



REL 2000 - 0W60: Introduction to Religion and Cultural Studies

Semester: Fall 2018

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)

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## 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.

## 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 principle 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?

Note: there are no prerequisite skills, knowledge, or courses, required to take REL 2000.

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## 3. 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. Technical Competencies and Necessary Hardware/Software

The ability to use Webcourses is essential for any online course. Please review the [Webcourses Tour](#) for more information.

Students may want to become familiar with a Word processor such as Microsoft Word (available for free through UCF).

Aside from an internet browser and a computer/tablet, no other hardware or software is necessary.

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## 5. 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)

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research* 4th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. (ISBN: 978-0226239736)

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## 6. 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.**

## 7. 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 / Introduce Yourself Discussion	n/a	<p>As of Fall 2014, faculty members 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 following academic activity by the end of the first week of classes, or as soon as possible after adding the course. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.</p> <p>The <b>Introduce Yourself</b> discussion is ungraded. It is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to your small group. You will also be asked to offer your preliminary definition of religion as a starting point for our discussions that follow.</p>
Weekly Quizzes	60% (14 quizzes)	<p>In order to ensure that students keep up with the vitally important readings and lecture material for the course, each week contains a mini-quiz related to the content from the week. The quizzes are open-book and must be taken independently. They will consist of multiple-choice and short answer questions. Typically, each quiz will contain one short answer question drawn from a list of questions, which will be communicated in advance of the quiz. You are encouraged to prepare answers for all possible short answer questions in advance so you can copy-and-paste your response into the required answer field.</p>

<p>Craft of Research Quizzes</p>	<p>15% (5 quizzes)</p>	<p>Over the course of the semester, students are required to read and respond to quizzes on the widely-read book <i>The Craft of Research</i>. It is through this book that you will develop an understanding of the basics for good practice in research. The skills you learn here will translate into all of your university classes.</p> <p>All five quizzes have scheduled due dates in the week following the scheduled reading dates. You will have up to five attempts for each quiz. Your highest grade will always be kept. You must score at least 80% on each quiz. Failure to score 80% or higher on any single quiz will result in a -5% deduction to your Research Skills Assignment. For example, if you score less than 80% on one quiz, this will result in a 5% deduction to your Research Skills Assignment. If you score less than 80% on all five of your quizzes, you will receive a 25% deduction on your Research Skills Assignment.</p>
<p>Research Skills Assignment</p>	<p>25%</p>	<p>Over the course of the semester, students will be asked to demonstrate their knowledge about research in the subject-field of Religion and Cultural Studies. Students will submit a series of responses that relate to their own interests and the craft of professional academic research.</p> <p>Students will be given an opportunity part of the way through the semester to submit the material they have completed to that point. Otherwise, students are expected to submit the completed assignment during the sixteenth week of the course. Both the feedback date and the final submission date are listed in the course calendar.</p> <p>Some of the things students will be asked to do include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and revise a research question</li> <li>• Demonstrate the ability to gather and review secondary literature</li> <li>• Distinguish between primary sources, secondary sources, and tertiary sources</li> <li>• Assess internet resources and determine good sources from poor sources</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate how to properly use evidence</li> </ul> <p>Specific instructions appear in the opening module.</p> <p>Note that deductions for this assignment may be applied based on your performance in <i>The Craft of Research</i> quizzes.</p>
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## 8. Grading Scheme

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

Grade	Percentage	Brief Description
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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## 9. 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. The vast majority (if not all) professors in Humanities and Religious Studies at UCF have a PhD, so be sure to avoid salutations that begin with "Mr.," "Ms.," or "Mrs." Your default should be "Professor" or "Dr."
3. Be respectful and considerate in your language and re-read your e-mail before sending.
4. Review the course syllabus to ensure that your question is not answered there.
5. For technical support, contact Online@UCF by clicking the following link: [UCF Online Support](#).

### Late Assignment Policies

All weekly content quizzes must be completed by the scheduled date. Late submissions will be allowed for up to 3 days following the due date with a penalty of 10% per day. After three days, submission windows will close and no further late quizzes will be accepted.

*The Craft of Research* quizzes will be accepted for up to three days following their due date without penalty. Recall that you are allowed up to five attempts for each of these quizzes. Your highest grade will always be kept.

The Research Skills Assignment must be submitted by the designated due date in the final week of the course (during exam week).

*The Craft of Research* quizzes late policy is listed above in the assignment description.

### 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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# 10. University Policy Statements

## Academic Integrity

Students should familiarize themselves with [UCF's Rules of Conduct](#). According to Section 1, "Academic Misconduct," students are prohibited from engaging in:

- *Unauthorized assistance*: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise unless specifically authorized by the instructor of record. The unauthorized possession of examination or course-related material also constitutes cheating.
- *Communication to another through written, visual, electronic, or oral means*: The presentation of material which has not been studied or learned, but rather was obtained through someone else's efforts and used as part of an examination, course assignment, or project.
- *Commercial Use of Academic Material*: Selling of course material to another person, student, and/or uploading course material to a third-party vendor without authorization or without the express written permission of the university and the instructor. Course materials include but are not limited to class notes, Instructor's PowerPoints, course syllabi, tests, quizzes, labs, instruction sheets, homework, study guides, handouts, etc.
- *Falsifying or misrepresenting* the student's own academic work.
- *Plagiarism*: Using or appropriating another's work without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own.
- *Multiple Submissions*: Submitting the same academic work for credit more than once without the express written permission of the instructor.
- *Helping another violate* academic behavior standards.

For more information about Academic Integrity, students may consult [The Center for Academic Integrity](#).

For more information about plagiarism and misuse of sources, see “[Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices](#)”.

### **Responses to Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, or Cheating**

Students should also familiarize themselves with the procedures for academic misconduct in UCF’s student handbook, [The Golden Rule](#). UCF faculty members have a responsibility for students’ education and the value of a UCF degree, and so seek to prevent unethical behavior and when necessary respond to academic misconduct. Penalties can include a failing grade in an assignment or in the course, suspension or expulsion from the university, and/or a "Z Designation" on a student’s official transcript indicating academic dishonesty, where the final grade for this course will be preceded by the letter Z. For more information about the Z Designation, see [UCF Golden Rule](#).

### **Course Accessibility Statement**

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing access and inclusion for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need disability-related access in this course should contact the professor as soon as possible. Students should also connect with [Student Accessibility Services](#) (Ferrell Commons 185, [sas@ucf.edu](mailto:sas@ucf.edu), phone (407) 823-2371). Through Student Accessibility Services, a Course Accessibility Letter may be created and sent to professors, which informs faculty of potential access and accommodations that might be reasonable. Determining reasonable access and accommodations requires consideration of the course design, course learning objectives and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student.

### **Campus Safety Statement**

Emergencies on campus are rare, but if one should arise in our class, everyone needs to work together. Students should be aware of the surroundings and familiar with some basic safety and security concepts.

- In case of an emergency, dial 911 for assistance.
- Every UCF classroom contains an emergency procedure guide posted on a wall near the door. Please make a note of the guide’s physical location and consider reviewing the online version at [Emergency Guide](#).
- Students should know the evacuation routes from each of their classrooms and have a plan for finding safety in case of an emergency.
- If there is a medical emergency during class, we may need to access a first aid kit or AED (Automated External Defibrillator). To learn where those items are located in this building, see [Workplace Safety](#) (click on link from menu on left).
- To stay informed about emergency situations, sign up to receive UCF text alerts by going to [my.ucf.edu](http://my.ucf.edu) and logging in. Click on "Student Self Service" located on the left side of the screen in the tool bar, scroll down to the blue "Personal Information" heading on your Student Center screen, click on "UCF Alert," fill out the information, including your e-

mail address, cell phone number, and cell phone provider, click "Apply" to save the changes, and then click "OK."

- Students with special needs related to emergency situations should speak with their instructors outside of class.
- To learn about how to manage an active-shooter situation on campus or elsewhere, consider viewing this video. [You CAN Survive an Active Shooter](#)

## **Deployed Active Duty Military Students**

If you are a deployed active duty military student and feel that you may need a special accommodation due to that unique status, please contact your instructor to discuss your circumstances.

## **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.

## **UCF Cares**

We want all students at the university to know that UCF not only cares about their academic success, but their overall wellbeing. Life can get difficult at times, especially while in college. Many students are faced with stressors and challenges that begin to impact their success as a student. These stressors can appear in many different forms: difficulty adjusting to university life, family issues, financial difficulties, abusive relationships, etc. Our goal is to “build a culture of care, one knight at a time, where every UCF Knight cares about the health and safety of one another.” For support of these matters, please visit [UCF Cares](#).

## **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.