

REL 2011 Introduction to Religion
Spring 2020 Syllabus
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Instructor: Andres Arrazola

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When and Where do we meet?

Class discussions: MWF 12:00 – 12:50 OBCC 119

Office Hours: Mondays 10:00 – 10:50 – GL 150, or by appointment

Why Should I 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.

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 the 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.

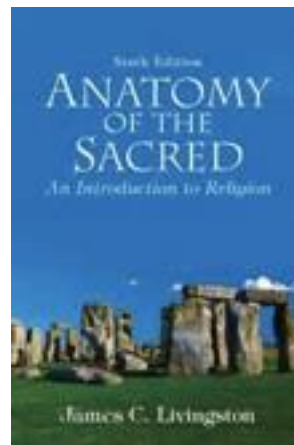
Religious illiteracy can greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies.

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.

Required Text

Anatomy of the Sacred: An introduction to
Religion by James C. Livingston
ISBN 978-0-13-600380-9 ISBN 0-13-
600380-x

** Other reading materials will be provided
by the instructor.*



How will you succeed in this course?

Attendance

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

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. Your participation grade will be compiled by assessing by how you ask questions during lectures, the quality and thoughtfulness of the questions, and asking questions during class debates.

Debates/Activities

There will be a series of structured debates/activities/discussions held throughout the semester on various topics. Attendance is expected during these sessions and constitutes a particular segment of the final grade. In the case of presentations, presenters will be assessed following a rubric to be found on canvas and is to be completed by the audience. The audience will be assessed by the professor on the quality of their assessment of the debaters.

Journal

Throughout the semester, you are to keep a journal to develop an awareness of the presence of religion around you and, more importantly, your unconscious tendencies that draw you towards something greater than yourself. You will use a composition book and are to journal a minimum of three days a week and each journal entry must be dated at the beginning. Journal entries must be handwritten and **LEGIBLE**. Write slowly and thoughtfully. All entries will be prompted with a specific question for you to contemplate. After the minimum three entries for the week are met, you can journal freely about any topic you wish, as long as it ties back to religion. The grade for the journal will be based upon how thoughtful, introspective, provocative, and probing the entries were, but most importantly, that you complete all of the topics. How personal your entries are up to your discretion. All information divulged in the journal will be kept confidential, with the exception of the expression of wishing to cause any harm or malice towards another person.

Essays

Essay One – The first essay will be a reflexive analysis of your journal. You will receive a personal prompt by the professor after review of your journal. The more detailed and thoughtful your entries are, the more engaging and meaningful your prompt will be. You will also need to resubmit your journal question typed on the cover page of the essay. The paper should be about 4 - 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 to include.

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 to include.

Essay Three – The third essay will be a handwritten 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 at random at the professor's discretion to assess the understanding of the class reading. 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.

Course breakdown

Course Landmarks	Items	Scale	Percentage of final Grade
Academic Papers	3	100 points	20
Examinations	2	100 points	20
Participation	*	100 points	10
Group Talk/ Activity/ Debates	6	100 points	5
Journal	1	100 points	10
Group Presentation	1	100 points	15
Attendance	*	100 points	20
Total			100%

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

Objectives

1. Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to ethnographic, psychological, anthropological, ethical, phenomenological, and so on.
2. Compare and contrast the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern, Western, indigenous and shamanic religions.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.
4. Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film, and so on.
5. Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
6. Correctly distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources, and scholarly vs journalistic sources.

Gordon Rule Requirement

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write a minimum of two major assignments. Each paper will be at least 1500-2000 words. All source material must be cited correctly using MLA Style and long quotes should be avoided.

Global Learning Objectives

As a Global Learning course, students will be 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.

Plagiarism

Do you know what plagiarism is? Avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism by asking me, a representative from the writing center or our library to explain. Many students end up plagiarizing material because they do not know what it entails. In short, plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely 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.

Calendar

Week of January 6th: Introduction Week. Textbook: Part 1: What is Religion and Ways of Studying Religion

Weeks of January 13th and 20th: Doctrines. Textbook: Chapters: 3) The Sacred and the Holy, 8) Deity: Concepts of the Divine and Ultimate Reality, 10) Views of the Human Problem. Class Activity/Debate: January 24th: Does God Exist?

Weeks of January 27th and February 3rd: Ethics. Textbook: Chapters: 11) Theodicy: Encountering Evil, 12) Ethics: Patterns of Moral Action. Class Activity/Debate: February 7th: The Problem of Evil

Weeks of February 10th and 17th: Myth. Textbook: Chapters: 4) Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine, 6) Sacred Scripture, 9) Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order. February 19th: Class Activity/Debate: What can be said about the resurrection of Jesus? **Midterm – February 21st.**

Week of February 24th Spring Break

Weeks of March 2nd and 9th: Ritual. Textbook: Chapters: 5) Sacred Ritual, 7) Society and the Sacred: The Social Formations and Transformations of Religion. March 13th: Class Activity/Debate: Why go to a regular religious service?

Weeks of March 16th and 23rd: Social. Textbook: Chapters: 14) Secularization, New Religious Revitalization Movements, Contemporary Religious Fundamentalism, 15) Contemporary Challenges to Religious Traditions: The Status and Role of Women, Relations between Religion and State. Class Activity/Debate: March 27th: Is the “secular” possible and desirable? **Journal Due Friday March 20th.**

Weeks of March 30th and April 6th: Experience: Textbook: Chapter 13) Soteriology: Ways and Goals of Salvation and Liberation. Class Activity/Debate: April 10th: Can we trust religious experiences? **Essay 1 Due Monday March 30th.**

Week of April 13th: Presentation week. Essay 2 Due Friday, April 17th.

Week of April 20th: Finals Week.

Syllabus is subject to change
