

## **REL 2011: Religious Analysis and Interpretation**

### **Department of Religious Studies**

**Instructor's Name:** Andres Arrazola

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Location:** see our website [religio.fiu.edu](http://religio.fiu.edu) go to courses and see schedule

**E-mail:** Email through Blackboard

### **Course Description**

This course is a foundational courses offered by the Religious Studies Department. The course incorporates the study of scripture, belief and practices, and the historical and social context of religion. This course introduces the field of Religious Studies by looking at topics and themes such as doctrine, ritual, scripture, mysticism, pilgrimage, and myth across two or more religions while also introducing methodological approaches to the comparative study of religion. In all, by studying the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religion, students will gain insights into similarities across religions as well as the most salient elements of religious traditions such as scripture, rituals, and institutions.

### **Course Objectives**

- 1) To analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in personal, social, and global contexts.
- 2) To understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth claims and meaning making practices.
- 3) To develop proficiency in analyzing texts, rituals, behaviors, beliefs and practices of a variety of religious traditions. Because the student will be constantly utilizing various theoretical discourses he/she will be able to analyze the many ways in which concepts, statements, beliefs, and judgments relate to practice, action, and other concepts and beliefs, as clarified through theoretical discourse. Thus the student will develop the skill of evaluating how plural theoretical structures may work together to create an adequate understanding of religion.
- 4) To better understand religious belief and practice within various religious traditions and areas of the world it will contribute to a richer understanding and appreciation of the diversity of religious activities throughout the world.

## **Course Requirements/Assessments**

Attendance: 20%  
Participation: 10%  
Quizzes: 10%  
Exams: 25%  
Three Essays: 20%  
Presentation: 15%

### **Essays**

Essay One – Write an essay discussing the arguments presented in Appiah’s “Case for Contamination” and contrast them with the arguments made in the other readings, particularly with Kiyaani and Csoradas’ “On The Peyote Road”. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.5-inch margins.

Essay Two – Choose one of the films we watched in class and apply the Smart’s six dimensions of religion to the analysis. The emphasis of the paper should be on how all six dimensions of a religion reinforce each other. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.5-inch margins.

Essay Three – Describe the religion you created with your group and demonstrate how all six of Smart’s dimensions of religions are incorporated. There should be a logical reinforcement of each dimension to each other that structures the religion into a cohesive whole. The religion should also be rational, understandable, and meaningful. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.5-inch margins.

### **Quizzes and Exams**

Throughout the course, quizzes will be administered at the professor’s discretion. The aim of the quizzes is to assess the level of engagement by the students of the assigned reading. Also, there will be a midterm and a final exam that will assess all of the materials discussed in class. The final exam will not be cumulative.

### **Group Project/Presentation**

Students’ will form into groups at the beginning of the semester with the intent of constructing their own religion by the end of the semester and will present their religion to the rest of the class. The group must show a mastery of the six dimensions of religion as discussed in class. There must be a rationale for the religion and each element of the religion must be reinforced somehow across the different dimensions.

### **Grading Scale:**

94-100 A 90-93 A-

87-89 B+ 84-86 B 80-83 B-

77-79 C+ 74-76 C 70-73 C-

67-69 D+ 64-66 D 60-63 D-

0-59 F

### **Academic Integrity**

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate the truth. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating, helping another student to cheat, plagiarism, turning in the same paper for two different courses (including those in two different semesters), purchasing papers written by others, manipulating attendance records, and falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines.

### **Course Materials**

Smart, Ninian. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. Pearson, 1999, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. ISBN-13: 978-0130209801, ISBN-10: 0130209805.

Other Readings will be provided for you.

### **Weekly Schedule**

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

Readings: Appiah – “The Case for Contamination”  
Kiyaanie and Csordas – “On the Peyote Road”

#### **Week 2: Why Are We Religious**

Readings: Harris - “Why We Became Religious; Evolution of the Spirit World”  
Boyer – “Religious Thought and Behavior as By-Products of Brain Function”  
Smith - “Religion, Religions, Religious”

**No Class on Labor Day**

### **Week 3: Culture and Religion**

Readings: Evans-Pritchard – “Witchcraft Among the Azande”  
Miner – “Body Rituals of the Nacirema”  
Chakrabarty – “The Modern and the Secular in the West”  
Malinowski – “Rational Mastery by Man of his Surroundings”

### **Weeks 4 & 5: Theological Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Theological Dimension”  
Swinburne – “The Existence of God”  
Pope Benedict XVI’s Regenbug’s Address  
Response to Pope Benedict XVI by Muslim Scholars

**Essay 1 Due on Friday Sept. 19**

### **Week 6 & 7: Ethical Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Ethical Dimensions”  
Douglas – “Taboo”  
Harris – “The Abominable Pig”  
Douglas – “Powers and Dangers”

**Midterm Exam on Friday Oct. 17**

### **Week 8 & 9: Mythical Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Mythical Dimension”  
Wolf – “The Virgin of Guadalupe”  
Daughtery – “Serpent Handling as Sacrament”  
Barthe – “Myth Today”

### **Week 10 & 11: Ritual Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Ritual Dimension”  
Turner – “Betwixt and Between”  
Furst and Coe – “Ritual Enemas”  
Rappaport – “Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations”

### **Week 12 & 13: Social Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Social Dimension”  
Brain – “An Anthropological Perspective on the Witchcraze”

Wallace – “Revitalization Movement”  
Noll and Shi – “Last Shaman of Northeast China”

**Week 14: Experiential Dimension**

Readings: Smart – “Experiential Dimension”  
Lewis – “Trance, Possession, Shamanism, and Sex”  
McIntosh – “Religion as Schema”

**No Class on Friday**

**Second Essay due on Monday Nov. 24**

**Week 15: Class Presentations**

**Third Essay due Friday Dec. 5**

**Week 16: Finals Week**

**Final Exam TBA**

**Syllabus Is Subject To Change**