

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Department of Religious Studies
Seminar in Sacred Sources
RELG 6935 - U01
Spring 2020

Instructor: Steven M. Vose
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Class Hours: M 10:00-12:45
Classroom: AHC 4-202
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Course Description:

The Seminar in Sacred Sources introduces students to the concerns and methodologies in the comparative study of religion as it pertains to the study of religious texts and reading practices. The theme for the Spring 2020 semester is “Reading, Religiously.” Each instructor will lead a two- or three-week unit on several texts and commentaries in classical and/or vernacular languages in order to examine their social and theological implications for the study of those traditions and for religion in general. Students will choose sources and topics to work on for their final projects in consultation with the appropriate instructor(s).

Course Objectives:

1. To introduce students to some key concepts, theories, and methodologies concerning the study of sacred sources.
2. To introduce students to the concerns and problems of the comparative study of religion by analyzing a theme thought to be held in common across many religious traditions.
3. To facilitate informed cross-cultural and inter-tradition comparison and evaluation of ways of expressing religious ideas by focused study of selected texts.
4. To engage students in in-depth studies of an individual text or texts covering one or more reading communities, leading to a research paper.
5. To compare reading practices in several religious traditions, and to examine the question of how readings are established, debated, challenged and changed in canonical, commentarial, and other genres of religious texts.

Course Requirements and Grading:

1. **Attendance & Participation** (25% of the final grade)
A seminar is only as good as the members who contribute to it. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to participate in class discussions and activities, and to come to class having completed all assigned readings with questions for discussion. Merely attending without participating is not sufficient and will reflect in the final grade for this portion of the course. Additionally, student conduct and class citizenship will be reflected in this portion of the grade. Treat classmates, instructors, and yourself with respect.
2. **Response Papers** (25% of the final grade)

At the end of each unit (there are five), students will submit a 500-750-word critical reflection on the readings examined. They are **due on the Friday after each unit at 11:59 PM**, posted to the appropriate Canvas dropbox. For the theoretical readings' unit (Weeks 2-5): Summarize the central argument of the main reading(s) for the unit, demonstrating *your* understanding of the main ideas in the readings and answer the questions posted on the discussion board on Canvas. For remaining units: Address how the readings illustrate key differences in tellings of similar stories across texts, how certain readings are established or challenged, how readings change over time or in various kinds of texts (or may exist simultaneously for readers), and/or how the theoretical readings help to illuminate issues pertaining to readings and reading practices. Each instructor will issue a prompt for you to address by the final class meeting of each unit. *Citations from the readings and a reference(s) page in an established style are required (Chicago notes-bibliography or author-date styles preferred)*. No outside research is required or permitted.

3. **Research Paper** (50% of the final grade)

Each student will write a research paper of 2,500-3,000 words, the topic to be chosen in consultation with the appropriate faculty member(s). Deadlines for a Topic Proposal (**Feb. 3**), Annotated Bibliography (**Mar. 9**), and Title & Abstract (**Mar. 23**) are set throughout the semester to keep you on pace. Additionally, students must discuss their paper topics with their selected professor by **Friday, Feb. 21**. Students will present their research papers during the last class meeting during the “final week of instruction” in a symposium format. The **Final Draft** is due on **Wednesday, April 22 at 11:59 PM**. Extensions cannot be granted beyond this date without taking an Incomplete.

The grade for the paper will be broken down as follows:

- a. Paper Topic: Due Mon., Feb. 3 at 11:59 PM (10%)
- b. Annotated Bibliography: Due Mon., Mar. 9 at 11:59 PM (15%)
- c. Title & Abstract: Due Mon., Mar. 23 at 11:59 PM (15%)
- d. Presentation of the paper in “final week of instruction” symposium (10%)
- e. Final Draft: Due Wed., Apr. 22 at 11:59 PM (50%)

Policies:

1. Late assignments related to the Research Paper will lose a full letter grade per day and will not be accepted after four days beyond the due date. Late response papers will not be accepted.
2. Written work will only be accepted for a grade if submitted to the proper place in Canvas. Work will not be accepted by email. If you are having difficulties using Canvas, you may submit work by email to Prof. Vose *only to confirm on-time submission*. Work must be uploaded to Canvas as soon as possible thereafter to be accepted for a grade, must not differ from the emailed version, and will not be accepted beyond 24 hours past the due date and time without incurring the penalty for late submission outlined above.
3. All student work must conform to University policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment or course and may include disciplinary measures, at the discretion of the instructor(s).

Grading scale:

A 93-100	A- 90-92	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
C+ 77-79	C 70-76	D 60-69	F 0-59	

Required Readings:

All readings and other materials will be posted on the course Canvas page in the appropriate weekly “Module.”

Schedule of Readings and Class Meetings:**Introduction to the Study of Sacred Texts**

Week 1 (Jan. 6): Introductions, “What is a text? What is a sacred text? What is a classical language? What is a vernacular language? How is reading a sacred text different from reading other kinds of texts?”

Unit I: Theorizing Religious Reading Practices (with Prof. Vose)

Week 2 (Jan. 13): Religious Reading Practices, Part I

Reading: Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, Preface, Chs. 1-2

Week 3 (Jan. 20): **NO CLASS: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Week 4 (Jan. 27): Religious Reading Practices, Part II

Reading: Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, Chs. 3-5, Conclusion

Week 5 (Feb. 3): Religious Traditions as Disciplinary Regimes

Reading: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, Introduction, Chs. 1-4.

Paper Topic Proposal due Monday, Feb. 3 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit I Response Paper due Friday, Feb. 7 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit II: Retelling the Story of Nemi and Rajul Across Jain Texts (with Prof. Vose)

Week 6 (Feb. 10): Neminātha and Rājimatī in the Jain Canon and Elite Literature

Reading: 1) *Kalpa Sūtra*, “Life of Ariṣṭanemi”;
 2) *Uttarādhyāyana Sūtra*, Ch. 22;
 3) Jain commentaries on UttS 22;
 4) Hemachandra, selections from the *Neminātha-Charita*;
 5) Dundas, “The Meat at the Wedding Feasts”.

Week 7 (Feb. 17): Vernacular Re-Tellings of the Story of Nemi and Rajul

Reading: 1) Selected Nemi-Rājul *bārahmāsa* (12-month) poems (tr. Vaudeville);
 2) *Nemināth-phāgu* (springtime) poems (tr. Vose);
 3) Kelting, *Heroic Wives*, Introduction, Ch. 5, and Conclusion.

Meet with your paper advisor to discuss your topic by Friday, Feb. 21

Unit II Response Paper due Friday, Feb. 21 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Week 8 (Feb. 24): **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS!!! ENJOY** (working on your papers)!!!

Unit III: The Nur Nama Across the World (with Prof. Akhtar)

Week 9 (Mar. 2): Sufism and Shia Islam

Reading: 1) Shi’a Beliefs;
 2) The Names of God, Meditation, and Mystical Experience;
 3) *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, selections.

Week 10 (Mar. 9): Comparing Tellings of the *Nur Nama*

Reading: 1) The Epistle of Muhammadan Light (Persian translation);
 2) Al-Haj Kadir Baksh, *The Noor Namah*.

Annotated Bibliography for Paper due Monday, Mar. 9 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit III Response Paper due Friday, Mar. 13 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit IV: Reading Strategies in Judaism (with Prof. Stier)

Week 11 (Mar. 16): Classical Jewish Reading Strategies

- Reading:
- 1) Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 111-171;
 - 2) Naftali Silberberg, “How Is the Torah Interpreted?” Chabad.org. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/819698/jewish/How-Is-the-Torah-Interpreted.htm;
 - 3) Rabbi Michael Leo Samuel, “The Meaning of PaRDeS: The Four Levels of Scriptural Interpretation,” rabbimichaelsamuel.com. <http://rabbimichaelsamuel.com/2009/11/the-meaning-of-pardes-the-four-levels-of-scriptural-interpretation>;
 - 4) “PaRDeS,” Ohr Somayach: Ask The Rabbi. https://ohr.edu/ask_db/ask_main.php/163/Q2;
 - 5) Rabbi Avrohom Davis, ed., *The Metsuda Chumash/Rashi*, v. 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1998), pp. 272-282; 292-306; 312-386;
 - 6) Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, trans. Chaya Galai (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 3-9; 89-100; 221-233.

Week 12 (Mar. 23): Close Reading of Jewish Texts

- Reading: Elie Wiesel, “And Jacob Fought the Angel,” in *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), pp. 103-135.

Title & Abstract for Research Paper due Monday, Mar. 23 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit IV Response Paper due Friday, Mar. 27 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Unit V: Popular Islam in the Ottoman World (with Prof. Grenier)

Week 13 (Mar. 30): Introducing Islam in the Ottoman World

- Reading:
- 1) Terzioğlu, Derin. “Where ‘İlm-i Hāl Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization” *Past & Present*, vol. 220, pp. 79-114;
 - 2) Klar, Marianna. “Chapter 22: Stories of the Prophets” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*. Ed. Andrew Rippin. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009);
 - 3) Chittick, William. “Ibn Arabi and His School” in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*. Ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr. (New York: Crossroad-Herder, 1987);
 - 4) Karamustafa, Ahmet. “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak. (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2005);
 - 5) Ahmed Bican, *Envaru'l-'Ashiqin*, Grenier translation.

Week 14 (Apr. 6): Esoteric Re-Tellings of Popular Narratives

- Reading:
- 1) *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabi, trans. Paul Austin. New York: Paulist Press, 1980;
 - 2) *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* or “Lives of the prophets.” Ai-Tha'labi. Brinner, William. Leiden: Brill, 2002;
 - 3) Excerpt from Henry Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*. Westchester: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995;
 - 4) Noah in Genesis, Qur'an, Envarü'l-'Aşiqin.

Week 15 (Apr. 13): Stories of Moses and Joseph in Islamic Texts

Reading: 1) Mir-Kasimov, Orkhan. “The Hurufi Moses.” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. Vol. 10, No. 1 (2008);

2) Mir, Mustansir. “The Qur'anic story of Joseph.” *The Muslim World*. Vol. 76 (1986);

3) Lawson, Todd. “Typological Figuration and the Meaning of ‘Spiritual’.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 132, No. 2 (2012);

4) Joseph in the *Envariü'l-'Aşiqin*.

Unit V Response Paper due Friday, April 17 at 11:59 PM on Canvas

Final Paper Presentations, Monday, April 20, during final exam period (TBA)

Final Paper due Wednesday, April 22 at 11:59 PM submitted to Canvas