

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Introduction to Religion

REL 2011–B54

FR 2:00 P.M. – 3:15 P.M.

AC1 326

CERTIFIED HYBRID COURSE

FALL 2023

Professor: Dr. A. Fernandez

Contact: CANVAS Email

Office Hours: 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.

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.
- Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study such as anthropology, 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.

LEARNING OUTCOME

Advantages of this course: 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:

- Foster tolerance of and appreciation for differences in human culture and diverse religious expressions.
- 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 in the study of religion.
- Identify the relevance of studying religion to contemporary life, human thought, and professional development.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to ethnographic, psychological, anthropological, ethical, phenomenological, and so on.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious concepts from ancient to contemporary times.
- Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film, and so on.
- Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
- Correctly distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources, and scholarly vs journalistic sources in the study of religion.

DISCLAIMER

The content covered in this course has no intended bearing on an individual's own faith or religious beliefs. This class is a safe space for generative and thought-provoking discussion, always carried out with the highest levels of respect from all participants. All ideas of belief are welcome as are all points of view, keeping in mind that everybody has the right to think, believe, and practice – or not – in whatever capacity is meaningful to them.

This is an academic environment; please come with a curious, respectful, engaging, and open mind and be ready to embrace the knowledge shared herein in a scholarly, diverse, inclusive, and objective manner.

This course, its content, its delivery, and interpretation[s] are not meant in any way, shape, or form to coerce, convince, or convert any of the individuals enrolled in this class.

Our mission here is NOT to question the validity of the religious theories we will discuss, but instead, we will ask HOW they exist, for whom, and why.

Fundamental to Florida International University's mission is support for an environment where divergent ideas, theories, and philosophies can be openly exchanged and critically evaluated. Consistent with these principles, this course may involve discussion of ideas that you find uncomfortable, disagreeable, or even offensive. These ideas are intended to be presented in an objective manner and not as an endorsement of what you should personally believe. Objective means that the idea presented can be tested by critical peer review and rigorous debate, and that the idea is supported by credible research. Not all ideas can be supported by objective methods or criteria. Regardless, you may decide that certain ideas are worthy of your personal belief. In this course, however, you may be asked to engage with complex ideas and to demonstrate an understanding of the ideas. Understanding and/or engaging with an idea does not mean that you are required to believe it or agree with it.

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Our approach for this course is *interdisciplinary*, which means you will learn how to critically draw from theories reflecting diverse fields of study to include, but not limited to, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, and ecology.

- This course is taught in *seminar style* as opposed to a lecture format. This means that as a collective – professor/students – we help guide one another to understand the ideas reflected in the assigned material through a group discussion format.

HYBRID MODALITY DISCLAIMER

Welcome to hybrid modality, a new and exciting way to learn! Hybrid learning takes the best of both worlds by combining face-to-face learning with online learning. Within a hybrid course design, parts of the curriculum are taught online via Canvas, while other activities are taught in a classroom setting. In other words, 50% of the course is dedicated to in-person, face-to-face facilitation where the professor and students engage in learning by discussing and developing concepts in a seminar style arrangement, and the other 50% of the time takes place outside of the classroom doing the assigned work in the Canvas portal as you would with a regular course except that a hybrid class only meets once a week.

Course Activities

The course is designed to engage you in a process of pre-class activities (online), in-class activities (face-to-face), and post-class activities (online).

- All students are assigned the same pre-class and post-class activities to work on online.

In-Class Activities (Face-to-Face)

Students are expected to attend every face-to-face class and remain in class for the duration of the session. The face-to-face class is not a lecture but seminar style that provides time for demonstrations, applications, discussion, polls, and problem-solving. Our class sessions are intended to elaborate on and supplement the pre-class readings, not merely to regurgitate this material. Occasionally, we will have review sessions or project discussions. Some topics will be

covered in much greater detail in class than that offered by the readings. You may use class time to ask relevant questions.

Pre- and Post-Class Activities (Online)

You will do your best and get the most from this course if you prepare well and read the assigned materials before class. You are responsible for working independently online to complete all assigned activities and discussions in Canvas by the due dates (as applicable). Pay close attention to the order of activities and read all materials in the order specified in the schedule.

NOTE: Students should not consider the online work schedule as being “off,” but rather to switch into a different style of self-learning, reviewing, practicing, and checking in on discussions during the week. Try to manage your schedule and time on the computer at home to work on online activities and assessments for submission by the due dates.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course. More information about prerequisites can be found in the [FIU course catalog](#).

COURSE COMMUNICATION:

It is important that you check your course emails twice a day – in the morning and evening. Read all my emails thoroughly, and when indicated, **RESPOND ASAP** – do not just either assume that I know you read them or ignore them altogether. Kindly always acknowledge my communications with you. I may periodically send emails updating an assignment, or with brainstorming of new ideas that are useful to our discussions and tasks, so again, **READ MY EMAILS!** Also, **be courteous** in addressing recipients of your emails. *It is important to begin your message with a polite greeting and introduction. Being rude or abrupt will get you nowhere in the world of cyber communication!*

NOTE: *FIU's official hours of operation are MON - FRI 8 am - 6 pm. Emails will be received and responded to within those working hours.*

EVALUATION CRITERIA

CANVAS is the main resource for this class. Strictly adhering to the instructions detailed in Canvas is a crucial part of successfully passing this class. With that said, all students are required to regularly monitor Canvas for updates and deadlines. In Canvas, students will be able to access course information and materials, upload assignments, view course announcements, send and receive messages, and monitor progress. If you should encounter any technical issues with Canvas, please contact them directly at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/>

Attendance – Class Participation – Facilitation: Each student is an essential part of the overall learning experience of this course. Timely attendance in weekly sessions is mandatory and graded on a point scale, thus absences will greatly affect your overall grade. It is important to notify the professor of absences before scheduled class meetings unless there is an emergency. The following is **FIU's policy on attendance:**

- At the discretion of the professor, excusable absences include personal illness, military obligations, jury duty, religious holidays, death of an immediate relative, disability accommodations as approved by FIU's Disability Resource Center (DRC), serious family emergencies, and/or participation in official university activities, i.e., athletic events, artistic performances, and other required curricular activities.
 - **NOTE:** Sustainable and verifiable documentation must be submitted either via email or upon the immediate return to class.
 - **NOTE:** the professor **WILL** validate documentation. Falsifying documentation can lead to serious academic disciplinary action.

Discussion Forums: Our weekly seminars are guided by the layout and design of the discussion forums as detailed in the corresponding Canvas cells.

Weekly Quizzes: There will be timed weekly quizzes designed to challenge your knowledge of all the assigned materials. Each quiz is composed of **20 questions** made up of **True/False**, **Multiple Choice**, and **Fill-In** worth **one (1) point** each and timed at a **60-minute/1 hour** timeframe.

Research Proposal: A research proposal is a structured, formal document that explains **what** you plan to research (your research topic), **why** it's worth researching (your justification), and **how** you plan to investigate it (your methodology). The layout and design for this assignment is detailed in the corresponding Canvas cell.

Final Synthesis Essay: The final project for this course asks the student to write a synthesis essay reflecting on one (1) of the weekly assigned topics and one (1) element of religious analysis covered in this course. The layout and design for this assignment is detailed in the corresponding Canvas cell.

***Students are encouraged to make use of FIU's Center for Excellence in Writing at:**

<https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/index.html>

Late Assignments???

- **Late submissions** will **NOT** be accepted, except in cases of genuine and documented emergencies. (See **FIU's policy on attendance** above).
- **Avoid leaving assignment submissions** for the 30 minutes before a deadline. **Heavy user traffic** in Canvas during this time frame guarantees delays and/or errors, which can lead to students missing crucial deadlines.

GRADING CRITERIA

COURSE REQUIREMENTS	NUMBER OF ITEMS	POINTS PER ITEM	TOTAL WEIGHT
Attendance/participation/facilitation	14	20	20%
Discussion Forums	13	15	10%
Weekly Reflections (4) / Quizzes (7)	(4) / (7)	(20) / (100)	20%
Research Proposal	1	20	20%
Synthesis Essay	1	30	30%
TOTAL	N/A	N/A	100%

GRADING GRID

LETTER GRADE	RANGE	LETTER GRADE	RANGE	LETTER GRADE	RANGE
A	95-100	B-	80-83	F	< 60
A-	90-94	C+	77-79		
B+	86-89	C	70-76		
B	83-85	D	60-69		

A, A-: awarded for excellent to exceptional work, free of technical and stylistic errors, showing an impressive academic level.

B+, B, B-: awarded for good to very good work, with some occasional errors, but nonetheless clearly indicating a good grasp of the material and assigned task.

C+, C: awarded for average to above average work, meeting minimal standards and exposing gaps in student performance and/or fulfillment of the assignment.

D: awarded for barely passing to below average work, usually seriously deficient in fulfilling the assignment.

F: awarded for unacceptable work.

Textbook: *There is no required textbook for this course. All materials are provided by the professor via Canvas.*

GORDON RULE REQUIREMENT

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write one major assignment. This final paper will be at least 1500-2000 words, double spaced – approximately four (4) pages, Times New Roman 12 pt. Font, and will be submitted through **Turnitin**. All source material must be cited correctly using **Chicago Manuel of Style** and long quotes should be avoided. Please be aware that papers processed through **Turnitin** 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) for the course.

Link for Chicago Manuel of Style: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

GLOBAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

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

*This course fulfills the **Gordon Rule requirement**; a “C” or better must be earned to receive credit for this course.

*This course fulfills the **Global Learning Foundations requirement**.

To learn more about Global Learning requirements, please visit: <https://goglobal.fiu.edu/courses/graduation-requirement/>

PLAGIARISM

Do you know what **plagiarism** is? 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:

- A written work that is entirely stolen from another source.
- Using quotations from another source without properly citing them.
- Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

USE OF AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) or other automated writing tools to complete assignments is strictly prohibited in this class. Any evidence of the use of AI will be considered a violation of academic integrity and will be met with a failing grade for the assignment and may result in further disciplinary action. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that all work submitted for this class is their own original work, written and completed without the use of AI or other automated writing tools.

See the University Code of Academic Integrity at: <http://integrity.fiu.edu/plagiarism.html>

All work will be submitted through Turnitin. Work turned in with a greater than **35% similarity rating** 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.

How to submit a Turnitin Assignment at:

<https://help.turnitin.com/integrity/student/canvas/assignments/submitting-an-assignment.htm> (Links to an external site.)

ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMODATION

The Disability Resource Center (**DRC**) collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the Center at (305) 348–3532 or visit its office at the Graham Center (GC) 190.

ATHLETES: *Please have the Associate Director of the SAAC – email me all your travel and practice itineraries during the first week of class.*

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE! *A warning to students who put off work:* Smart is as smart does – start your research and your work early so procrastination will not happen to you! Procrastination can lead you to lose precious time, pass by good opportunities, not meet important goals, ruin your career, and even damage your reputation. In the words of good ole Benjamin Franklin ***“Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”***

PLEASE NOTE: CHECK YOUR CANVAS NOW FOR TECHNICAL ACCURACY!!!

I AM NOT A CANVAS TECHNICIAN!!! FOR CANVAS ISSUES, CONTACT CANVAS!!!!

If you are having **ANY TECHNICAL** issues with Canvas, **YOU MUST** contact their support

team directly. Again, I am not a Canvas technician, nor do I – or any other professor, administrator, staff, or student at FIU – have inside information on how to resolve Canvas issues. Get in touch with Canvas for resolutions, **immediately!!!** Canvas is your only source for Canvas issues! Here is their link: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/> (Links to an external site.)

*****NOTE:** If you find yourself in a situation where you are emailing me telling me that for "**some odd reason**" Canvas is not working for you, kindly remember the above note!!! Canvas technical issues are not an excuse for late or missed work!

Canvas, and/or any other computer or laptop malfunctions or technical issues are not an excuse for late or missed work! It is the student's responsibility to monitor mechanical efficiency and performance.

!!! IMPORTANT !!!

*****SUBJECT TO CHANGE!!! Because teaching and learning are creative and fun processes, I reserve the absolute right to amend, alter, change, transform, adapt, modify, readjust, and/or revise this syllabus at any time, all in the interest of enhancing the student's overall learning experience. Any changes to the syllabus are discussed with students in a timely manner.***