Instructor: Steven M. Vose  
Office: DM 359-A  
Office Hours: W 1:30-3:00, R 3:30-5:00, or by appointment  
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Class Hours: R 5:00-7:40  
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Course Description:
This seminar will examine some of the most influential theories and methodologies in the academic study of religion. Beginning with an investigation into the historical meanings of “religion” and the modern construction of it as a discrete category of academic discourse and object of analysis, the course will proceed to examine some of the major works that have brought various disciplinary and philosophical perspectives to bear on the development of new theories of religion or of aspects of religious behavior. The theories and schools investigated in this seminar include: phenomenology, mysticism, psychoanalysis, history, sociology, anthropology, feminism, lived religion, structuralism and post-structuralism. Each theoretical work is paired with a salient critique to show how the field has developed and continues to progress. Students will practice formal writing in Religious Studies using Chicago citation styles. Students lead class discussions and present their research papers at the end of the course.

Course Objectives:
- To introduce students to several influential theories and methodologies in the academic study of religion and the critiques of those theories and methods.
- To learn how knowledge about religion is constructed, disseminated, critiqued and advanced in academia.
- To foster critical thinking skills that will help students to evaluate claims and arguments.
- To build formal writing and presentation skills, including proper attribution of sources.
- To introduce students to graduate-level library research techniques.

Learning Outcomes:
By the end of this course, students will:
- Be able to summarize and critically evaluate a number of influential theories of religion or aspects of religious behavior.
- Understand the historical growth of the interdisciplinary study of religion in the academy.
- Have led a seminar discussion on a set of readings and presented a review of them.
- Build formal writing and citation skills through response papers and a research project.
- Know how to conduct library research using article databases and other library resources.

Course Grading, Requirements and Expectations:
The final grade in the course will be based
1. Weekly Response Papers, 800-1,000 words, due Tuesdays at 11:59 PM. (25%)
2. Class Participation: Attendance and Discussion (25%)
3. Discussion Leader and 1,000-1,200-word review (sign-up in class) (20%)
4. Research Paper, 4,000-5,000 words, topic selected with instructor (30%)
   The grade for the paper will be broken down as follows:
   a. Paper Topic: Due Fri., Sep. 21 at 11:59 PM (10%)
   b. Annotated Bibliography: Due Fri., Oct. 19 at 11:59 PM (10%)
   c. Title & Abstract: Due Fri., Nov. 16 at 11:59 PM (10%)
   d. In-Class Presentation: Finals Week (Day/Time TBA) (20%)
   e. Final Draft: Due Fri., Dec. 7 at 11:59 PM (50%)

1. *Weekly Response Papers* of 800-1,000 words take the place of exams. They are due on the Tuesday of each week at 11:59 PM, posted to the appropriate Turnitin dropbox on the course Canvas page. The papers consist of two parts: 1) Summarize the central argument of the main reading(s) for the week, demonstrating your understanding of the most important ideas in them; 2) Address any aspect of that week’s readings relevant to your own interests in the study of religion. Citations from the readings and a reference(s) page in a Chicago style (notes-bibliography or author-date) are required. No outside research is permitted, though readings marked “Optional” may be consulted and cited—they should not be discussed at length, however. These papers are your opportunity to raise questions that you wish to discuss in class and to organize your thoughts for a more productive class discussion. You are encouraged to make connections between readings within and across weekly topics. The instructor will read and comment on them on Wednesday of each week—you are encouraged to consult those comments before class. Late response papers will receive no credit.

2. *Class Participation* is crucial to a successful seminar. This is the course in which you transition from student to scholar by working collaboratively with your colleagues to understand the texts and to develop your individual research questions. Come to class with the readings completed; bring questions and make connections with other readings. Mark passages that speak to a particular topic of class or personal interest, or which were difficult to understand. Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to participate in the discussion.

3. Each student will *Lead Discussion* of at least one week’s readings. A sign-up sheet will be circulated during the second class meeting. During the class meeting, the discussion leader should present a 10-minute summary of the main text(s) and generate questions for class discussion. Additionally, the presenter should give a brief overview of the scholar’s (or scholars’) career, referencing other major writings. The discussion leader must then submit to Turnitin by the Friday at 11:59 PM of his/her week (that is, the day after the class meeting) a review of 1,000-1,200 words, to be subsequently distributed to the class, summarizing the main reading(s) for that week, highlighting its (their) contributions to the field of scholarship, and explaining the critiques of the theory. The discussion leader does not have to submit a response paper on the week that s/he leads class discussion. In the case that more than one student must present in class on a given week, please consult with the instructor about how to divide the written work.

4. The *Research Paper* will be due on Friday, December 7 at 11:59 PM, posted to Turnitin. There are deadlines to submit a topic, annotated bibliography, and abstract (all submitted to Turnitin) over the course of the semester (see above). Students must discuss their paper topics with the instructor (during office hours) by Thursday, October 4. The December 6 class meeting will be a symposium in which students will make 10-minute presentations, with visual aids (e.g. a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation), of their research with 5 minutes for questions; it
comprises 20% of the total paper grade. Additionally, papers must be properly referenced using a Chicago citation system (author-date or notes-bibliography). See below for the policy on late papers.

Policies:
1. Written assignments must be double-spaced, with 1” margins all around, in 12-point, Times New Roman (or equivalent) font.
2. **Late papers** (i.e., reviews and assignments related to the final research paper) will lose a full letter grade per day and will not be accepted after four days beyond the due date. **Late weekly response papers will not be accepted.**
3. All student work must conform to University policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course, and may include referral for disciplinary measures.
4. Work will be graded only if posted to the proper Turnitin dropbox; the instructor will not grade work submitted by email. In cases of technical difficulties, the work may be emailed to confirm on-time submission only. In such cases, the work must be submitted to Turnitin within 24 hours of the original due date/time without changes to the emailed document.
5. Students should expect that their views and opinions will be challenged, by both the instructor and fellow classmates. Students should expect to feel that they are being pushed out of their “comfort zone” to some extent in the interest of learning. To create a rich and safe learning environment, we must foster an atmosphere of respect for the various perspectives each of us brings to the seminar.

Grading scale:
A 93-100  A- 90-92  B+ 87-89  B 83-86  B- 80-82  C+ 77-79
C 73-76  D 60-72  F 0-59

Required Texts (Also on Course Reserve at Green Library [GL]):
Note: Bold terms indicate how readings will be marked in the Schedule of Readings below.
- All other readings are on Canvas (C) or are e-books available through the library website.

Recommended Texts:
These books are very helpful references for some of the most important foundational theorists of religion. Several readings from these volumes are posted on Blackboard as weekly readings.
Additionally, students, especially those planning to write theses, are strongly encouraged to obtain the following style guides:


**Schedule of Readings and Class Meetings:**

* “OPTIONAL” readings supplement and summarize the main readings for the week. They may aid in understanding the main texts but should not be discussed at length in response papers.
* “Further Reading” books provide additional resources to aid in developing research topics.

**Constructing “Religion”**

**Week 1 (Aug. 23):**

Class: Introductions, Overview of course, Sign-up for discussion leaders
Reading:

**Week 2 (Aug. 30):**

Reading:
- From “Religion” to “Religious Traditions”: Wilfred Cantwell Smith
  1) W.C. Smith, _The Meaning and End of Religion_ (esp. chs. 1-3, 5, 6, 8);
  2) T. Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith’s _The Meaning and End of Religion_,” 18 pp. (C).

**Phenomenology and the “Scientific Study of Religion”**

**Week 3 (Sep. 6):**

Reading: _Mysterium Tremendum_: Rudolf Otto
- 1) R. Otto, _The Idea of the Holy_ (esp. chs. 1-9, 14-17, 21);


**Week 4 (Sep. 13):**

Reading: Psychoanalysis and the “Origin” of Religion: Sigmund Freud
- 1) Freud, _Civilization and Its Discontents_;

- 2) Olson, “Psychology of Religion” (C).

Week 5 (Sep. 20): Myth, Time, and History (of Religions): Mircea Eliade

**Paper Topic Due Friday, Sep. 21 at 11:59 PM on Canvas/Turnitin**

**Reading:**
1) Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*;
OPTIONAL: Olson, “History of Religions” (C).


**Historicism I: Sociology of Religion**

Week 6 (Sep. 27): Marx and Weber on Religion and Society

**Reading:**
1) Marx: “Estranged Labor,” “Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” and “Theses on Feuerbach” (C);


**Anthropology of Religion: Structuralism: Language-Ordered Society**

Week 7 (Oct. 4): Structural Anthropology: Claude Lévi-Strauss

**Last day to consult with instructor about your paper topic**

**Reading:**
1) de Saussure, Ch. 3, “The Object of Linguistics,” from *A Course in General Linguistics*, 10 pp.;
2) Lévi-Strauss, “Introduction: History and Anthropology” and Part III: Magic and Religion (Chs. 9-12) from *Structural Anthropology*, 104 pp.;
OPTIONAL: Olson, “Anthropology of Religion” (C).


Week 8 (Oct. 11): Library Workshop with Stephanie Brenenson (Instructor at Conference)

**Anthropology of Religion: Structuralism from the Field**

Week 9 (Oct. 18): Structural Analysis from the Field: Clifford Geertz

**Annotated Bibliography Due Friday, Oct. 19 at 11:59 PM on Canvas/Turnitin**

**Reading:**
1) Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” from *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 27 pp.;
2) Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” from *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 41 pp.;
3) Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” from *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 39 pp.;
*Use Turabian, Chs. 18-19 for author-date style citation system.*

Historicism II: Post-Structuralism: Language and Practices

Week 10 (Oct. 25):
Post-Structuralism, Part I: Foucault and the Conditions of Knowledge
(Guest Instructor: Dr. Whitney Bauman)

Reading:
1) Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 24 pp.;
2) Foucault, “Governmentality,” 21 pp.;
3) Foucault, “The Order of Things,” (Interview) 7 pp.;
4) Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 20 pp. (all on C).

OPTIONAL: 1) Olson, “Poststructural/Postmodern Approaches to Religion,” 10 pp.;
2) Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx;” “Return to History” (all on C).

Further Reading: M. Foucault, The Order of Things and Discipline & Punish.

Week 11 (Nov. 1):
Post-Structuralism, Part II: Bourdieu and the Social Sciences

Reading:
2) Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” 44 pp.;

Further Reading: P. Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice and The Logic of Practice.

Feminism and Subjectivity

Week 12 (Nov. 8):
The Contested Female Religious Subject

Reading:
1) Mernissi, Introduction and Ch. 5 “The Hijab, The Veil” from The Veil and the Male Elite, 28 pp.;
2) Mahmood, Ch. 1 “The Subject of Freedom” and Ch. 2 “Topography of the Piety Movement” from The Politics of Piety, 78 pp. (all on C).

Further Reading: J. Butler, Gender Trouble; R. Reuther, Women and Redemption.

Postmodern Ethics

Week 13 (Nov. 15):
Postmodern Theology, Planetary Ethics, and Meaning Making

Title and Abstract Due Friday, Nov. 16 at 11:59 PM on Canvas/TURNITIN

Reading:
1) Bauman, Religion & Ecology;
2) Review of Religion & Ecology (TBA) (C).


Week 14 (Nov. 22):
NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

The Politics of Representation

Week 15 (Nov. 29):
“Representing” Religious People and Reflecting on Fieldwork

Reading:
1) Edward Said, Introduction to Orientalism, 28 pp.;
2) Robert A. Orsi, Preface and Ch. 3 “Imagining Women” from Thank You, St. Jude, 33 pp.;
3) Robert A. Orsi, Introduction and Ch. 5 “Reflections on Fieldwork in Chicago” from Between Heaven and Earth, 48 pp. (all on C).


**Presentations**
Week 16 (Dec. 6): Student Research Paper Symposium

**Final Research Paper due Friday, December 7 at 11:59 PM on Canvas/Turnitin**