REL 2011

Introduction to Religion

Section: U11

In Person

Spring Term 2027

Course Meeting Information

Hello, fellow travelers! This course takes place in, at, and on the following:

- In-Person
- at Charles E. Perry (PC) 432
- on Tuesdays and Thursdays
- from 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM
- From January 11, 2027 - April 24, 2027

Professor Information

Jon Roberts

Roles: Primary Instructor

Email: jrobe001@fiu.edu

Response Time: Within 24 hours

Phone: 707-726-1077

Office Hours: By appointment (but limited to: in-person Thurs 2:00-3:00, Zoom at any other time)

Office Location: SIPA 508, or Via Zoom

Department or Academic Unit: Religious Studies

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

This course will immerse you in the nature and variety of religious phenomena, belief, and practice. Beginning with the simple but far-reaching question: What is religion?

My emphasis in this course is on experiential forms of knowing and creating a sacred space where you, as the student, can not just obtain propositional knowledge (facts) about "religions",

but can actually be immersed in the other forms of knowing (procedural, perspectival, and participatory) and grow as a person thereby.

This course's emphasis is on the ways religion is studied. Of course this includes a cross-cultural study of the variety of historic forms of religious belief and practice. We cover a laundry list of topics such as deity, myth, ritual, scripture, views of the problem evil and suffering, and the theories used throughout the centuries to define and dissect religion and religious experiences.

This Course's Goal: What's the Big Deal About "Religion"?

Ultimately this course is designed for you to develop *a critical faith*. I want to show you how we all hold a faith (or specific lens or worldview) and operate out of it, and so has all of humanity since we began as a species (based on what different academic disciplines have shown us, e.g. archaeology, philology, anthropology etc.). If it is the case that humanity has always had this capacity for "self-transcendence", it is essential for us to know what we actually believe and what others do as well. The goal of this course, then, is for you to "remain committed and yet open" while conducting "honest exploration of others' beliefs" (Livingston, *Anatomy*, 2009, p.14).

Let me put it this way: the main goal of this course is for you not to just gain "facts" about religion (and repeat those facts to me for a grade) but to understand that you as a person operate with a worldview that is informed by the thing we now categorize as "religion," whether your worldview is overtly religious or non-religious. As such, this course takes as its presupposition that you would do well (as a student and as a human being) to understand what it is that you believe, because it is the foundation for everything you do and are.

As part of developing this critical faith, we will not just ask questions and move on once we get an "answer", we will, in the words of author Rainer Maria Rilke, "live the questions now." (Rilke, *Letters*, 1903). Questions like these: Why is there something instead of nothing? Why do bad things happen to good people? Is religion even relevant to me today? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? How can the study of religion help me understand current events?

Or simply: *How can studying religion help me understand myself?*

This course is interested in experiential examination of the different expressions, practices, and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular tradition will be favored, you will be tasked with examining and experiencing religious settings to which you are unfamiliar, and with examining yourself, and then applying the theories we've learned to those experiences of self and other.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- Explain the basic history, development, and belief systems of various religious traditions
- Identify key historical thinkers in the sociology of religion, (e.g. Émile Durkheim, Carl Jung, Max Weber, Karl Marx) and be able to identify their interdisciplinary theories about the human experience of the sacred
- Identify the meaning behind religious concepts and symbols
- Apply critical thinking to various topics in the field of religious studies
- Demonstrate creative thinking about religious issues in the contemporary world
- Conduct field research about a particular religious community
- Improve writing and reasoning skills by writing and revising argumentative, thesis-driven, and evidence-based papers
- Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to: ethnographic, psychological, sociological, ethical, phenomenological

- Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film
- Distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources (emic and etic histories/perspectives), and scholarly vs journalistic sources

Expectations of the Course

This course fulfills three major requirements for FIU undergraduates:

- University Core Curriculum (UCC) Humanities Group Two requirement
- Global Learning (GL) requirement
- Gordon Rule Writing (GRW) requirement

This means this course holds a lot more weight than your average elective. This course is designed to improve your writing and reasoning skills. This means we will be submitting drafts and receiving feedback in order to improve. That is what learning is all about, I will guide you on this journey!

Plagiarism and LLMs (AI)

"... Not Even Once." Or so the saying goes. And that is basically

what I expect with regard to your LLM use in this course. Treat it like what it is, a substance that is: Addictive? Sure! Fit for actual academic inquiry? It depends. (We'll discuss this in our introduction to the course.)

This is a class that deals with a subject that transcends our culture's obsession with propositional knowledge (our overemphasis on just spitting out and debating facts). There are other kinds of knowing, and there are greater and longer-lasting forms of truth. These other forms of knowing can only be accessed when you embrace the difficulties of learning and grow as a result.

I expect every word that is written, typed, tapped, or dictated in this class to be done so by you. No exceptions. I am not expecting perfection, but I do want to see your own effort.

At FIU, the use of generated content submitted as original work is considered plagiarism. As stated in the Student Conduct and Honor Code (Section 6, article ix):

> *"[Plagiarism is defined as] the submission of any work authored by another person or generated by an automated tool without proper acknowledgement of the source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form."*

I take this very seriously. If you use AI (or plagiarize in any other way) to check the box of "did work for class" then you are only cheating yourself. If that is how you have come to approach school work, let this class be the one where you

change that approach and allow yourself to grow as a human being and learn.

Textbook and Course Materials

Anatomy of The Sacred: An Introduction to Religion

Subtitle: (Sixth Edition)

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Livingston, James C.

Publisher: Prentice Hall

Publication Date: 2009

Copyright Date: 2009

ISBN 10: 013600380X

ISBN 13: 9780136003809

Chapters/Pages: 448 pages

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.

Grading

Late Work

Late submissions will not be accepted, except in cases of genuine and documented emergencies.

Avoid leaving assignment submissions for the last minute before a deadline. “Heavy user traffic” during this time may cause delays and/or errors, which can lead to missing crucial deadlines.

I, as the instructor, reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus by means of announcements or messages with ample time allowed for you to respond and adjust appropriately.

Course Assignment Grade Weights

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Points Available	Weight
Discussions	6	28.416	170.5	17.5
Attendance	1	150	150	15
Site Visit Essay (First Draft)	1	100	100	10
Total	14	1000	1000	100

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Points Available	Weight
Site Visit Essay (Final Draft after revision)	1	150	150	15
Personal Analysis Essay (First Draft)	1	100	100	10
Personal Analysis Essay (Final Draft after revision)	1	150	150	15
Midterm	1	87.5	87.5	8.75
Final	1	87.5	87.5	8.75
Total	14	1000	1000	100

Grading Scale

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

Course Grading Table

LETTER	RANGE (%)	LETTER	RANGE (%)	LETTER	RANGE (%)
A	95 - 100%	B	83 - 86%	C	70 - 76%
A-	90 - 94%	B-	80 - 82%	D	60 - 69%
B+	87 - 89%	C+	77 - 79%	F	0 -59%

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place primarily via email. So please make sure you regularly access and read your FIU email when taking this course.

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.

Schedule of Topics

This is an outline of the course based on the chapters from the required text. Note: this schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and with written notice on Canvas.

- Week 1: What is Religion - Chapter 1
- Week 2: Ways of Studying Religion - Chapter 2
- Week 3: The Sacred and the Holy - Chapter 3
- Week 4-5: Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine - Chapter 4
- Week Week 6: Sacred Ritual - Chapter 5
- Week 7: Sacred Scripture - Chapter 6
- Week 8: Society and the Sacred - Chapter 7
- Week 9: Deity: Concepts of the Divine and Ultimate Reality - Chapter 8
- Week 10: Origins of the Natural and Social Order - Chapter 9
- Week 11: Views of the Human Problem - Chapter 10
- Week 12: Theodicy: Encountering Evil - Chapter 11
- Week 13: Ethics: Foundations of Moral Action - Chapter 12
- Week 14: Soteriology: Ways and Goals of Salvation and Liberation - Chapter 13
- Week 15: Secularization & Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Religion - Chapter 14, 15

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.

Assignments & Assessments

Overview

This course is comprised of two (2) major writing (research) assignments, six (6) in-class discussions, and an online midterm and final. The following sections contain descriptions of each assignment. However, full and complete details will be given in the course.

Essays

This course, at its core, is a writing course. It will focus on conducting field work (physically visiting an unfamiliar religious site) and crafting well-formed research papers. There will be two major writing assignments, with the rest of the coursework bolstering and informing the creation of these works.

These essays must have a thesis (a structured argument or point-of-view), and adequately support that thesis. The essays must be organized clearly and logically.

Both papers:

- Will be 1,200 - 1,800 words and will be submitted through Turnitin (via Canvas)
- Will be formatted with MLA style formatting, with inline or footnote citations and a list of references at the end
- Will be written from start to finish using Google Docs (see details below)

Accountability and Revisions

You will be required to start and end the writing process using Google Docs. This is for accountability for your writing process. For each essay, begin with a blank document on Google Docs and share that document with my FIU email jrobe001@fiu.edu, allowing editing capabilities.

Craft as much of your planning and writing process in that document. Even if you write notes and use those, include screenshots of those notes as you copy and revise. Show your work. I use a plugin that allows me to play back your writing process. It will show me that your paper has grown organically, and allow me to see when you edited and for how long. It will also allow me to comment and suggest revisions when we get to the drafting process.

I will explain this process in more detail in the course.

Late papers may be accepted with a legitimate excuse but only with a maximum score of 75%.

Paper 1: Religious Site Field Research

With this paper you will be writing what is known as an ethnography. It will require you to visit a religious site from a religious tradition that is not your own. You will observe and analyze this group. This paper must have a research question (a thesis in the form of a question) that will help you study and analyze the religious tradition represented by the group. (Note: I will provide full assignment instructions and format in the course.)

You will be revising this essay. So, using the Google Docs method, I will watch your paper as it organically grows from a blank document, to the preliminary research stage, to the addition of field notes and site photo, to supplementary research, and then your first draft.

- **First Draft:** You must submit a minimum 1,200-word first draft. (Export from Google Docs to PDF to submit on Canvas). The purpose of this first draft is for me to give you feedback, helping form and hone your writing skills.
    - You need to submit a picture of yourself at the site for credit. Please attach a minimum of one photo to the paper, at the end of the document.
    - Place the photo directly from your phone's photo album into the document so I can review the photo's metadata and confirm it was taken on the day and at the place you visited.
- **Final Draft:** After my feedback on the first draft, the final draft must be at least 1,200 words long, but no longer

than 1,800 words.

Paper 2: Personal Analysis

For this essay, you will be using a research methodology known as autoethnography. This boils down to you describing your personal experience (your story), and analyzing it so as to connect it to cultural experience. This means you will be analyzing yourself using the theoretical frameworks for analysis presented in this course. This means you will start with what Livingston presents, and then add other academic sources to further analyze your personal experience. (Note: I will provide full assignment instructions and format in the course.)

- **First Draft:** You must submit a minimum 1,200-word first draft. (Export from Google Docs to PDF to submit on Canvas). The purpose of this first draft is for me to give you feedback, helping form and hone your writing skills.
- **Final Draft:** After my feedback on the first draft, the final draft must be at least 1,200 words long, but no longer than 1,800 words.

In-Class Discussions

We will have six (6) in-class discussions. The discussions will be done in two phases, first we will have the preparatory stage in class, where I will present a topic based on the lectures and give you time to reflect with pen and paper. Then, you will turn

in those papers to me upon completion. Then, for phase two, in the next class we will have a guided discussion based on your written reflections.

Exams

The Midterm Exam and Final Exam will be available online during their respective scheduled dates. Each exam is worth 8.75% of the final grade, for a total of 17.5% of the final grade.

The format is that of a typical exam: Multiple-choice and true/false questions. These exams are entirely based on our assigned readings.

No late submissions will be accepted.

Participation/Attendance

Your attendance will be monitored and makes up 15% of the final grade of the course. If you are not in class, your grade will be affected. You will also be lacking critical information to complete assignments, and miss critical discussion times.

I allow a set of 3 days where you are permitted to miss class without penalty (aside from the missed assignments, if any). Please do not abuse this permission, otherwise you will not be excused when you do need to be absent. Attendance will be calculated at the end of the semester.

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.

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.