

Introduction to the Study of Religion (Rel 202) Fall 2021

(Rel 100: 3 CR. HUM).

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Office hours will be through Zoom: Friday 9-11am, and by appointment. Let me know when you would like to meet and I will send you a Zoom invitation.



"I may be a member but I wouldn't identify myself as 'religious.'"

Course Description:

We live in a world filled with religion, and it is our job as friends, relatives, coworkers, professionals, Americans, and members of a global community to be able to engage this powerful aspect of human life. This task of understanding matters regardless of our own personal relationships to a specific religious tradition. Equipping you for the beginning of this journey is the goal of this course. This class introduces students to the study of religion as an academic discipline within the modern university. In this discipline we seek to UNDERSTAND how religion functions in the lives of individuals and communities and to ANALYZE the complex interrelationships between religion and other aspects of culture. During this semester we will examine the basic tools and vocabulary employed in the academic study of religion.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN AND HOW YOU WILL LEARN IT. **You will leave this class able to begin to answer these “big questions”:**

Why is religion such a powerful force in human life?

How does one go about understanding the religious perspective of another person or group of people?

What can the study of religion teach you about yourself?

You will fulfill the following learning outcomes:

- **GEP Humanities 1:** Read closely, think critically, and write effectively about texts or cultural artifacts that reflect on perennial questions concerning the human condition (such as the search for truth and meaning, the confrontation with suffering and mortality, or the struggle for justice, equality, and human dignity).
- **GEP Humanities 2:** Investigate and thoughtfully respond to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than one’s own.
- **RELIGIOUS STUDIES:** Demonstrate the ability to interpret, describe, and compare religious phenomena as they intersect with diverse historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Assessment of learning outcomes (“How we’ll know what you learned”)

Achievement of these learning outcomes will be measured through the following:

Weekly Short answer questions that will measure your understanding of specific concepts and your ability to create valid arguments supported by specific evidence. (GEP 1 and 2, Religious Studies).

3-Step Worksheets (details will be explained during course) that teach you to bracket your own initial response to religious/cultural difference and engage in interpretation using religious studies ideas (GEP Humanities 1 and 2, Religious Studies).

Unit Short Answers and Unit Essay Questions that will ask you to construct and support with evidence answers to more complex questions that pull together information and concepts from across a unit (GEP Humanities 1 and 2, Religious Studies).

Explanation of Alignment with Learning Outcomes

Religions, almost by definition, center on "perennial questions concerning the human condition" because at their root religions help people to deal with being alive (GEP Humanities 1, Religious Studies). You will learn specific Religious Studies methods for encountering, analyzing, and responding to a diverse set of religious situations (GEP Humanities 2, Religious Studies) in a way that demonstrates an awareness of the importance of placing a specific example in its specific historical, social, and cultural context (Religious Studies).

Grading and Student Expectations

Short Answer Questions: 15%. These will be short (100-200 word) mini essays that will ask you to apply your understanding of the week's material to a specific question.

3-Step Worksheets: 15%. These worksheets are based on the 3-Step Method for Engaging Religion (guidelines given before first assignment). There will be four over the course of the semester.

Unit 1 Short Answer Test: 15%. Unit 1 concludes with a short answer test.

Unit 2 Essay: 10%. Short (600-800 word) essay that offers an analysis of a specific religious situation or situations.

Unit 3 Essay: 10%. Short (600-800 word) essay that offers an analysis of a specific religious situation or situations.

Unit 4 Essay: 20%. Slightly longer (800-1000 word) essay that offers an analysis of a specific religious situation in greater depth.

Final Essay: 5% Short (300-500 word) essay that allows you to reflect on what you learned across the semester.

Participation: 10%. You must actively participate in our class 25 times during the semester. Active participation is defined as some combination of the following:

- Attending face-to-face class in a way that demonstrates that you have prepared the class materials.
- Participation in interactive activities (polls, discussion forum, etc.)
- Completing make-up assignments if you are absent (see absence guidelines below)
- Discussing class material with me outside of face-to-face class meetings.

At the end of the semester, you will need to submit a self-evaluation form. This form will ask you to give yourself the participation grade you feel you deserve for the semester. I will then take this self-evaluation into account when determining your participation grade. The grade will be determined according to the following scale:

23-25 = 90-100%. 20-23 = 80-90%. 19=70%.

If you miss more than six classes for any reason your participation grade will be a zero unless you meet with me and we determine that your absences are not impacting your ability to be successful in this class.

Percentage to Letter Grade Conversion

A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, C+:77-79, C: 73-76. C-: 70-72, D+: 67-69, D: 65-66, F: 64 or lower.

Text Rental

The Religion Toolkit by John Morreal and Tamara Sohn.

Text Purchase

Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia by Dennis Covington. Da Capo Press, 2009. **ISBN-10:** 0306818361; **ISBN-13:** 978-0306818363. Other editions (including digital) are fine but be sure to check whether the page numbers match.

Other materials will be provided through Canvas.

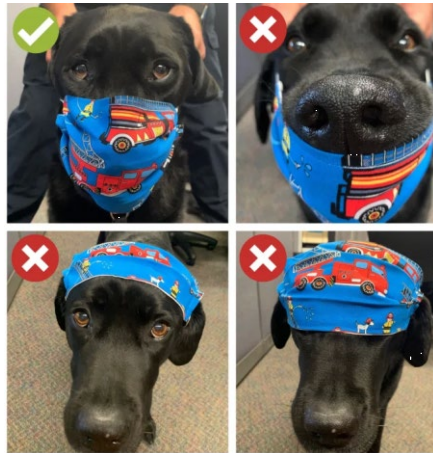
Inclusivity Statement

My goal in this course is to create and maintain a learning community that feels welcoming to students from all different kinds of backgrounds and experiences. Diversity (of sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture) makes our learning better, but only if our class feels like a safe space for learning and growth. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. ***Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.***

If you have experienced a bias incident (an act of conduct, speech, or expression to which a bias motive is evident as a contributing factor regardless of whether the act is criminal) at UWSP, you have the right to report it using this [link](#). You may also contact the Dean of Students office directly at dos@uwsp.edu.

COVID-Related Policies

UWSP is committed to offering students a face-to-face learning environment that is as safe as possible. Here is how we'll handle face-to-face classes unless the university decides to change COVID-related policy. For our class to meet together, everyone needs to sit in their assigned seat (for contact tracing). Everyone needs to wear their masks ***properly*** or we cannot meet face-to-face.



The only exception to this rule is if you have a mask exemption that has been granted to you directly from the Disability and Assistive Technology Center (DATC). If this is the case, you and I will both know because we will have received official notification from the DATC. All of the above guidelines have been set by the University and are not subject to my individual discretion.

Class Absences

It is inevitable that this is going to be a complicated semester. I am always ready to help you succeed in this class. If you miss class for a COVID-related reason (sickness, quarantine, isolation), or for any other acceptable reason¹ then you'll need to follow these steps in order to count that class towards your participation grade:

Step 1: Complete all of the assigned reading for the day(s) you missed.

Step 2: Review the in-class materials from the day(s) you missed (audio recordings, PowerPoint lectures, films, etc.).

Step 3: Review notes from someone in your group.

Step 4: Have a look at the written assignment for the week and see if you feel able to complete the assignment properly.

Step 5: Write a brief 1-2 paragraph summary of what you feel were the important concepts and details from each class, along with any questions or confusions that you have.

Step 6 (OPTIONAL): If necessary, request a Zoom meeting with me to go through your questions.

If you have an unexcused absence, then I would ask that you do steps 1-4 before requesting a meeting. I am also ready to give you flexibility on assignment deadlines if you need it.

¹ *The following are acceptable reasons for absence from class: illness, family emergency, or a school or team related event. Best practice for excused absences is send an email to lwhitmor@uwsp.edu prior to the absence requesting that it be excused.

Policies and Resources

Assignment Submission and Late Work Policy

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through Canvas unless otherwise instructed. Assignments must be submitted by the given deadline or special permission must be requested *before the due date*. Without instructor permission, late or missing assignments may affect the student's grade. I am always ready to work with students who are struggling.

Student Support

UWSP offers students support in many different ways: technology, study skills, subject-specific tutoring, counseling, and medical services. There is a special section of our Canvas course with links to all of the ways that the university is ready to help you.

Religious Beliefs Accommodation

It is UW System policy ([UWS 22](#)) to reasonably accommodate your sincerely held religious beliefs with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements.

Equal Access for Students with Disabilities

If modifications are required due to a disability, please inform the instructor and contact the [Disability and Assistive Technology Center](#) to complete an Accommodations Request form. Phone: 346-3365 or Room 609 Albertson Hall.

Title IX

UW-Stevens Point is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and institutional policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In the event that you choose to disclose information about having survived sexual violence, including harassment, rape, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, and specify that this violence occurred while a student at UWSP, federal and state laws mandate that I, as your instructor, notify the Title IX Coordinator/Office of the Dean of Students. Please see the information on the [Dean of Students webpage](#) for information on making confidential reports of misconduct or interpersonal violence, as well as campus and community resources available to students. For more information see the [Title IX page](#).

Academic Misconduct

Copying off of someone's test, plagiarism, claiming credit for work that is not yours, and all other forms of academic misconduct are not tolerated at UW-Stevens Point. If a student is confused about what exactly academic misconduct is, there is information available regarding rules and procedures for the [process](#). You can also visit with your faculty or learn how to cite the work of others at the [Writing Lab](#).

Emergency Procedures

See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Procedures at www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point."

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides students with a right to protect, review, and correct their student records.

Lecture materials and recordings for Rel 202 Fall 2021 are protected intellectual property at UW-Stevens Point. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or share lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Rel 202 Fall 2021 Schedule of Assignments

All assignments should be submitted on Canvas. If assigned material is not from *The Religion Toolkit*, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, or linked directly from this document, you will find it on Canvas.

Unit 1: The ABC's of Religious Studies Analysis

Week 1: What does it mean to study religion in a university?

ASSIGNMENT: Turn in your "About Me" by Friday, September 3 at midnight.

Thursday, September 2: WELCOME!

Week 2: What does a framework for analyzing religion look like?

ASSIGNMENT: Weekly short answer due on Canvas by midnight on Friday, September 10.

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

- In *Religion Toolkit*, p. 2-7 (through the paragraph that ends "(called aaidzookaan) to the next generations).
- Pick someone with whom you have regular contact (friend, family member, roommate) and try to summarize this reading to them. Come to class prepared to share your experience.

Thursday, September 9, 2021

- *The Religion Toolkit*: p. 7-14.
- ["Baptism by Zoom"](#)

Week 3: What makes something "religious" or part of a "religion"?

ASSIGNMENT: Weekly short answer due on Canvas by midnight on Friday, September 17.

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

- In *Religion Toolkit*, read 207-208 (overview), 213-215 (The Mystical Worldview of the Upanishads), and 219 (Hatha Yoga)
- View ["Yoga: Is It Hindu"](#) by Epified.

Thursday, September 16, 2021

- Finish watching *Kumare*.
- Read ["About Kumare"](#) and ["Mirror Yoga \(The Kumare Method\)."](#)

Week 4 How do religions help people to "deal with life"? Part 1.

ASSIGNMENT: First 3-Step Worksheet due on Canvas by Friday, September 24.

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

- The Religion Toolkit (17-22 (Theodicy).
- Bring to class either an example of a theodicy that you have found somewhere on the Internet or b) be ready to share something you've personally seen or heard.

Thursday, September 23, 2021

- The Religion Toolkit: 22-26 (Death)
- View these videos and come to class prepared to analyze connections between these videos and the Toolkit reading. WARNING: Some of these videos are difficult to watch if you are dealing with/have dealt with loss.
 - [Why is it important for us to understand death and dying?](#)
 - [Facing Death Directly](#)
 - [Being with Dying](#)
 - [James Cone on Black Theology and Suffering](#)
 - [Realize your Krishna-hood and Thumb Your Nose at Death](#)
 - [Traditional Navajo View on Death and Grieving](#)
 - [Life Does Not End \(Navajo Perspective\)](#)

Week 5: How do religions help people to "deal with life"? Part 2.

ASSIGNMENT: Short Answer Test due on the following Tuesday October 5 by class time.

Tuesday, September 28

- *The Religion Toolkit*: 26-30 (Order), 30-38 (Social Order)

Thursday, September 30

- *The Religion Toolkit*: 38-42 (Ritual). Think of an example of a ritual that fits the way Toolkit describes ritual and order and come to class ready to share it.
- Read and view the following sources about the Jewish festival of Passover:
 - [Pluralism Project essay about Passover](#)
 - [Mayim Bialik on Passover](#)
 - [Passover and Zoom Seders](#)
 - [Zoom-over – a new way of celebrating Passover.](#)
 - [A Passover Seder by Elie Wiesel.](#)

Unit 2: Applying the Toolkit Method to the Hajj Pilgrimage

Week 6: How does Islam help Muslims to "deal with life"?

ASSIGNMENT: Short Answer Test due on Tuesday October 5 by class time. Weekly Short Answer due on Canvas by Friday, October 8.

Tuesday, October 5

- In-class focus on comparative religion and Islam.

Thursday, October 7

- Toolkit p. 167-176 (History and Teachings of Islam, Early History: The Life of Muhammad and the Rashidun Caliphs).

Week 7: What is the relationship of the Hajj pilgrimage to Islam as a whole?

ASSIGNMENT: 3-Step worksheet due by Friday at midnight. Essay due by class time on Tuesday, October 19.

Tuesday, October 12

- Finish *Inside Mecca* (see link on Canvas). Note: It is crucial that you actually watch this entire film before class on Tuesday.
- *The Religion Toolkit*: 180-182 (Islamic Rituals)

Thursday, October 14

- [It is time to reform the management of the Hajj](#)
- [Explaining the Muslim Pilgrimage of the Hajj](#)

Unit 3: Comparing the Hajj to the Pilgrimage to Osun-Osogobo

Week 8: How do African Yoruban religious tradition help followers to "deal with life"?

Assignment: Unit 2 Essay due by class time on Tuesday, October 19.

Week 8 Short Answer due on Canvas by Friday, October 22 at midnight.

Tuesday, October 19:

Thursday, October 21

- Background reading for Pilgrimage to Osun-Osogobo (link on Canvas).
- Excerpts from "Rethinking the Study of African Indigenous Religions" by Jacob Olupona (PDF on Canvas).
- View the [The Ifa-Divination System](#).

Week 9: How does the pilgrimage to Osun-Osogobo relate to Yoruban traditions as a whole?

Assignment: 3-step worksheet due by class time on Thursday, October 28. Bring a copy to class. Unit 3 Essay due Friday, October 29.

Tuesday, October 26

- [From Africa to America](#)
- Finish watching / re-watch *Pilgrimage to Osun Osogobo*.
- "Orisha" entry from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (PDF on Canvas).

Thursday, October 28: Essay prep. day

Unit 4: Extended Analysis and Competing Interpretations

Week 10: As students and scholars of religion how should we approach the case of Appalachian Christian snake handlers?

Assignment: Weekly short answer due on Canvas by midnight on Friday, November 5.

Tuesday, November 2

- Chapter 1 ("Following Signs") in *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (henceforth SOSM).

Thursday, November 4

- SOSM Chapter 2 (The Trial) and Chapter 3 (Sheep Without a Shepherd)

Week 11: How does the history of Christian practice in a general sense relate to the case of Appalachian Christian snake handlers?

Assignment: Weekly short answer due on Canvas by midnight on Friday, November 12.

Tuesday, November 9

- SOSM Chapter 4 (Under the Brush Arbor) and Chapter 5 (Jolo).

Thursday, November 11

- SOSM Chapter 6 (Roots)

Week 12: How does the broader history of Christianity in America relate to the case of Appalachian snake handlers?

Assignment: 3-Step Worksheet due on Canvas by Friday, November 19 at midnight.

Tuesday, November 16

- SOSM Chapter 7 (Snakes)

Thursday, November 18

- SOSM Chapter 8 ("Salvation on Sand Mountain")
- In *Religion Toolkit*, read p. 71-72 ("Emile Durkheim: Modernization Theory")

Week 13: Which religious studies "tools" are most useful for understanding the situation of Appalachian Christian snake handlers and those who write about them?

Tuesday, November 23

- SOSM Chapter 9 ("War Stories"), Chapter 10 ("The Wider Circle")
- In *Religion Toolkit*, read p. 82-85 ("Phenomenology and Religious Studies")

Thursday, November 25: THANKSGIVING

Week 14: Which religious studies "tools" are most useful for understanding the situation of Appalachian Christian snake handlers and those who write about them?

Assignment: Unit 4 Essay Prep worksheet due on Canvas by beginning of class on Thursday. Unit 4 Essay due the following Tuesday, November 30 by the beginning of class.

Tuesday, November 30

- Finish *SOSM* focusing on Chapter 11 ("The Wedding").

Thursday, December 2

- Unit 4 Essay Prep due. Bring copy to class.
- Read *The Appalachian Other* (PDF on Canvas).

Week 15

Tuesday, December 7

- Unit 4 Essay due. Closing conversations, introduction of final essay topic.

Thursday, December 9

- Unit 4 Essay due. Closing conversations, introduction of final essay topic.