**Introduction to the Study of Religion**

**REL 2011**

**M/W/F**

**12:00-12:50**

**CASE: 136**

**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” in many different ways 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 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.” Mondays and Wednesdays will be in person lectures and discussions. Fridays will be filled with group activities focused on understanding the readings and lectures better. Any online content will be facilitated through our Course Canvas Shell. This is also where you will turn in all of your assignments for the course.**

**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 dn 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 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.

**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.

**ANY USE OF AI WRITING TOOLS WILL COUNT AS PLAGIARISM AND A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.**

**Text**

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

**Requirements**

**Attendance/ Participation: 20%**

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. In order to facilitate our work together, each in person class will start with a 2 minute orienting exercise. These exercises will help us into a space of learning and conversation together. 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 will 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.

**The first part to doing well in this class is showing up and doing the readings.**

**The second part of this participation grade will be participating in the Friday activities with other members of your group, in order to digest the lectures and readings. This will sometimes involve mental mapping projects with others in your group, and other times it will involve answering a set of questions together. These activities are meant to help you digest and remember the materials we will cover in the course.**

**4-Blogs: 60% (800-1000 words each; 15% each)**

For all blogs, follow the citation and formatting guidelines of the Chicago, Turabian Style: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/citation-guide.html>. In addition, be sure to include an image (of your own or in the public domain) with each blog. Each blog should use materials from the readings and lectures in the course, and at least two sources outside the course.

Students must make an appointment (in person or virtual) with a Writing Center tutor for the first or second blog ( <https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/make-an-appointment/>). You will have to turn in some sort of proof that you went to the writing center for this first essay, which they can provide you with (usually an official email approval or stamp).  It is strongly recommended that you make an appointment early, and take your blog along to that appointment. You can make in-person and on-line appointments at the following url, but do it early because the time-slots fill up:  <https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/make-an-appointment/index.html>. This will count for 10 points of either the first or second blog, so if you miss this requirement by the end of the second blog, 10 points will be deducted from that blog.

First Blog Prompt: In the first few weeks of the course, we have talked about the history of the idea of “religion,” and its involvement in both colonization and liberation movements. Think about one of the following contemporary topics: the feminist revolution in Iran, religious nationalisms (whether Christian nationalism, Hindu nationalism, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar), the ongoing struggles between native peoples and resource extraction, or religious struggles with LGBTQ issues. Find a specific example within one of these areas and think about how religion is used to justify oppression and violence, and/or to justify liberation and peace.

Second Blog Prompt: In the second part of the course, we discussed many of the components and definitions of what might be included in a religion: texts, rituals, ideas, lived practices, etc. In this blog I want you to find a place, object, or practice that you find to be meaningful, spiritual, or religious. You should take a “Holy Selfie” of yourself in the place, with the object, or in the practice. First describe your Holy Selfie (where, when, what, etc.). Second, talk about the experiences you feel in that space. Third, talk about how that experience might be understood as spiritual or holy, even if it is outside of a “traditional” religious space.

Third Blog Prompt: The third part of the course had to do with religious pluralism, secularism and issues of power struggle. In short, what does religion mean in a pluralistic or even secular society? Which religions get to “define” a certain culture (like Christianity in the US, or Islam in Indonesia). There are two main understandings of “secularism.” One is freedom *of* religion, and the other is freedom *from* religion. In many places “the secular” does not mean the absence of religion but rather religious pluralism in the public sphere. Argue for your own understanding of “the secular” (freedom of, or freedom from), and then use a specific example (person, place, event) to explore and argue your case.

Fourth Blog Prompt: The fourth and final part of the course deals with the different ways in which different bodies experience religion differently. Issues of race, class, gender, sex, and sexuality always shape our experiences of the world. In addition, religions affect different non-human bodies and the earth in different ways. Pick a topic, religion and (race, gender, sexuality, animals, or the earth in general). Then, pick a current event (black lives matter, women priests/abortion, transgender issue, species extinction, or climate change, religious nationalisms, or religiously inspired violence), and discuss religious responses to the issue.

**If you want to get a feel for the types of blogs I am looking for, check out these two sites:**

<https://www.counterpointknowledge.org/category/publications/blog/>

<https://religiondispatches.org/>

**Final Reflection; Religious Autobiography: 20% (1200 words)**

**In this final course reflection, you should reflect on your own religious or spiritual journey. Even if you are agnostic (like me) or atheist, talk about how your understanding of what is good, beautiful, and meaningful have developed over your life. It may be, for instance that you started out in the religious community you were born into, and later questioned it and outgrew it, and now have your own type of spirituality / meaning-making practice. Or, it may be that you have experienced a conversion to one form of thinking or another. I want you to: a) give me your definition of what religion or spirituality is; and b) describe your journey, and then talk about how your own spirituality/religion informs the way that you live your life—ethically, in relationship to other people, in relationship to politics, and in relationship to the rest of the natural world. The goal is to help understand how what you believe and what you practices are informed by one another.**

**This will be due at the time of the scheduled final for the class.**

**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**

**Schedule**

**Week 1: What is Religion?**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 1.**

**M, January 6: Review Syllabus, getting to know one another**

**W, January 8: Lecture on different understandings of Religion**

**F, January 10: Discussions of Readings and Lecture**

**Week 2: The invention of “religion”**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 4**

**M, January 13: Lecture**

**W, January 15: Lecture / Discussion**

**F, January 17: Group Discussions of Readings and Lecture**

**Week 3: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Decolonization**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 7**

**M, January 20: MLK Jr. Day; No Class**

**W, January 22: Lecture/ Discussion**

**F, January 24: Group discussion and review of first 3 weeks.**

**Week 4: Lived Religions**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 3**

**M, January 27: Lecture / reading discussion**

**W, January 29: Baraka**

**F, January 31: Blog 1 Due (no extra assignment)**

**Week 5: Religious Communities: Insider/Outsider**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 2**

**M, February 3: Lecture**

**W, February 5: Lecture /Discussion**

**F, February 7: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 6: Comparative Approaches to Religion**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 11**

**M, February 10: Lecture**

**W, February 12: Lecture / Discussion**

**F, February 14: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 7: Religion and Ritual**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 12**

**M, February 17: Lecture**

**W, February 19: Green Tea Ceremony / Hajj**

**F, February 21: Blog 2 Due (no extra assignment)**

**“SPRING” BREAK, NO CLASSES: FEBRUARY 24-February 28**

**Week 8: Interreligious Dialogue**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 14**

**M, March 3: Lecture**

**W, March 5: Lecture / Discussion**

**F, March 7: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 9: Religion and Secularism**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 16**

**M, March 10: Lecture**

**W, March 12: Lecture Discussion**

**F, March 14: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 10: Religion and Power**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 5**

**M, March 17: Lecture**

**W, March 19: Sharing of Popular Media Images**

**F, March 21: Blog 3 Due (no extra assignments)**

**Week 11: Religion and Bodies**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 9**

**M, March 24: Lecture**

**W, March 26: Lecture /Discussion**

**F, March 28: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 12: Religion, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 10**

**M, March 31: Lecture**

**W, April 2: Fish out of Water**

**F, April 4: Conceptual Mapping**

**Week 13: Religion, Race and Diversity**

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, chapter 6**

**M, April 7: Lecture**

**W, April 9: Lecture/ Discussion**

**F, April 11: Blog 4 Due (no extra assignments)**

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

**Weekly Reading: Hedges, Chapter 17**

**M, April 14: Lecture**

**W, April 16: Course wrap up**

**F, April 18: Final conceptual mapping**

**Spiritual / Religious Autobiographies Due at date of Finals.**