

Florida International University
Department of Religious Studies
Studies in World Religions, REL 3308, U08
Spring 2020, Wednesdays 5:00PM to 7:40PM
Primera Casa Room 211

Course Syllabus

Instructor: José O. Vilanova
Contact: jose.vilanova@fiu.edu / (305) 348-2186
Office Hours: By appointment. I will make myself available to meet with students at whatever hours are most convenient.

Introduction

A common socio-cultural aphorism is that one should not discuss politics, money, or religion in polite company. The often emotionally charged nature of conversations about religion in modern US American society, among other factors, has led to a woeful, and indeed dangerous, religious illiteracy. In fact, the underpinnings of nearly *every socio-cultural structure and intellectual paradigm* are rooted in some religious discourse. A prime goal of this course is to equip each student with a basic understanding of the form and substance of major world religions, as well as imbue each student with an interpretative framework for analysis and appreciation of religious movements, generally.

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 explore the variety of religious expressions and frameworks that shape societies around the world, and the role religion plays in local and international affairs.

Religious literacy will 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.

Grading

The components upon which your final grade will be calculated are not merely assessments of how well you have internalized the course material; they are more importantly instruments designed to help direct your learning.

Examinations (45%): You will be given two examinations. The Midterm Exam will count twenty percent (25%) of your exam grade, and the Final Exam will count thirty percent (30%) of your exam grade.

Analytical Essays (30%): You will be given a problem or question to address in a five to seven page essay. Each of the two Analytical Essays will count fifteen percent (15%) of your Analytical Essay grade.

Weekly Quizzes (10%): Each week you will be given a short quiz based on the readings due that week. Your grade for the Weekly Quizzes will be based upon your ten highest quiz grades for the semester.

Community/Congregation Visits (10%): Miami-Dade County, and South Florida generally, is home to a surprising array and diversity of religious communities. During this semester, please visit four (4) different communities or congregations and submit to me a three (3) page personal reflection about your experience. Each personal reflection paper will count twenty-five percent (25%) of this component of your overall grade. I will distribute a separate, detailed instruction document as guidelines for these visits.

Participation (5%): Please do not take this component lightly. Your attendance and in-class participation are not only crucial to your learning, but your healthy, robust contribution to our class discussions are valuable.

Required Text

Anthology of World Religions: Sacred Texts and Contemporary Perspectives

ISBN-13: 978-0195332360

ISBN-10: 0195332369

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

Course breakdown

Course Landmarks	Items	Scale	Percentage of final Grade
Examinations	2	1.0- 4.0	45%
Analytical Essays	2	1.0- 4.0	30%
Weekly Quizzes	10	0-100	10%
Community/Congregation Visits	4	1.0-4.0	10%
Participation	1	1.0-4.0	5%
Total			100%

Goals

- Analyze and interpret the universal dimensions of the sacred.
- Discover the relevance and practice of religion in everyday life.
- Recognize the academic impact of religion as an interdisciplinary field.
- Identify the role of religion as a transformational force for the self and society.
- Develop a critical and open-minded approach to religion that questions assumptions.
- Explore religion as a platform that increases civic engagement and global awareness.

Objectives

1. Understanding the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization.
2. Recognize the strength of utilizing different approaches, theories, and methodologies to better understand the universal forms of religious experience and expression such as sacred symbols, rituals, myths, scriptures, ethics, and communities.
3. Identify religious themes and patterns that shape our everyday life.
4. Analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in our individual, cultural, economic, and political contexts.
5. Critically engage the issue of religious diversity and dialogue in national and international context.
6. Reflect upon and enhance student's potential for moral agency and compassion.

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 and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using MLA Style and long quotes should be avoided. 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).

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.

Course Schedule

Jan 8	Course Introduction: Everything is Religion
Jan 15	Discussion: Early Iterations of "Religion:" Religion per se or a way of life? Readings due: from the course text, Chapter One, essays by Mircea Eliade, William James, Sigmund Freud, and Merlin Stone
Jan 22	Readings Due: Chapter 10, pages 303 to 322 (It will benefit you to answer the study questions at the end of the chapter.)
Jan 29	Readings Due: Chapter 7, pages 231 to 260
Feb 5	Readings Due: Chapter 8, pages 261 to 286 FIRST ANALYTICAL ESSAY DUE

Feb 12 Readings Due: Chapter 4, pages 133 to 153

Feb 19 Readings Due: Chapter 3, pages 83 to 131

Feb 26 SPRING BREAK – No Class – Enjoy your break!

Mar 4 Readings Due: Chapter 5, pages 155 to 206
MIDTERM EXAM

Mar 11 Readings Due: Chapter 6, pages 207 to 229

Mar 18 Readings Due: Chapter 11, pages 325 to 381

Mar 25 Readings Due: Chapter 12, pages 383 to 430
SECOND ANALYTICAL ESSAY DUE

Apr 1 Readings Due: Chapter 13, pages 433 to 479

Apr 8 Readings Due: Chapter 14, pages 481 to 511

Apr 15 Last Day of Class
Readings Due: Chapter 2, pages 33 to 80
DUE: All Visitation Reports must be complete

Apr 24 **FINAL EXAM**, 7:15PM to 9:15PM