

**REL 2011 Introduction to Religion**  
**Spring 2023 Learning Guide**  
**FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

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Instructor: Sharma Dammar

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**When and Where do we meet?**

Class Discussions: Classes will meet on Saturdays on-campus,  
11:00a.m - 1:45p.m. at the Biscayne Bay Campus, Academic Center One,  
room 262. Course updates will be delivered as an announcement via Canvas.

Office Hours: By appointments on Saturdays, 1:45p.m. to 2:25p.m. at the  
Biscayne Bay Campus, immediately after a class meeting ends.

**What is this Course About?**

This course will look into a pantheon of interdisciplinary thinkers such as Marx, Jung, and Weber to analyze salient theories about the patterns and paradoxes of sacred experiences across religions. We will explore how communities from various times and geographies express their sacred experiences through symbols, myths, scriptures, time, and space and how these are accessed and transformed through diverse interpretations. Our fundamental aim will be to discover the intrinsic connection between the sacred and our notions of self, nature, society, reality, and so on.

Ultimately, this course will prepare you to formulate your own theoretical questions and methodology to create and apply new knowledge in any field of study. It will also provide you with the necessary tools to guide your individual quest. Welcome!

**Objectives of the Course**

1. Identify key thinkers such as Marx, Jung, and Weber and their interdisciplinary theories about the patterns and paradoxes of sacred experiences across traditions.
2. Understanding the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization.
3. Dissect the universal forms of religious experience and expression such as sacred symbols, rituals, myths, scriptures, ethics, and communities.
4. Identify religious themes and patterns that shape our everyday life.
5. Analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for a better understanding of religion in our individual, cultural, economic, and political contexts.
6. Recognize the strength of utilizing different approaches, theories, and methodologies to better understand the study of religion.
7. Evaluate the interrelationship between the student's own and other's religious views to avoid uninformed assumptions.
8. Inspire students to formulate their own religious beliefs or philosophies of life.
9. Develop college-level academic writing and communication skills.
10. Understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth claims and meaning-making practices.
11. Foster creativity and self-confidence in a communal setting.
12. Better understand how an individual's identity and outlook are shaped by religious influences.
13. Critically engage the issue of religious diversity and dialogue in national and international contexts.
14. Reflect upon and enhance student's potential for moral agency and compassion.
15. Acquire an appreciation for the dynamic dialogue between insider and outsider perspectives.

### **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.

This course is interested in examining the different expressions, practices and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular tradition will be favored, materials from several traditions will be chosen to exemplify thematic topics in the experience of the Sacred. We will also focus on the tenets of religions, dispelling common misconceptions and assumptions and looking into the emergence of new practices among the post-denominational generation.

### **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 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.

### **Equity and Diversity Statement**

This course recognizes and celebrates the vast array of individual and group differences in our community. To that end, this course ensures a curriculum rich with course reading materials, instructional content, and learning experiences from communities that have historically been marginalized or ignored. Prejudices and discrimination create challenges and hurdles that continue to shape the lives of our students.

Faculty and students condemn racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, ageism, religious intolerance, and other forms of oppression. We are committed to ending the systemic privileges and injustices embedded in our institutions, culture, and everyday life. Any behaviors that threaten, harass, or discriminate against another person will not be tolerated and may be subject to disciplinary actions. Together, we will cultivate a diverse and inclusive learning environment. Hate will not persist in us.

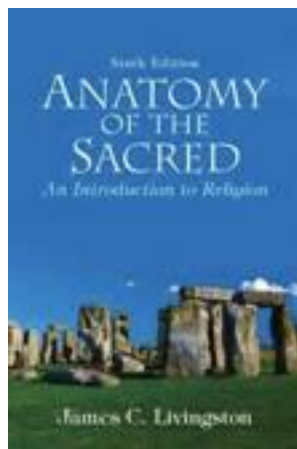
## How will you succeed in this course?

**Examinations (50%):** Exam #1 (25%)  
Exam #2 (25%)

**Assignments (50%):** Comparative Reaction Paper on Chapters 11-15 (25%)  
Religious Visitation Paper (25%)

**Extra Credit:** 5 points

## Required Text



Anatomy of the Sacred: An introduction to Religion

By: James C. Livingston

Publisher: Pearson Edition: 6<sup>th</sup>

ISBN: ISBN 978-0-13-600380-9 ISBN 0-13-600380-x

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

## Course Breakdown

Course Landmarks	Items	Points	Percentage of final Grade
Academic Papers	2	200	50
Examinations	2	200	50
Total			100%

There will be **two exams**, a **religious visitation paper**, and a **comparative reaction paper on Chapters 11-15** where each is worth ¼ of your final grade. Examinations will entail true and false, fill in the blanks, and multiple-choice questions. Exams will be available via Canvas during a class date and time slot. The religious visitation paper and the comparative reaction paper are mandatory as this course has a writing requirement. Failure to submit one and/or both writing assignments on time, via Canvas, will result in zero points for the papers as well as zero points for Exam #2. Extra credit is optional and can only elevate the final grade by 5 points. It is your duty to attend class meetings and complete all graded items before this course is over.

<u>Coursework</u>	<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Percentage of Final Grade</u>
Exam #1	100	25%
Exam #2	100	25%
Comparative Reaction Paper	100	25%
Religious Visitation Paper	100	25%

#### Grading Scale

A	=	95 – 100	B	=	83 – 86.99	C	=	70 – 76.99
A-	=	90 – 94.99	B-	=	80 – 82.99	D	=	60 – 69.99
B+	=	87 – 89.99	C+	=	77 – 79.99	F	=	below 60

#### **Examination Policy**

Exams will cover material from lectures as well as from the assigned textbook. In order to obtain a good grade on exams students need to read and understand material from the chapters of the assigned textbook. It is the student's duty to contact the professor if he/she needs to make up an exam. Make-up exams will only be approved by the discretion of the professor. Students will only be able to take a make-up exam due to legitimate reasons. In order to take a make-up exam, students will need to provide reasonable verification to a suitable department within FIU as to why he/she missed the scheduled exam. There are no make-ups if you miss Exam #2 unless there is/was a true emergency that restricted you from taking it. In other words, if you are absent, you will not be able to take Exam #2 which will result in a failing grade.

#### **Goals**

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

#### **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 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 Policies**

1. Read each assignment prior to the date on which it is scheduled to be discussed. Students are expected to complete the required readings for each session and formulate Discussion Points concerning the readings to facilitate class discussion.
2. Take exams and turn in assignments at the scheduled times. Late submission of assignments is unacceptable and will result in 0 points.
3. Be on time to our class meetings. If a student must arrive late or leave early, the student should be courteous and observe silence.
4. Be respectful of the beliefs of others. This is of utmost importance in a religious studies class. This course acknowledges and honors the vast array of individual and group disparities in our community. In this course, there is no place for racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, ageism, religious intolerance, and other forms of oppression. Any behaviors that threaten, harass, or discriminate against another individual will not be tolerated and may be subject to disciplinary actions. Together, we will embrace a diverse and inclusive learning environment.
5. Know and abide by FIU's Student Conduct and Honor Code. Cheating and plagiarizing will result in an “F” for this course.
6. Turn off all cellular phones. Texting is not permitted in the classroom.
7. The use of any recording software and/or device (visual and/or audio) are prohibited.
8. Silence is golden when your professor/classmate is speaking. Essentially, one individual at a time has the right to speak unless otherwise instructed by your professor.
9. Disrespectful behavior (sleeping, using headphones as well as using electronic devices to oppose academic purposes, verbal disruption, and physical disruption) is unacceptable and may result in removal from the course.

10. Physical contact with your professor is forbidden such as hugs, handshakes, etc.

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**Note:** This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the professor. Changes will be announced in a fair and timely fashion. Assignments, homework, and exams will be adapted for the benefit of the student; students will always know of any changes ahead of time. Monitor Canvas consistently to keep up with any potential changes or modifications to our class as we progress through the semester, especially if you are not sure, were absent, or were late. Check the “Announcements” section of your Canvas account daily for possible course updates.

### **Academic Conduct**

Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

### **Academic Freedom and Integrity**

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. We affirm that academic freedom is a protected right 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 or she sees it. Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint of belief.

### **Attendance Policy**

Class attendance is an expectation of this course and attendance will be tracked. Any student who misses **more than 3 class meetings** will be subject to losing one letter grade for the course. Students may be excused at the professor’s discretion for legitimate reasons to be absent, such as verified illnesses, emergencies, etc. Reasonable verification as to the nature of the absence must be provided to a suitable department within FIU. Being absent because of work, vacations, or sport activities will not be excused. It is the student’s responsibility to obtain missed notes and assignments. **Communicating with your professor before you are absent is a key to your success.**

### **Accessibility and Accommodation**

The Disability Resource Center collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable. The DRC provides FIU students with disabilities the necessary support to successfully complete their education and participate in activities available to all students. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the Center at 305-348-3532 or visit them at the Graham Center GC 190 (BBC: WUC 139, 305-919-5345).

For additional assistance please contact FIU's Disability Resource Center, <https://dasa.fiu.edu/all-departments/disability-resource-center/>

#### COURSE OUTLINE

CLASS DATE	SUBJECT
January 14	Welcome & Introduction to Class
January 21	Dimensions of Religion
January 28	Fieldworks
February 4	Instructions for Comparative Paper, Instructions for Religious Visitation Paper, What is Religion?
February 11	Ways of Studying Religion
February 18	The Sacred and the Holy
February 25	Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine Sacred Ritual <b>Comparative Reaction Paper (Due 2/25/2023 via Canvas)</b>
March 4	<b>Spring Break (No Class)</b>
March 11	<b>Exam #1</b>
March 18	Sacred Scripture
March 25	Society and the Sacred: The Social Formations and Transformations of Religion
April 1	Deity: Concepts of the Divine and Ultimate Reality <b>Religious Visitation Paper (Due 4/1/2023 via Canvas)</b>
April 8	Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order
April 15	Views of the Human Problem
April 22	<b>Exam #2</b> <b>Extra Credit (Due via Canvas)</b>
April 29	Closing Lecture & Evaluations

EXAM	SUBJECT ON EXAM
<b>Exam One</b>	What is Religion?
	Ways of Studying Religion
	The Sacred and the Holy
	Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine
	Sacred Ritual
<b>Exam Two</b>	Sacred Scripture
	Society and the Sacred: The Social Formations and Transformations of Religion
	Deity: Concepts of the Divine and Ultimate Reality
	Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order
	Views of the Human Problem

## **Instructions for Comparative Reaction Paper on Chapters 11-15 from *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion***

The reaction paper should be typed after reading chapters 11-15. Your Comparative Reaction Paper is due by 11:59p.m. (Miami-Dade local time), via Canvas on February 25, 2023.

Use Microsoft Word, times new roman font, font size should be 12, and for each page include a right aligned header with your last name and page#. Double space your lines excluding your heading. Only your heading should be single spaced. Your paper should be divided into **2 sections** with section titles in bold such as **Compare & Contrast and Global Perspective.**

The first page should consist of your full name, course id, reference number, days of week your class meets with time, my name, and the title of your paper. Please refer to my sample document for a sample heading format.

It is required to use the Writing Center for assistance in the writing process.

<https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/>

4-5 pages in length with a requirement of 1000 – 1250 words. There is no need for a title page. Include at least 2 peer review sources to support your comparison, contrast, and/or global perspective. A works cited page is required with peer review sources as well as your textbook as a source.

Leave 1" margins on the top, bottom, left, and right.

Use single spaces after full stops, commas, exclamation marks, etc.

Indent each paragraph.

Do not forget to use the spelling and grammar check tool that is offered by Microsoft Word.

You are required to submit your paper by 2 ways, Turnitin.com, and as an attachment in Canvas.

**Compare & Contrast** Choose 4 dimensions from the 7 dimensions of religion such as narrative/mythic, ritual, social/institutional, ethical/legal, doctrinal/philosophical, art/material, and experiential/emotional. For your Comparative Reaction Paper, make sure to include in bold the 4 dimensions of your choice. Also, to endorse your comparison and contrast, please state the page numbers from your textbook where you have found supportive information regarding each of your 4 dimensions. For the first paragraph, identify and state 2 dimensions to cover 2 chapters from chapters 11-14 for a comparison. Elaborate on the similarities from both chapters. For the second paragraph, identify and state 2 dimensions to cover the remaining 2 chapters for a disparity. Elaborate on the dissimilarities from the remaining 2 chapters from chapters 11-14.

**Global Perspective** After perusing through chapter 15, state all the global issues and trends that comes to your mind that are interrelated with the development and practice of religions. Based on what you have read, what would you change religiously in the world of religions to pacify religious issues in the contemporary world?



## Instructions for Religious Visitation Paper

Review the lecture slides on the topic of Fieldworks, which is a necessity for students that have missed the lecture on Fieldworks. The paper should be typed about your experience from a live streaming religious service/event via online or a prerecorded religious service/event that is somewhat current. You should not incorporate personal feelings/bias into your research. **Your Religious Visitation Paper is due by 11:59p.m. (Miami-Dade local time), via Canvas on April 1, 2023.**

You should visit a religious site/event of a religion other than your own by using the internet. Students that are Christians should not visit a Catholic site/event for this paper, as well as Catholics should not visit a Christian site/event for this paper. You are required to visit a religious site/event live via online. If you have had an experience from religious sites/events before the lecture on fieldworks, your prior religious experiences will not be admissible for your research and writings. Religious stores and external resources (online material, books, someone else's experience/accounts other than your own) does not count as a visitation site or event for the site visitation paper.

For health and safety purposes, it is best to encounter the religious experience via online for your site visitation paper. Experiencing a live streaming religious service/event via online is highly recommended. Many religious institutions might provide a live stream through their website, social media, or elsewhere on the internet. After exploring, if you still cannot come across something solid to live stream, I will make an exception for the entire class. The offer is on the table to watch a prerecorded religious service/event via online if it is somewhat current, as it should be something from 2023 or within 5 years old. Please explore online for it is part of the preliminary research process. If a student is not affiliated with any religion, the individual is free to observe any religion desired. I understand that an online religious experience is restricted in the sections of visuals and audio, as there are limitations, the lenses/microphone of a camcorder/webcam can only reveal captured footage to us. Please do your best. I am aware of the circumstances.

**It is required to use the Writing Center for assistance in the writing process.**  
<https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/>

**4-5 pages in length with a requirement of 1250 – 1500 words. There is no need for a title page. Include at least 2 peer review sources to support your preliminary research, 5 bold sections, and/or conclusions. A works cited page is required with peer review sources.**

Use Microsoft Word, times new roman font, font size should be 12, and for each page include a right aligned header with your last name and page#. Double space your lines excluding your heading. Only your heading should be single spaced. Your paper should be divided into **5 sections** with section titles such as **Background Information, General Information, Account of the Service, Analysis, and Conclusions.**

The first page should consist of your full name, course id, reference number, days of week your class meets with time, my name, and your title of research. Please refer to my sample document for more information.

Leave 1" margins on the top, bottom, left, and right.

Use single spaces after full stops, commas, exclamation marks, etc.

Indent each paragraph.

Do not forget to use the spelling and grammar check tool that is offered by Microsoft Word.

You are required to submit your paper by 2 ways, Turnitin.com and as an attachment, a Microsoft Word document in Canvas. Updated details for the submission of your paper will be provided during our virtual class meeting/Canvas announcement.

Please establish a connection by email or phone (your Google Voice number) with a gatekeeper regarding the religious site that you intend to visit. In order to be precautions of taboos and ethics, conduct preliminary research about the religion and religious group before connecting with a religious site. Visit an online religious service/event in a tradition that is unfamiliar to you and write it up as a report. Here is the outline you should follow.

A preliminary note: For this exercise, select a religious group in which you do not possess positive or negative feelings towards, but a group that would be neutral for you, so you can be objective. It is best just to try to remember what transpired. It is usually alright to ask leaders or members questions afterward if anything is unclear. Focus on what you get from this experience for the paper. Tap into your senses based on what you actually see and hear. Keep in mind, individual members or a group may deviate quite a bit from the official teachings and practice of a denomination or tradition.

**Background Information** Give the full name, entire physical address, web address, and religious affiliation, including the exact denomination of the group; give the date and time of your visit; and give the name and type of service attended. Which individual or individuals(group) formed the religious institution that you are visiting? What is the date of their establishment and purpose/mission for formation?

**General Information** Describe the outside and inside appearance of the building, giving special attention to particularly important symbols and distinctive architectural features. Then describe the way visitors are greeted, and the sort of people in this group - their apparent social class, lifestyle type, ethnic background, average age, gender, and approximate number present. Describe in the same way the leadership conducting the service.

**Account of the Service** Describe what happened in the service from beginning to end. Try to give some sense of the emotional tone and subjective spiritual meaning of the activity. For example, was the opening dramatic or casual? Was the congregational participation emotional or reserved? Was much of the service spontaneous? Did it seem to be ancient ritual or contemporary?

**Analysis** Analyze the worship experience in terms of the three forms of religious expression: theoretical (teaching), practical (worship), and sociological.

- Theoretical. What, essentially, does this religion teach? As far as you could tell from this one experience, from the sermon, practices, symbols, and so on, what seems to be the main message of this religion? You may need to distinguish between what was "officially" said in the creeds, and what really seemed to be most important to the people in the congregation as they took part.
- Practical. What was the basic nature of the worship? Formal or informal, old or new, structured or spontaneous, intellectual or emotional, or something of all of these. What message about how this group conceives of the role of religion, and the best way for humans to build bridges to Ultimate Reality, did this worship communicate?

- Sociological. What kind of group was it? As well as you could tell from this one experience, was it close-knit or diffuse? Was this group composed of mostly people drawn to the religion by family or ethnic ties, or mostly committed converts of different backgrounds? What role did the priest or leader play? What message did you get from the religious experience that was communicated by the nature of the group?

Optional. You may also conduct an interview with a religious practitioner(s) from the religious setting. If you choose to do so, incorporate your interview at the end of your Analysis section of your paper by using a dialogue format for the interview portion of the paper.

**Conclusion** How would you summarize your interpretation of this group in terms of the three forms of religious expression? (This does not mean to include your personal bias of the religion you have experienced. Describe and elaborate on how the forms fit together and how the forms served the religious practitioners for whom view them as important.)