



REL 2000 - 0W60: Introduction to Religion and Cultural Studies  
Semester: Fall 2017  
Credit Hours: 3.0  
Mode: Web

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# 1. Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Nick Shrubsole

Virtual Office Hours: Available By Appointment via Skype or Conferences (Webcourses)

E-mail: [Nicholas.Shrubsole@ucf.edu](mailto:Nicholas.Shrubsole@ucf.edu) (Preferred method of contact)



## Biography

Hello everyone! My name is Nick Shrubsole and I am your instructor for this course. Professionally, I hold a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Waterloo (2013), which is located just outside of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Yes, I am a Canadian living in Florida. How novel, right? I moved to Orlando in 2015 after teaching for a few years back in Canada. I have extensive teaching experience in a broad range of Religious Studies courses, including Introduction to Religion, World Religions and Politics, Religion, and the Law, Religion and Popular Culture, Evil, and a number of others.

My primary research interest is on Indigenous Religious Freedom. I am particularly concerned with how "religion" is understood publicly. I am deeply rooted within postcolonial theory, which seeks to expose and address the continuing impact of institutionalized colonial ideology in the legal system and, more generally, within society. More specifically, I am concerned with public understandings, misconceptions, and expectations of religion.

On a more personal note, I like to let my students know that I am a disabled person. I have had a visual impairment since I was quite young. In my face-to-face classes, this usually means that I need to tell students that they need to be a bit more assertive when they need a question answered, but that won't be the case here. Even though you could go this whole course without ever knowing I have a visual impairment, I think it's important to let you know when diverse experiences are leading the class. I also hope that my disclosure can make others with disabilities feel comfortable in this class and beyond. Every disability is unique, so it is important to share our stories and let people know that we are here.

Aside from my professional credentials and disclosure, I do have a life outside of work, although it is difficult at times in this kind of employment. I played a lot of music back in Canada, so I am actively trying to continue that here in Florida. I enjoy watching live music and try to get to at least one show every couple of weeks. I enjoy going out with the wonderful friends I have met in this city as much as I enjoy taking a break and watching any number of quality shows.

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## 2. Course Description

### *Course Catalogue*

Introduction to the fields of religion and cultural studies explored from various disciplinary perspectives with attention given to the relationship between religion and popular culture

### Instructor Description

For most people, religion in an academic setting is first encountered comparatively by looking at various religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, among others. Those religions are then examined through particular dimensions, such as sacred space, sacred texts, authority, and myth, among a few others. If I'm being honest, this is a very old way of studying religion, popularized by the famous Religious Studies scholar Ninian Smart, among others. Not only is the approach very old, it is also problematic. Why? This is where REL 2000 becomes immensely important.

This course acts as an introduction primarily to Religious Studies with attention given to Cultural Studies and an emphasis on the intersections of Religion and Popular Culture. We are not so much concerned with the subject of Religious Studies, but rather the field. The "field" refers to the history, methods, and principal ideas in the activity of studying what has come to be called "religion." Together we will answer several critical questions in the subject-field of Religious Studies including the following: What is Religion? How do we study religion? What is the relationship between religion and culture? What are the challenges of studying religion and culture?

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## 2. Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the complexity of the concept of "religion"
  - Explain various methodological approaches to the study of religion
  - Explain key issues in the study of religion
  - Discern good sources from bad sources and primary sources from secondary sources
  - Understand the various ways in which religion and popular culture intersect\
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## 4. Required Texts

There are two required texts for this course. The most recent edition of each book is required as they both include new chapters covered in this course.

George Chryssides and Ron Geaves, eds. *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Concepts* Second Edition. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013 (ISBN: 9781780938400)

Bruce David Forbes, ed. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* Third Edition. University of California Press, 2017. (ISBN: 9780520291461)

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## 5. General Expectations in a Fully Online Course

This is a fully online course. For this reason, students must develop their time management skills effectively. As an online course, you are still expected to dedicate the same amount of time you would in a face-to-face course. The major difference is that there is no scheduled class time. The work that you conduct outside of the classroom remains relatively the same, but the experience of the classroom is a little different. In a classroom, you may attend class at a scheduled time at which point you can listen to a lecture and engage with your fellow classmates in meaningful discussion. When you leave the class, you may independently set up study groups, but many students may just take that time to read their text, complete assignments, and make study guides for in-class tests. In an online course, you will continue to engage with your classmates, listen to some lectures, and participate in small group assignments. The difference is that this is completed online at a time that is more conducive for your schedule. Here are some helpful hints at the beginning of this course to make sure you stay on schedule:

- **Write down the critical dates for all assignments in the course.** You may choose to just use the calendar function in Webcourses, but I would encourage you to use a calendar that you encounter regularly (i.e., on your phone, laptop, tablet, or, wall calendar).
  - **Note the opening and closing dates for assignments.** In an online course, you have windows to complete assignments rather than a specific due date. Note both the opening and closing dates of all assignments.
  - **Ensure that you login at least four times a week.**
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## 6. Description of Assignments and Tests

Each Module contains several assignments related to each item of content. Each module also concludes with a discussion board that asks you to apply the theoretical framework you have been working with to a cultural object.

Assignment	Grade Weight	Description
Syllabus Quiz	n/a	As of Fall 2014, faculty members are required to complete a syllabus quiz at the beginning of each course. In order to document your completion of this activity by the end of the semester, please add the following academic activity by the end of the semester. Failure to do so may result in a grade of D.
<i>The Study of Religion</i> Weekly Quizzes	25%	In order to ensure that students keep up with the course, there will be weekly quizzes for weeks 2 through 12 of the course, each worth 5% of the grade for the week. The quizzes are open-book and multiple-choice questions.
Religion and Popular Culture in America Presentations and Peer-Review	25%	<p>In the final four weeks of the semester, each student will be responsible for creating a PowerPoint or Video presentation on a specific section of the text <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i> (you will collectively work together to create these presentations over the next 4 weeks). Small groups must work out among themselves which chapters must be covered (if there are five members, each member must cover one chapter).</p> <p>After the completion of each presentation, students will be responsible for providing peer review of the other presentations. It is important to note that your peer review work from. It is important to note that your peer review work will not impact each other's grades. You are encouraged to constructively provide feedback to your peers on their presentation without penalty by Wednesday of the final week where submissions will be final.</p> <p>Each presentation is worth 5% (for a total of 20%) and the peer reviews will make up the final 5% of this assignment.</p>
Semester-long Small Group Religion and Popular Culture Analysis Project	35%	<p>Students will be divided into groups of five. Each group will be assigned a religious artifact, religious or cultural. Each group will be responsible for analyzing the artifact as diverse as Harry Potter to alien-worshipping. Each group will receive individual prompts that will contrast the artifact with theories, and difficulties in the study of religion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss your own status as either an individual or community. What biases should you be aware of in your positionality?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design a short survey to collect statistical data. What do you hope to learn?</li> </ul> <p>Each assignment will be equally weighted among all assignments.</p>
Semester-long Small Group Final Presentation and Peer-Review	15%	<p>In week 14, Students are responsible for submitting a final presentation on their research methods, and key issues in the study of your religion and popular culture. Unlike your individual Religion and Popular Culture assignments, this presentation is a group effort.</p> <p>Then, collectively, each group will be responsible for presenting their research. The peer-review process does not penalize students for late submissions; rather offers an opportunity to offer constructive feedback. The peer-review will comprise of 5% of your final grade.</p>

### *Late Assignment Policies*

All mini-quizzes will be open for a total of four days after they are due. Students will receive a 10% late penalty per day. This means that quizzes will close on the Thursday at 11:59 p.m. after the due date. For example, if you complete the quiz on the Monday after the quiz is due, you will receive a 10% deduction. So, if you receive a 7 / 10, your grade would be adjusted to a 6 / 10.

The semester-long weekly assignments will adhere to the same late policy as above. Note that only one student needs to submit the assignment on behalf of the group. If the assignment is late, all members of the group will be penalized. If, at any time, a member of the group is not reachable. This should be noted in the assignment. Students who do not complete any one assignment will receive a deduction from their grade individually.

Your *Religion and Popular Culture in America* presentation will be subject to the same late penalty as stated above with the quizzes and semester-long weekly assignments. Late assignments may not be resubmitted if they are submitted in time for peer-review.

Your semester-long presentation will be subject to the same penalty as the above assignments. Note that only one student needs to submit the assignment on behalf of the group. If the assignment is late, all members of the group will be penalized. If, at any time, a member of the group is not reachable. This should be noted in the assignment. Students who do not complete any one assignment will receive a deduction from their grade individually.

No late peer-reviews will be graded. No late re-submissions will be accepted.

### *Effective Group Work*

Working together through this course is very important. Each student should make a real effort to stay in contact with each other. Hold each other responsible. It is expected that the work will be distributed evenly and all students will participate evenly. If this is not the case, please have a group representative contact me.

It is recommended that you use the "Discussions" or "Conferences" tab when communicating with each other. This way, your professor can monitor discussions. If you choose to engage with each other on Facebook, Google Hangouts, or some other social networking platform, the professor will be less likely to weigh in on a situation if one was to arise. Of course, how you choose to communicate is up to each group.

If you can meet in person or setup a multi-screen Google Hang, do so. I'd be happy to join in as well. In fact, I'll plan to have one of those meetings with the group at least twice over the semester. It is important to recognize that we are all human beings. Treat everyone with respect and get to know each other.

Set your own due dates prior to the actual due dates and meet them. Only one person needs to submit so you'll have to all send material to one individual and you may also have to discuss that information. Do so early.

Spread out the leadership. Unless one person is comfortable being the point person for the group, distribute the responsibility of submitting and contacting the professor evenly through the year. Set a schedule in advance and make sure everyone has a copy.

It is important that everyone volunteers for the work they conduct. Try not to delegate. If you must, ensure that mandatory responsibilities are rewarded later in the semester with first choices or work and things such as that.

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## 7. Grading Scheme

Below you will find general descriptions of the grades offered in this course. Note that "

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
A	94% - 100%	Reserved for excellence, far exceeds average understanding as evidenced in course work and goes significantly beyond basic understanding.
A-	90% - < 94%	Excellent, exceeds average understanding as evidenced in course work and goes well beyond basic understanding.
B+	87% - < 90%	Very good. Far above average, fully meets or exceeds average understanding as evidenced in course work, fully understands the basics and goes beyond that level.
B	84% - < 87%	Very good. Above average, fully meets average understanding as evidenced in course work, fully understands the basics and can engage material somewhat beyond that level.

B-	80% - < 84%	Very good. Just above average, fully meets expectations for basic understanding as evidenced in coursework and fully understands the basics and can engage material at that level.
C+	77% - < 80%	Slightly above average, fully meets expectations for basic understanding as evidenced in coursework and understands the basics.
C	74% - < 77%	Average, meets minimum expectations and satisfies course requirements.
C-	70% - < 74%	Slightly below average, meets bare minimum expectations and satisfies course requirements.
D+	67% - < 70%	Lacking in quality. Below average, meets most minimum expectations and satisfies all or most course requirements.
D	64% - < 67%	Lacking in quality. Below average, meets many minimum expectations and satisfies all or most course requirements.
D-	60% - < 64%	Greatly lacking in quality. Far below average, but meets most minimum expectations and satisfies most course requirements with minimal understanding evidenced in course work.
F	0% - < 60%	Fails to meet minimum expectations in understanding and course work as evidenced by performance and submission of graded elements.

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## 8. Instructor Policies

### E-mail correspondence

1. Please use the inbox located to the left of this page to correspond with your instructor.
2. Think of an e-mail as a formal letter when corresponding with instructors (as opposed to a text message). Begin with a salutation (a greeting) and conclude with your name. Be respectful and considerate in your language and re-read your e-mail before sending.
3. Review the course syllabus to ensure that your question is not answered there.
4. For technical support, contact Online@UCF by clicking the following link: [UCF Online Support](#).

### Late Assignment Policies

All mini-quizzes will be open for a total of four days after they are due. Students will receive a 10% late penalty per day. This means that quizzes will close on the Thursday at 11:59 p.m. after the due date. For example, if you complete the quiz on the Monday after the quiz is due, you will receive a 10% deduction. So, if you receive a 7 / 10, your grade would be adjusted to a 6 / 10.

The semester-long weekly assignments will adhere to the same late policy as above. Note that only one student needs to submit the assignment on behalf of the group. If the assignment is late, all members of the group will be penalized. If, at any time, a member of the group is not reachable. This should be noted in the assignment. Students who do not complete any one assignment will receive a deduction from their grade individually.

Your *Religion and Popular Culture in America* presentation will be subject to the same late penalty as stated above with the quizzes and semester-long weekly assignments. Late assignments may not be resubmitted if they are submitted in time for peer-review.

Your semester-long presentation will be subject to the same penalty as the above assignments. Note that only one student needs to submit the assignment on behalf of the group. If the assignment is late, all members of the group will be penalized. If, at any time, a member of the group is not reachable. This should be noted in the assignment. Students who do not complete any one assignment will receive a deduction from their grade individually.

No late peer-reviews will be graded. No late re-submissions will be accepted.

### **Virtual Open Door Policy**

Your instructor is here to help! I encourage you to contact me at any time to discuss your questions and concerns about the course. .

### **No Extra Credit Policy**

This course offers no extra credit assignments. Please do not inquire about extra credit.

### **Maintaining a Respectful Environment**

This course will be guided by an ethic of mutual respect and responsibility. At times, the topics may become controversial and online debate rather tense. While disagreement is part of a healthy university environment, please engage your colleagues (including the instructor) with respect and in such a way to promote a response. Agreement should not be the task in online discussions, but rather education and, where possible, consensus.

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## 9. University Policies and Important Information

### **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.

### **Disability Statement**

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with

the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with [Student Disability Services](#), Ferrell Commons, 7F, Room 185, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

### **Diversity Statement**

The University of Central Florida recognizes that our individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us, rather than divide us. In this class, people of all ethnicities, genders and gender identities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities are strongly encouraged to share their rich array of perspectives and experiences. If you feel your differences may in some way isolate you from UCF's community or if you have a need of any specific accommodations, please speak with the instructor early in the semester about your concerns and what we can do together to help you become an active and engaged member of our class and community.

### **UCF Cares**

During your UCF career, you may experience challenges including struggles with academics, finances, or your personal well-being. UCF has a multitude of resources available to all students. Please visit [UCFCares.com](http://UCFCares.com)([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#) if you are seeking resources and support, or if you are worried about a friend or classmate. Free services and information are included for a variety of student concerns, including but not limited to alcohol use, bias incidents, mental health concerns, and financial challenges. You can also e-mail [ucfcares@ucf.edu](mailto:ucfcares@ucf.edu) with questions or for additional assistance. You can reach a UCF Cares staff member between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. by calling 407-823-5607. If you are in immediate distress, please call Counseling and Psychological Services to speak directly with a counselor 24/7 at 407-823-2811, or please call 911.

### **A Note on 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.

### **Warning about 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.

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## 10. Course Schedule

As you may need to review the Course Schedule on a regular basis, it is located on its own page. You can find it here: [Course Schedule](#)