

REL2000 - Introduction to Religion and Cultural Studies
Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the fields of religion and cultural studies. It will explore religion and cultural studies from various disciplinary perspectives with special attention given to the relationship between religion and popular culture. Some key questions to be addressed are: What is religion? What is cultural studies? What are some theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion and popular culture? What types of definitional approaches are employed in classifying religion and popular culture? How does one study religion in and through popular culture?

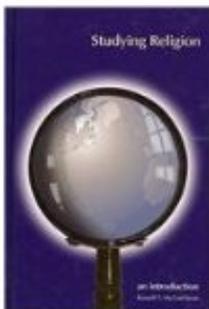
Note: this is not a survey of world religions course (viz., REL 2300: World Religions).

Course Objectives:

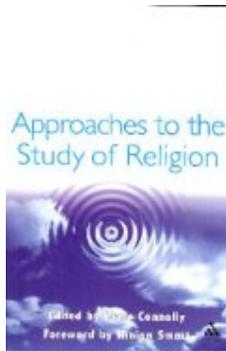
- To introduce students to the fields of religion and cultural studies
- To engage students in critical thinking about the relationship between religion and popular culture
- To present various methodological and theoretical perspectives in religion and cultural studies
- To present theories of definition and classification as they relate to religion and cultural studies

Texts:

- *Studying Religion: An Introduction*, Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007)



- *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Peter Connolly ed. (New York: Continuum, 2006)



- *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture: Theories, Themes, Products and Practices*, Terry Ray Clark and Dan W. Clinton, Jr eds. (Routledge: New York, 2012)



Hi, All.

My name is Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo (or Dr. D to make things easier). I'm here to help facilitate your progression through this online course dealing with the academic study of religion, as well as any questions or issues that may arise as you're completing the readings and the assignments. Since my academic background is primarily in philosophy of religion, you can expect that a close reading of each thinker's perspective in a critical fashion will be our main focus (btw, thinking critically does not mean thinking negatively about the perspectives provided). We will do our best to try to understand each perspective; that is, read it in the best possible light before thinking about the consistency, implications, and value of the argument, proposition, position, or perspective being proposed. What unites each of the perspectives through their often diametrically opposed differences is that each proposes a way of thinking about religion (and how we think about our thinking about religion). Keep in mind that this course is based on theoretical and disciplinary approaches to religion and the problem of classifying, categorizing, and defining religion. As noted above, this is not a World Religions course (i.e., REL 2300). While different religious traditions will be mentioned, the primary issue to be addressed is how we came to distinguish certain cultural beliefs, experiences, rituals, and practices as religion in the first place.

If you hope to do well in the course, make sure you keep up with the readings, assessments, and assignments.

Point Distribution & Grade Scale

I. Writing Assignments (44% of total possible points): Participation in the course will be determined by different writing assignments (i.e., posts) in each of the modules. These may consist of discussion questions/responses, essays, short answer, or video posts. Directions for these written assignments will be provided under the "Assignments" heading in each module. Writing assignments may have different closing dates during a module; it is the student's responsibility to be aware of the closing dates listed in each module. Do not wait until the due day to respond. Writing assignments **will not** be reopened once closed. If you have a documented medical emergency, you must provide a note from your doctor in order for me to consider allowing a missed writing assignment to be completed.

II. Quizzes/Final (56% of total possible points): There will be a quiz in each of the modules as well as a final exam in the last module to assess your comprehension of the material. Quizzes and the final exam will consist of responding to multiple-choice questions based on the readings. Given the (default) open book nature of the course, **quizzes and the final will be timed**. So, make sure you have read and comprehended the chapters before taking the quizzes/final. I would also suggest making a handy reference guide with names, theoretical positions, beliefs, etc. along with page numbers to reduce page-flipping during the timed assessments.

Note: One missed quiz missed during the semester may be taken at the request of the student without a point reduction or a documented medical emergency. **One** missed writing assignment (or extension for a writing assignment) during the semester may be submitted with a 5 point reduction from total points earned on the assignment. For any other accommodations, a signed doctor's note documenting a medical emergency will be required. If you would like to take a missed quiz or submit a missed assignment, you must send me a message with your request (sooner rather than later). All requests must be made prior to module 8.

The above percentages are approximations, since assignments and point totals may change in any given semester.

Final grades will be based on the **number of points earned** by the student out of a total of 500 possible points. Canvas has a habit of breaking down different types of assignments in terms of percentages. One of the problems with this feature is that it doesn't count missed assignments in its calculation (which yields an inaccurate percentage). This feature cannot be turned off; do not let those percentages confuse you. Final grades will be based on the **total number of points** earned as reflected in the grade scale below. Note: This scale has 2 rather than 3 possibilities relative to each passing letter grade (A/A-, B+/B, C+/C, etc.)

Grade Scale

A = 473-500 pts.
A- = 448-472 pts.
B+ = 423-447 pts.
B = 398-422 pts.

C+ = 373-397 pts.
C = 348-372 pts.
D+ = 323-347 pts.
D = 298-322 pts.
F = 297 pts. and below

Academic/Personal Conduct

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Personal Conduct

You are expected to conduct yourself in a manner that is conducive to the academic ends that we are attempting to achieve (see University standards for personal conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule). This course is an educational safe zone. It welcomes the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, ethnicities, religions, philosophies, and abilities. Consequently, all members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity and to refrain from offensive posts. It is expected that each student will be sensitive to the beliefs/values of others in the course. **Critical thinking should not be understood as "belief bashing."** In the case that this advice is not followed you should expect a lowering of your final grade or, in the event of continuous serious violations, removal from the course.

Student Accessibility Statement

The University of Central Florida considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be a strength and critical to its educational mission. UCF expects every member of the university community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture for all in its classrooms, work environments, and at campus events. Dimensions of diversity can include sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith and non-faith perspectives, socio-economic class, political ideology, education, primary language, family status, military experience, political beliefs, cognitive style, and communication style. The individual intersection of these experiences and characteristics must be valued in our community.

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at www.shield.ucf.edu

If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible and/or contact Student Accessibility Services.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:

Title IX – EO/AA - <http://www.eeo.ucf.edu/> & askanadvocate@ucf.edu

Disability Accommodation – Student Accessibility Services - <http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/> & sas@ucf.edu

Diversity and Inclusion Training and Events – www.diversity.ucf.edu

Student Bias Grievances – Just Knights response team - <http://jkrt.sdes.ucf.edu/>

UCF Compliance and Ethics Office - <http://compliance.ucf.edu/> & complianceandethics@ucf.edu

Ombuds Office - <http://www.ombuds.ucf.edu>

Copyright

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Protocols

Classroom Expectations

The following ground rules will help your work in this course to go more smoothly. Please carefully review these expectations and follow them.

1. Academic integrity will be appraised according to the student academic behavior standards outlined in *The Golden Rule of the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook*. See <http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/> for further details.

2. Keep up with the reading. You have quite a few chapters, modules, discussion postings, and e-mail messages to read for the class. Please keep up with the reading. Students who keep up with the reading tend to do much better in this kind of class than those who do not.

Messaging

Make sure you:

1. Check your inbox at least twice per week (more often is better).
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message. Generally, two days is considered reasonable amount of time to receive a reply.
3. Be courteous and considerate. Being honest and expressing yourself freely is very important but being considerate of others online is just as important as in the classroom.
4. Make every effort to be clear. Online communication lacks the nonverbal cues that fill in much of the meaning in face-to-face communication.
5. Do not use all caps. This makes the message very hard to read and is considered "shouting." Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation (you may want to compose in a word processor, then cut and paste the message into the discussion).
6. Break up large blocks of text into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.
7. Never assume that your messages can be read by no one except yourself; others may be able to read or access your mail. Never send or keep anything that you would not mind seeing on the evening news.

Discussion Topics

General "rules of the road" or protocols that apply to messages also apply to the use of discussions. Use the following conventions when composing a discussion posting:

1. During a Discussion assignment, deadlines for posting to and replying will be specified with each assignment. It is a good practice to always check the Discussions multiple times during the week.
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message.
3. Everyone should feel free to participate in class and online discussions. Regular and meaningful discussion postings constitute a substantial portion of your grade.
4. Respect each other's ideas, feelings and experiences.
5. Be courteous and considerate. It is important to be honest and to express yourself freely, but being considerate of others is just as important and expected online as it is in the classroom.
6. Explore disagreements and support assertions with data and evidence.
7. Do not use postings such as "I agree," "I don't know either," "Who cares," or "ditto." They do not add to the discussion, take up space on the Discussions, and will not be counted for assignment credit.
8. Avoid posting large blocks of text. If you must, break them into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.

Word of Caution

Since this course is predominantly self-paced, my **very strong recommendation** is that you keep up with the readings, discussion posts, and quizzes in order to stay on track. It has been my

experience that self-paced courses are a double-edged sword. The flexibility that makes online courses popular also brings with it the temptation to procrastinate in the absence of weekly F2F meetings. As a result, withdrawals and "F's" due to the inability to complete work are very high in online courses. **Given this flexibility as well as the open-book nature of this course, the final, quizzes, and posts will not be re-opened; no "Incomplete" will be granted without a documented medical emergency. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all deadlines.** If you find that you have forgotten, misread, misunderstood, misconstrued the deadlines, and/or have “misplaced” your cyber-calendar, are the victim of a computer crash, have fallen prey to cyber-gremlins, and/or your cyber-dog ate your cyber-paper, and/or just plain procrastinated, **do not e-mail the instructor requesting any of the aforementioned.**

The moral of the story is this: if you want to avoid undue stress, anxiety, and do well in the course, make sure you take the time to read on a consistent basis and check in on the discussion messages regularly; **do not wait until the last possible day/minute to take quizzes and post discussions.** Keep in mind those students that are actively engaged in the course will fare better at the end of the semester. If you have any questions concerning the course, feel free to send me a message. If you encounter material in the readings that you do not understand, contact me and I will gladly assist you.

Federal Financial Aid Regulation

All faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the **Student Information for Instructor** assignment included in this module by the date listed in the module (or, if adding the course late, as soon as possible after adding the course). This assignment should be turned in no later than the end of the first (introductory) module. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Support Services

The following services/resources are available to assist students:

- Review the [Academic Engagement for Financial Aid FAQ](#) web page for a list of frequently asked questions.
- Online@UCF Support – Provides technical assistance to students who use Webcourses@UCF.
 - Live support 8:30 to 4:30
 - 407-823-0407
 - Live Chat and online document search: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/>
 - Email: onlinesupport@ucf.edu
 - Support form: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/contact-online-support/>
 - Weekend and evening hours: Messages are answered by email.
- Service Desk – Students should contact the Service Desk for issues regarding NID passwords or access to university systems.
 - Hours: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday-Friday
 - Call: 407-823-5117
 - Website: <http://www.cst.ucf.edu/service-desk/>

Module	Topic	Text & Readings	Module Opens/Closes
1	Course Introduction	Course and Canvas Information <i>Studying Religion: an Introduction</i> (Preface and Introduction)	Mon. 8/22 @ 9:00 am - Mon. 8/29 @ 4:00 pm
2	What is the Study of Religion? What's in a Name? History of "Religion" The Essentials of Religion The Functions of Religion Public Discourse on Religion Religion and the Insider/Outsider Problem The Resemblance Among Religions Religion and Classification	<i>Studying Religion</i> Introduction and Chapters 1-8	Mon. 8/29 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 9/12 @ 4:00 pm
3	Afterword: The Necessary Lie: Duplicity in the Disciplines Glossary Scholars	<i>Studying Religion</i> Afterword and pp. 81-192	Mon. 9/12 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 9/26 @ 4:00 pm
4	Anthropological Approaches Feminist Approaches	<i>Approaches to the Study of Religion</i> Intro & Chapters 1 & 2	Mon. 9/26 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 10/10 @ 4:00 pm
5	Phenomenological Approaches Philosophical Approaches	<i>Approaches to the Study of Religion</i> Chapters 3 & 4	Mon. 10/10 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 10/24 @ 4:00 pm
6	Psychological Approaches Sociological Approaches	<i>Approaches to the Study of Religion</i> Chapters 5 & 6	Mon. 10/24 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 11/7 @ 4:00 pm
7	Theological Approaches What is religion? What is popular culture? How are they related?	<i>Approaches to the Study of Religion</i> Ch. 7	Mon. 11/7 @ 4:00 pm - Mon. 11/21 @ 4:00 pm

	<p>Religion in science fiction film and television</p> <p>Religion and cinema horror</p>	<p><i>Understanding Religion and Popular Culture</i></p> <p>Introduction, Chs. 3 & 4</p>	
8	<p>On the sacred power of violence in popular culture</p> <p>Religion and video games: shooting aliens in cathedrals</p> <p>The Coca-Cola brand and religion</p> <p>Postmodern prophecy: Bob Dylan and the practices of self-subversion</p>	<p><i>Understanding Religion and Popular Culture</i></p> <p>Chs. 5, 8, 9, & 13</p>	<p>Mon. 11/21 @ 4:00 pm - Tues. 12/6 @ 4:00 pm</p> <p>Note the different closing date for this module during final exams week</p>