You are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the [University Code of Academic Integrity](#) if you need further clarification. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely or partially stolen from another source;
2. Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
3. Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at <http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm> if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class. You may not “reuse” papers.

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## **Late Assignment Policy**

I do accept late assignments, however, if you turn in late work the highest grade you can get for that assignment is an 80%. This even includes first drafts that are 'replaced' by final draft grades. No, you cannot turn in all of your assignments at the end of this course I will not accept assignments more than 10 days after the due date.

**No assignments will be accepted after Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> with the exception of the final exam. No exceptions.**

## **III. Course breakdown**

Course Landmarks	Items	Scale In points	Percentage of Final Grade
Discussion Forum	8	22x8 (170.50)	17.5
Attendance	1	150	15
Site Visit Essay (First Draft)	1	100	10
Site Visit Essay (Final Draft after revision)	1	150	15
Personal Analysis Essay (First Draft)	1	100	10
Personal Analysis Essay (Final Draft after revision)	1	150	15
Midterm	1	87.5	8.75
Final	1	87.5	8.75
Total	14	1000	100%

## **IV. Assessment Descriptions**

### **A. Essays**

#### **Gordon Rule Requirement**

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write a minimum of two major assignments. **The essays must have a thesis, and adequately support that thesis. The essays must be organized clearly and logically.** Each paper will be at least 1500-2000 words and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using Chicago style

formatting. Please be aware that papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points). 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. Late papers may be accepted with a legitimate excuse and the maximum score will be 80%.

### **1. Essay 1: Religious Site Visit**

For this essay, you will need to visit a religious site from a religious tradition that is not your own and write a report on it. This paper must have a thesis. Detailed assignment instructions and format are provided in the course. You will be revising this essay. People plagiarize all the time on this assignment, if you do, you will fail the course. In order to complete the first essay, you must select a religious site and provide proof that you were there. A picture with you at the site is sufficient, if you happen to attend a physical service.

- **First Draft:** You must submit at least 1000 of the minimum 1500 words, include your thesis, conclusion, and a bulleted plan for any parts missing from your essay to receive full credit on the first draft.
  - **You need to submit a picture of yourself at the site for credit.**
- **Final Draft:** After my feedback on first draft the final draft must be at least 1500 words long, and cover 3 elements of the religion or site you are visiting.

### **2. Essay 2: Personal Analysis**

For this essay, you will analyze yourself using the theoretical frameworks for analysis presented in this class. The purpose of this assignment is to assess whether you understand the basic concepts of the study of religion through naming what is sacred in your life as the thesis. Support the 'thesis' by describing & defending your chosen symbols meaning against the backdrop of suffering & evil, and the human problem. Detailed assignment instructions and format are provided in the course.

- **First Draft:** You must submit at least 1000 of the minimum 1500 words, include your thesis, conclusion, and a bulleted plan for any parts missing from your essay to receive full credit on the first draft.
- **Final Draft:** After my feedback on first draft the final draft must be at least 1500 words long.

### **C. Discussions**

There will be a total of 8 discussions. The discussions will take two forms. The first form will be portions of your essays so that they can be revised & edited by me. The second form will be posting in response to a question posited in the Lectures. These will be responded to by your classmates.

- The discussions will short and are here to aid you with your papers.
  - 4 of the discussions are submitting elements of your essays so they can be edited. This helps you write more efficiently & effectively while still meeting Gordon Rule requirements, saving you time and helping your grade.
  - The other 4 discussions are responses to lectures and current events. They must be at least 300 words. You will be required to respond to 2 other classmates posts with responses of at least 75 words.
- All discussions must be thesis based, so they must have one clear idea throughout the post.

### **D. Exams**

The Midterm Exam and Final Exam will be available online during their respective scheduled dates. Each exam is worth 8.75% of the final grade, for a total of 17.5% of the final grade.

Format: multiple-choice and true/false questions based on assigned readings.

No late submissions will be accepted.

### **E. Participation/Attendance**

Your attendance will be monitored, and makes up 15% of the final grade of the course. If you are not in class (physically or virtually depending on circumstance), your grade will be affected. You

will also be lacking critical information to complete the assignments. **Everyone gets 3 days they can miss. Don't abuse them.**

## **F. Extra Credit Opportunities**

Extra credit can account for up to 5% of your final grade. You get one opportunity to do this.

1. Proof that you went to the writing center during exam & writing week. You must go and have them help you write the essay. You automatically get 5% for doing this. Make the appointment early and show up.

## **V. Grading Scale**

<b>Letter</b>	<b>Range (%)</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Range (%)</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Range (%)</b>
A	95 or above	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 94	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less

## **VI. Course Calendar**



**Topic: What is Religion?**

**Week 1**  
August 23-29

- READING: Chapter 1, pp. 1-14
- Introductions, syllabus review, class plan
- Lecture “What is Religion”  
*Remember to start your Religious Site Visit research early!*

**Ways of Studying Religion**

**Week 2**  
Aug. 30-Sept. 5

- READING: Chapter 2, pp. 15-34
- Lecture: Social Science & Religion
- Lecture: Interpreting Religion + Site Visit Paper Explained  
*Have you done your Site Visit?????Proof is due next week!!!*

**The Sacred and the Holy**

**Week 3**  
Sept. 5-12

- **NO CLASS LABOR DAY SEP 6.**
- READING: Chapter 3, pp. 35-52
- **DUE:** Discussion 1-Religion & the Sacred Fri. Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture: Sacred Power
- Lecture: “The Sacred and the Holy”

**Sacred Symbol, Myth and Doctrine**

**Week 4**  
Sept. 13-19

- READING: Chapter 4, pp. 53-73
- **DUE:** Discussion 2-Intro/Thesis Fri. Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture “Myth I.”
- Lecture “Myth II.”

**Sacred Ritual**

**Week 5**  
Sept. 20-26

- READING: Read Chapter 5, pp. 74-95
- **DUE:** Discussion 3-Conclusion Fri. Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture "Ritual I"

**Sacred Scripture**

**Week 6**  
Sept. 27-Oct. 3

- Read Chapter 6, pp.96-123
- **DUE: First Draft** Site Visit Paper Fri. Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>
- Lecture "Scripture I"

### Society and the Sacred

**Week 7**  
Oct. 4-10

- Read Chapter 7 p. 124-150
- **DUE:** Discussion 4-Scripture, Society, & the Divine Fri. 8<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture "Society and the Sacred"

### Concepts of Deity/ Ultimate Reality & Cosmogony

**Week 8**  
Oct. 11-17

- Read Chapter 8, pp. 151-182
- **DUE: Final Draft** Site Visit Fri. Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture "Deity"
- Lecture "Cosmogony I"

### Cosmogony

**Week 9**  
Oct. 18-24

- Read Chapter 9, pp. 183-210
- Lecture "Cosmogony II"
- Personal Assessment Paper discussion & Mid-term review
- **Mid Term Open:** Oct. 24-Nov.7<sup>th</sup>  
**Mid Term to cover only to chapter 8.**

### The Human Problem & The problem of Evil

**Week 10**  
Oct. 25-31

- Read Chapter 10 pp. 211-234
- **DUE:** Discussion 5-Humanity & Suffering Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>
- Lecture "The Human Problem"
- Lecture "Theodicy"
- **Mid Term Open:** Oct. 24-Nov.7<sup>th</sup>

### Assignment & Writing Week

**Week 11**  
November 1-7

- No in person class, appt. Available on Zoom.
- Read Chapter 11 pp. 235-258
- **DUE:** Discussion 6- Intro/Thesis Fri. Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>
- **DUE:** Discussion 7- Conclusion Fri. Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>
- **DO YOUR EXTRACREDIT IN THE WRITING CENTER IT'S WORTH 5%.**
- **DUE: Midterm Exam Nov. 7th at 11:59 pm, ET**  
\*\*\*No Late Submissions Accepted you had 3 weeks\*\*\*

**Ethics**

**Week 12**  
Nov. 8-14

- **VETERANS DAY: No Class, Nov. 11th**
- Read Chapter 12 pp. 259-286
- **DUE: First Draft Personal Assessment Essay Nov 12th**
- Lecture "Ethics"

**Salvation and Liberation**

**Week 13**  
Nov. 15-21

- Read Chapter 13 pp. 287-337
- Lecture "Soteriology: Salvation & Liberation"
- **Due:** Discussion 8-Ethics & Death Nov 19th

**Secularism & Fundamentalism I.**

**Week 14**  
Nov. 22-28

- Read Chapter 14 pp. 341-360
- Lecture "Secularization/New Religious Movements"



**Secularism & Fundamentalism II**

**Week 15**  
Nov. 29-Dec. 4

- Read Chapter 15
- **Due:** Final Draft Personal Analysis Paper Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Last Day of Class: Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>

**Week 16**  
Dec. 5-10

- **Final Exam open DEC 5: 12:01 pm – DEC 10:11:59 pm**
- **Take Final Exam ONLINE BY DECEMBER 10**
- **any later and I cannot give you any grade other than 0**

