

Introduction to the Study of Religion
REL 2011
M/W/F
12:00-12:50
OBCC, 117

Professor: Whitney Bauman

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Office hours: (in person/ on Zoom): by appointment

Course Description:

What is religion and how does it shape the world around us? Many different peoples have defined “religion” over the years and not all definitions agree. At its etymological root, religion means to “re-read” or to “bind together” (depending on which root you believe the latter part of the word to derive from). In both cases, this suggests that religion is an active thing. It is about interpretation, storytelling and meaning making. We will explore these themes in this course. In addition, we will look at the ways that religion, historically, has shaped politics, economics, the sciences, gender, sexuality, race, and other facets of our lives.

In addition, we will look at the ways that “religion” as a concept gets developed during the process of European colonization from the 15th century onwards. Indeed, it is formed in distinction from magic and science through this colonial process. Most religious traditions evolve and form together with many different cultural interactions: we might say that there is no “pure” tradition but rather pluralism even within traditions. We will explore the hybridity of “world religions” as part of the course as well. For these reasons, Indigenous and nonwestern, non-monotheistic traditions are calling for new models for understanding the phenomena we now know as “religion.” Spirituality, cultural practices, philosophies for living, spirit-scapes, and other ways of thinking about the phenomena.

Finally, we will look at how religion and religiosity/spirituality can be found outside of what we think of as “world religions.” Consumerism, Environmentalism, Veganism, Animal Rights advocacy, hiking, fishing, baking, and even scholarly reading and writing can be understood as meaning-making or spiritual practices. Indeed, there is a growing number of “nones” in the United States, meaning people who don’t really believe in any particular religion but still find meaning-making and spirituality important. We will explore these practices as well.

Modality

This course will be mostly “in person,” with a few Zoom sessions. Mondays and Wednesdays will be synchronous lectures and questions. Fridays will be asynchronous small group work in which you work together to answer questions about the readings. These small groups will help you prepare for the short, weekly quizzes on readings and lectures.

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.

Objectives Of the Course:

1. Identify key thinkers and concepts in the study of religion;
2. Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion;
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from the period of European colonization to the present;
4. Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural, sociological and political phenomena such as: religion and art, religion and popular culture, religion and gender, religion and sexuality, religion and race, and religion and violence.
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.

Global Learning Outcomes

As a Global Learning course, students will 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.

WAC Outcomes/ Gordon Rule:

This course is intended to help students become better writers. In particular, this course is aimed at helping students "write to learn." Writing to learn involves developing one's critical thinking, reasoning, and argument skills through writing. As such, students will write four short, interconnected blogs and one final essay. All writing requirements will be assessed by rubrics handed out on the first day of class.

Statement on Plagiarism

You are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity if you need further clarification. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism,

or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely or partially 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.

Text

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

Requirements:

Attendance/ Participation: 20%

4-Blogs: 60% (800-1000 words each)

Final Essay: 20% (1200 words)

Schedule:

Week 1: What is Religion?

Week 2: The invention of “religion”

Week 3: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Decolonization

Week 4: Lived Religions

Week 5: Religious Communities: Insider/Outsider

Week 6: Comparative Approaches to Religion

Week 7: Religion and Ritual

Week 8: Interreligious Dialogue

Week 9: Religion and Secularism

Week 10: Religion and Power

Week 11: Religion and Bodies

Week 12: Religion, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Week 13: Religion, Race and Diversity

Week 14: Religion, Science, and the Non-human world