

# Modern Analysis of Religion

RLG 6013

Thursdays, 5:00-7:40pm (EST)

Location: CP 103

Fall 2022[1]

“The way we make meaning, then, matters the world around us. In other words, it shapes our own bodies and other earth bodies around us, it co-creates with others the eco-social worlds in which we live. Just as the substance-based metaphysic and meaning-making practice found in Western style metaphysics and its corresponding mechanistic model of science help[ed] to create the nature-cultures of the industrial revolution and all that entails, so now non-substance-based metaphysics and the corresponding interrelated and living models of science found in non-equilibrium thermodynamics, chaos and complexity, and other postmodern sciences are beginning to create new nature-cultures. Thus our meaning-making practices don’t so much reflect metaphysics and ontologies as they do serve as regimes of truth in the Foucauldian sense.” (Bauman, *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic*, 108)

**Room:** CP 103 (and some Zoom classes)

**Instructor:** Whitney Bauman

**Office:** DM 301A (and Zoom)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Office Hours: By appointment

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Religion, if nothing else, is about the critical process of re-reading and re-connecting human beings into some sort of meaningful narrative about reality. In this sense, religion is part of what it means to be human: regardless as to whether one is atheist, agnostic, or a believer that identifies with some sort of faith tradition, we all, as human beings, make meaning out of our daily lives. As such, “religion” is not confined to the narrow definition of “world religions.” Furthermore, religion has historically shaped societal institutions such as economics and politics and therefore, the study of these religious influences is important. Finally, religions matter bodies in the world: they shape what become societal norms for eating, dressing, sexuality, gender, race, and relationships to the rest of the natural world. This course is a **seminar-style (not a lecture-based)** course aimed at introducing MA students to various issues and methods associated with the contemporary study of religion. As you will note, “religious studies” is a “field” and not a “discipline,” which means that it uses a variety of disciplines to study the central subject: in this case, religion. We will explore methods in religious studies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (when the academic study of religion began in earnest) to the present and ask questions such as: What is religion and why does it matter? How does religion function in our daily lives to affect institutions, identity, and the rest of the natural world? How do the contexts of globalization and the plurality of religious expressions change the identity of religious traditions? What new expressions of religion are emerging in the context of what contemporary sciences tell us about the human being and the rest of the natural world around us? And, how does the study of religion rely on interdisciplinary analyses of the phenomena we call “religious”?

Though time does not allow us to take on a full, historical approach of the study of “religion” since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, we will question the ways in which “religion” is defined and by whom. Furthermore, we will explore the various differences in how religions are / are not separated off from a “secular” space. Why is religion generally not taught in public schools in the United States? Why is “theology” not a part of the public university in the US as it is in say, Germany or Indonesia (and many other places)? Are there other models of secularism than that which totally separates religion out from politics, economics, and legal institutions? Even in its so-called absence, religion shapes our daily lives in the west, and the aim of this course is to provide you with some tools to think more critically about “how.”

## **MODALITY**

This course will be seminar style, meaning that it is not a lecture based, but rather discussion-based course. It is important that you prepare by doing the readings. The course will be mostly “in person,” with some Zoom meetings, and will utilize tools on Google Classroom to foster course discussions. We will have a break at some point during each session.

## **AIM OF THE COURSE**

This course will provide students with the theoretical tools and methods for analyzing the functions and purposes of religion in contemporary societies and will provide critical thinking skills for dealing with religious plurality in a globalized world.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this course, students will know relevant “methods and theories” used in the academic study of religion and be familiar with some of the major issues in the field.

Furthermore, each student will be given the tools to critically analyze the ways in which religions (and meaning-making practices in general) affect institutions, bodies, daily life, and human relationships with the rest of the natural world.

## STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom and responsibility are essential to the integrity of the University. The principles of academic freedom are integral to the conception of the University as a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth and the communication of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. The University serves the common good through teaching, research, scholarship/creative activities, and service. The fulfillment of these functions rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate. The University and UFF affirm that academic freedom is a right protected by this Agreement in addition to a faculty member’s constitutionally protected freedom of expression and is fundamental to the faculty member’s responsibility to seek and to state truth as he/she sees it.

## REQUIREMENTS

### 1. Class Participation—30%

The first step to doing well in this class is to show up! You can’t be a part of the learning community if you are not present. If you have to be absent from the course, please notify me ahead of time.

The second step to doing well in this course is to read the materials. I trust that you will read the materials for each week’s class. Each of you should come prepared to class every week by a) developing a question for the given text that we will read, and b) providing a resource that helps us relate to the given text (it could be a current news story, a fiction novel, a historical example, a film or television show, etc.). **These should be posted on our Google Classroom prior to each session.**

The third step to doing well in the class is to speak up during course discussions. I realize that we all exist on a spectrum between introversion and extroversion, but remember that the classroom is as good as all of the voices therein. We all lose if we don’t hear your voice at some point(s) throughout the semester. **Toward this end, each of you will sign up to lead us in our discussion through the readings for one week.**

The classroom is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Having said that, there are some ground rules that should be followed in course discussions and assignments.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another’s privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.

2. **Trust and Respect:** The classroom is a learning community, and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your classmates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas, and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class. While freedom of expression, and challenging assumptions is encouraged in this classroom, hate speech will not be tolerated.
3. **Academic Honesty.** In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and “Copying” from other students may result in a failing grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day.
4. Students should be aware of everyone in the classroom and enable each person to contribute to the conversation. Likewise, each participant should refrain from dominating class discussion.

## **2. Paper Abstract, Proposal—30% (SEE DUE DATES IN THE SCHEDULE BELOW)**

<https://papers.aarweb.org/program-units>

<https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/About-AAR-/Regions.aspx>

<https://www.acls.org/Member-Societies/Society-Profiles.aspx>

Instead of a traditional “final paper” for the course, we will build up to a conference paper/presentation. The first part of that will be developing a paper abstract and conference paper proposal. We will work to identify a conference in your given area of interest within religious studies, and then write a proposal for that conference. Step 1: Once we have identified a conference and a topic, you will write a paper abstract. Step 2: You will create the conference paper proposal based upon the guidelines of the given conference you have chosen.

As with all written assignments in this class, you must use the Turabian Guide and follow the “Notes and Bibliography” style. This is one of the required texts for the course and you can find a shortened version of it here: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html/>

## **3. Final Conference Paper—40%**

Each student is expected to write a final conference paper for the course of no more than 3,000 words, double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins. This is the maximum length that any conference paper should be, as you will usually have about 20-30 minutes to deliver a paper at a conference. These will be delivered to the class on the final day of the semester. You should develop a Powerpoint to go along with your final conference paper presentation.

As with all written assignments in this class, you must use the Turabian Guide and follow the “Notes and Bibliography” style. This is one of the required texts for the course and you can find

a shortened version of it here: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html/>

**The final draft of the paper (after the class presentation) will be due online, during our scheduled finals time.**

## **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

This course adheres strictly to FIU's plagiarism policy:

This Policy views plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct, and adopts the definition of the university's Code of Academic Integrity, according to which plagiarism is:

the deliberate use and appropriation of another's works without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for the ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

1. Term papers acquired online or from other sources;
2. Copying of original material without attribution;
3. Use of other students' work;
4. Copying and pasting, verbatim, information from Internet sources, without quotation marks and correct citation.

**Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a referral to the College of Arts and Sciences Dean of Students for academic misconduct.**

## **GRADING SCALE**

A	96-100	C+	76-79
A-	90-95	C	70-75
B+	87-89	D	60-69
B	83-86	F	59 and below
B-	80-82		

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Hedges, Paul Michael. *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies* (University of California Press, 2021).

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions* (University of Chicago, 2005).

Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2011).

Pals, Daniel. *Nine Theories of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual For Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition* (University of Chicago, 2018).

## **IMPORTANT WEB RESOURCES**

American Academy of Religion: [www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org)

Religion in the Schools: <https://www.aarweb.org/about/religion-schools>

Philosophy of Religion: <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/>

Sociology of Religion: <http://www.sociologyofreligion.com/>

Religion and Science: <https://nese.com/library-resource/science-religion>

Religion and Ecology: <http://fore.yale.edu/>

Religion and Nature: [www.religionandnature.com](http://www.religionandnature.com)

Religion, Gender and Sexuality: <https://clgs.org/resources/>

Critical Theory of Religion: <http://www.criticaltheoryofreligion.org/>

Religion and Race: <http://dlxs2.library.cornell.edu/r/racerel/>

Comparative Religions: <http://www.interfaith.org/>

Religion and Current Events: <http://religiondispatches.org/>

Religion and Sociological Studies: <http://www.pewforum.org/>

Teaching Religion and Theology: <http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/home/default.aspx>

Religious Studies Project: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/>

## **SCHEDULE**

Week 1, August 25: Review Syllabus; Getting to know one another; developing a theoretical definition of religion.

**Reading:** Turabian / Hedges, Introduction

NB : Please read the introduction for Hedges for the first Class on Thursday. And, bring your copy of the Turabian *Manual for Writers* (to class)

Week 2, September 1: Questioning “Religion”

**Reading:** Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Intro through Chapter 3.

Week 3, September 8: Questioning Religion (**Zoom**)

**Reading:** Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chs. 4-7.

Week 4, September 15: Questioning Religion (**Library Research Session**)

**Readings:** Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chs. 8-9; Hedges, chapter 7

**Sign up for reading discussions (see blank spaces below)**

Week 5, September 22: Religion and Modernity

**Reading:** Mignolo, Intro and Part I

Week 6, Sept 29: Religion and Modernity

**Reading:** Mignolo, Part II and Part III

**Discussants:**

**ABSTRACTS DUE**

Week 7, October 6: Methodological Debates

**Readings:** Hedges chapter 2-4

**Discussants:**

Week 8, October 13: Power and Social Construction / **Guest Lecture:**

**Reading:** Hedges, chapter 5 & 13.

Week 9, (October 20): Identities, Sex/Gender and Bodies / **Guest Lecture:**

**Reading:** Hedges, chapter 6, 9, 10

**Discussants:**

Week 10, October 27: Comparative and Ritual Studies/ **Guest Lecture:**

Reading: Hedges, chapters 11-12.

Week 11 November 3: Decolonial Studies (**Zoom**) / **Guest Lecture:**

**Reading:** Mignolo, Part IV.

**Discussants:**

**PAPER PROPOSAL DUE**

Week 12, November 10: Religion and Violence / Religion and Secularism

**Reading:** Hedges, 15-16.

**Discussants:**



Week 13, November 17: Religion, Nature, and Politics

**Reading:** Hedges, 17-18.

**Discussants:**

November 25<sup>th</sup>: No Classes; Thanksgiving

Week 14, December 1: Paper Presentations Round 1

**FINALS WEEK: Thursday, 5-7pm on Zoom**

Paper Presentations Round 2

**Final Papers due by Friday, December 9th**

[1] Syllabus is subject to change. Required purchased text, course requirements, and course time will not change, but some of the reading materials may depending on the context of the Fall 2020 semester.