REL 2011

Introduction to Religion

Section: U03

In Person

Spring Term 2027

Course Meeting Information

MoWeFr 11:00AM - 11:50AM

Charles E. Perry (PC) 447

Professor Information

Ernesto Fiocchetto

Roles: Primary Instructor

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Department or Academic Unit: Religious Studies

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

This course asks what "religion" is, who gets to define it, and what it does in people's lives and societies. Following the FIU catalog description, students learn methods for thinking critically about religion. They apply them to knowledge, value, the sacred, the individual and human society, moving from classical Western texts to the contemporary world.

The course has three parts. Part I (weeks 1–9) builds a set of analytical tools from the textbook and ends with a midterm exam. Part II (weeks 10–14) applies those tools to five areas where religion is publicly contested, one per week: politics and economy, migration, gender and sexuality, media and technology, and the environment. Part III runs all semester: a research project in which each student investigates one religious topic and writes a research paper. Miami and South Florida supply many of our cases.

This course does not teach or require any religious belief, and it does not ask students to give up any. Students of all faiths and of none are

equally welcome. The task is to analyze religion, not to judge whether any religion is true.

UCC Category Description

This course satisfies the University Core Curriculum **Humanities, Group 2** requirement.

Humanities courses must afford students the ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy, and must include selections from the Western canon.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- 1. Explain why "religion" is hard to define and how a definition shapes what counts as religious.
- 2. Use core analytical concepts (belief, function, classification, essentialism, structure, habitus, legitimation, authority, authenticity) to analyze religious claims and practices.
- 3. Summarize and assess classic theories of religion, including those of Marx, Durkheim and Freud.
- 4. Analyze how religion shapes, and is shaped by, politics,

economy, migration, gender and sexuality, media and technology, and the environment.

- 5. Critically evaluate an AI-generated account of religion: its assumptions, omissions and errors.
- 6. Design and carry out a research project: frame a question, find and assess scholarly sources, and write a thesis-driven research paper.

Expectations of the Course

This is an online course, which means most (if not all) of the course work will be conducted online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same for a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

Students are expected to:

- Review the how to get started information located in the course content
- Introduce yourself to the class during the first week by posting a self-introduction in the appropriate discussion forum and an appropriate photo
- Take the practice quiz to ensure that your computer is compatible with Canvas

- Interact online with instructor/s and peers
- Review and follow the course calendar
- Log in to the course 4 times per week
- Respond to discussion board postings within 2 business days
- Respond to emails/messages within 2 business days
- Submit assignments by the corresponding deadline
- Check official FIU email and Canvas Messages daily

The instructor will:

- Log in to the course 3 times per week
- Respond to emails/messages within 2 business days (excluding holidays and weekends)
- Grade assignments within 7 business days of the assignment deadline

Assignments from the text and other resources are listed for each class session. Students are expected to pace their learning according to the posted course assignments. It is expected that interactive learning and teaching will enrich the learning experience of all students, and that each student will work in partnership with the professor to create a positive learning experience for all. Student engagement is a necessary condition for an effective learning experience and includes contributions to debate and discussion (if any), positive interactive learning with others, and an enthusiastic attitude towards inquiry. Everyone is expected to be a positive

contributor to the class learning community, and students are expected to share the responsibility of teaching each other.

Grading

Your final grade is made up of seven components.

Component	When	Weight
Attendance	Throughout	10%
Participation, including Global Learning Religion 1–4	Throughout	15%
AI text analyses	Wednesdays, weeks 2–9	15%
Reading quizzes, one per reading block	Weeks 1, 3–14	10%
Midterm exam (Part I)	Week 10	10%
Final exam (cumulative: whole course)	Finals week	15%
Research paper, built in stages through the Friday workshops	Throughout; final paper in finals week	25%
Total		**100%**

Research paper stages (25%)

Stages marked "Feedback" are required but not graded: you get comments to improve your work before the graded stages.

Stage	Week	Weight
Topic and AI text submission	2	Feedback
Research question	3	5%
Annotated bibliography	6	Feedback
Research proposal	7	5%
Outline	9	Feedback
Full draft	12	Feedback
Presentation	14	5%
Final paper	Finals week	10%

The design has to satisfy these requirements:

1. **Writing Intensive:** at least three substantial writing assignments, given to students in writing with grading criteria, sequenced across the term and totaling about 3,500 words (FIU WAC). Students need a C or better for writing credit.
2. **Global Learning:** an assessment for each of the three outcomes, active learning strategies, and an integrated co-curricular activity (to be decided among Global Learning Religion 1–4).

Textbook and Course Materials

A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Martin, Craig

Publisher: Routledge

Publication Date: 2023

Copyright Date: 2023

ISBN 10: N/A

ISBN 13: 9781032190464

Notes: https://fiu.bncollege.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/TBListView?catalogId=10001&storeId=21551&langId=-1&courseXml=

Chapters/Pages: Complete book

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for $22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop.

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place via the Canvas

Inbox. Check out the Canvas Conversations Tutorial or Canvas Guide to learn how to communicate with your instructor and peers using Announcements, Discussions, and the Inbox. I will respond to all correspondences within 24 hours.

Assignments & Assessments

How the course works

Each week has the same rhythm: theory on Monday, application on Wednesday, research on Friday. Parts I and II follow one another; Part III runs alongside both.

	Monday	**Wednesday**	**Friday**
Part I, weeks 1–9	Lecture: a concept from Martin	Apply the concept to your AI text	Research workshop
Part II, weeks 10–14	Lecture: one "religion and…" topic	Global Learning activity	Research workshop

The AI text

In week 2 you will choose a religious topic and use an AI tool to generate an overview of it, about 2,000 words, using a prompt we write together in class. You will submit the exact text, with your prompt, the tool's name and the date, and keep it unchanged all semester.

Throughout Part I, Wednesday classes test each week's concept on your text. Where does it agree with the scholarship? What does it assume, leave out, or get wrong? The AI text is your starting point, not a source: your job is to analyze it.

The research project

Your AI text's topic is also your research topic. Friday workshops take you through the research process one step at a time: from topic to question, to sources, to thesis, to draft and revision. The semester ends with a research paper and a short presentation. Every Wednesday analysis of your AI text becomes material for that paper.

Full instructions and grading criteria for each assignment will be posted on Canvas.

Attendance (10%). Being present and on time for every class meeting.

Participation (15%). Active, prepared contribution to class discussions, Wednesday activities and Friday workshops. This includes the four Global Learning Religion activities in Part II, in which you analyze religion across local, global, and intercultural contexts.

AI text analyses (15%). Each Wednesday in Part I, you apply that week's concept to your AI text in a short written analysis. You identify where the text agrees with the scholarship, what it assumes or leaves out, and where it is wrong.

Reading quizzes (10%). A short quiz on each reading block, 13 in total. Quizzes check that you have done the reading and understood its key concepts.

Midterm exam (10%). Covers Part I: the concepts from Martin and the classic readings.

Final exam (15%). Covers the whole course: the Part I concepts and the five Part II topics.

Research paper (25%). A thesis-driven research paper on the topic of your AI text, built step by step through the Friday workshops:

1. **Topic and AI text submission (week 2, feedback).** Your chosen topic and the unchanged AI text, with your prompt, the tool's name and the date.
2. **Research question (week 3, 5%).** One focused, researchable question about your topic, with a short paragraph explaining why it matters.
3. **Annotated bibliography (week 6, feedback).** Scholarly sources on your topic, each with a brief summary and a note on how you will use it.
4. **Research proposal (week 7, 5%).** Your question, working thesis, method and main sources.
5. **Outline (week 9, feedback).** The structure of your argument, section by section, with the evidence for each part.
6. **Full draft (week 12, feedback).** A complete draft of the paper, for instructor comments before the final version.
7. **Presentation (week 14, 5%).** A short presentation of your research question, argument and findings to the class.
8. **Final paper (finals week, 10%).** The finished research paper. It uses at least one Part I concept, engages scholarly sources, and shows how the scholarship corrects or deepens your AI text.

Schedule of Topics

The instructor may change this schedule with further notice; changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.

Part I: Theoretical and critical tools (weeks 1–9)

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
1	Mon	Welcome: the course, the syllabus and the AI research project	None
1	Wed	What do we mean by "religion"?	Martin, Preface and ch. 1, "Religion"; quiz
1	Fri	Research: what makes a good research topic? Introducing the AI text	Think of two or three possible topics
2	Mon	**No class: Martin Luther King Jr. Day**	

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
2	Wed	Research: choose your topic and generate your AI text	Your topic shortlist
2	Fri	Application: how does your AI text define religion?	Martin, ch. 1; your AI text
3	Mon	Belief	Martin, ch. 2, "Belief"; quiz
3	Wed	Application: belief in your AI text	Your AI text
3	Fri	Research: from topic to research question	
4	Mon	What does religion do?	Martin, ch. 3, "Functionalism" ; Marx and Freud excerpts; quiz
4	Wed	Application: function and suspicion in your AI text	Your AI text

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
4	Fri	Research: library session	
5	Mon	Classification; the sacred and the profane	Martin, ch. 4, "Classification"; Durkheim excerpt; quiz
5	Wed	Application: classification in your AI text	Your AI text
5	Fri	Research: scholarly and popular sources; fact-checking your AI text	
6	Mon	"True" religion and "real" members	Martin, ch. 5, "Essentialism"; quiz
6	Wed	Application: essentialism in your AI text	Your AI text
6	Fri	Research: the annotated bibliography	

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
7	Mon	Society's structures and religion in daily habits	Martin, ch. 6, "Structure", and ch. 7, "Habitus"; quiz
7	Wed	Application: structure and habitus in your AI text	Your AI text
7	Fri	Research: thesis, method and the research proposal	
		Spring break: no classes	
8	Mon	How religion justifies social order	Martin, ch. 8, "Legitimation"; quiz
8	Wed	Application: legitimation in your AI text	Your AI text
8	Fri	Research: proposal feedback; observation as a method	

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
9	Mon	Who speaks for a tradition, and what counts as "authentic"?	Martin, ch. 9, "Authority", and ch. 10, "Authenticity"; Plato, *Euthyphro*; quiz
9	Wed	Application: final analysis of your AI text	Martin, case study "What Would Jesus Do?" and Afterword
9	Fri	Research: outlining the paper	

Part II: Religion and… (weeks 10–14)

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
10	Mon	Religion, politics and economy	Hurd, Introduction; Weber, ch. 2 excerpt; quiz
10	Wed	**Midterm exam (Part I)**	
10	Fri	Research: drafting workshop	

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
11	Mon	Religion and migration	Tweed, ch. 1; quiz
11	Wed	Global Learning Religion 1	
11	Fri	Research: drafting workshop	
12	Mon	Religion, gender and sexuality	Wilcox, Introduction; quiz
12	Wed	Global Learning Religion 2	
12	Fri	Research: full draft workshop	Submit your full draft
13	Mon	Religion, media and technology: religion and AI	Singler, Introduction; quiz
13	Wed	Global Learning Religion 3	
13	Fri	Research: revision and presentation preparation	
14	Mon	Religion and the environment	Bratton, one chapter; quiz

Week	Day	Topic	Read or prepare
14	Wed	Global Learning Religion 4	
14	Fri	Research presentations	
Finals		**Final exam (cumulative)**: finals week, day and time TBC. Final research paper due: finals week, date TBC	

Policies & Resources

Please review the FIU's Policies webpage. The policies webpage contains essential information regarding guidelines relevant to all courses at FIU, as well as additional information about acceptable netiquette for online courses. For additional information, please visit FIU's Policy and Procedure Library.

As a member of the FIU community, you are expected to be knowledgeable about the behavioral expectations set forth in the FIU Student Conduct and Honor Code.

AI Tools Policy

Academic integrity. All work must be your own and follow the FIU

Student Conduct and Honor Code. Cite every source you use, including any you paraphrase.

Generative AI. This course assigns one AI-generated text, which you analyze; it is an object of study, not your own work. Everything you write about it, and your research paper, must be your own writing.

Nondiscrimination Statement

The **Office of Civil Rights (OCR)** is responsible for ensuring that FIU maintains a workplace and learning environment free from discrimination, where current and prospective faculty, staff, and students are treated equitably. If any student, employee, or applicant has a sincere and reasonable belief that they have been discriminated against or harassed based on age, color, disability, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, retaliation, sex, or any other protected category, they can report their concerns to the OCR team through report.fiu.edu.