

REL 202: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Sections M01 & W01

12:30 – 1:45 PM, Tuesday & Thursday

Wausau Campus, room 220; Marshfield Campus, room 130

Instructor: Dr. Ryan T. O’Leary

Email: roleary@uwsp.edu

Office: Room 311, UW Stevens Point at Wausau

Office Hours: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM Tuesday & Thursday, and by appointment



Description: This course will introduce students to two of the most important theories in the academic study of religion and will provide students with the opportunity to apply these methods to diverse expressions of the religious life.

Content-Related Learning Outcomes: Having taken this course students will:

1. be able to describe and evaluate key features of Western monotheism, Eastern religions, and religion in America;
2. have opportunity to broaden their overall cultural awareness by investigating and thoughtfully responding to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than one’s own;
3. practice reading closely and writing effectively about perennial questions concerning the human condition.

Skills-Related Learning Outcomes: Having taken this course, students will be able to:

1. identify, analyze, and evaluate how classical theoretical approaches to the study of religion can be used to interpret particular expressions of the religious life;
2. construct and communicate their own interpretations of religious texts, artifacts, or phenomena.

Late Work Policy: Late assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 1 point per day the assignment is late deducted from any points the assignment earns.

Attendance Policy: In this class attendance and participation are extremely important. Each absence beyond the third will result in three points being deducted from the student’s final score. If for any reason you need to miss a significant part of the course, it is your responsibility to work out appropriate accommodations with the instructor. I will be as accommodating as possible to all students to address the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic. This does not include reteaching content or recreating discussions, however, which is impossible.

Note on Electronic Items: Computers, tablets, and cellphones are not permitted in this class. Exemptions to this rule will be made only with official documentation of a disability requiring the use of electronic devices. Students will need to print electronic reserve readings to bring them to class. Recording devices are permitted.

READING & FILM LIST

Over the course of the semester we will be reading two books that have had a strong influence on the field of religious studies. You will be asked to reflect on these books, understand key passages, and apply the theories they present. For these reasons, it is crucially important that students keep up with the reading assignments and come to class prepared to discuss them.

For Purchase

The Sacred and the Profane, by Mircea Eliade

The Sacred Canopy, by Peter L. Berger

Required Readings found on Canvas

Genesis, chapters 1 – 12

The Gospel of Mark

Selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*

"Civil Religion in American Schools," by Adam Gamoran

Required Films found online via the UW-SP Library

To the Land of Bliss, by Wen-Jie Qin (<https://uwsp.kanopy.com/video/land-bliss>)

The Split Horn, by Taggart Seigel (<https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.uwsp.edu/watch/the-split-horn-life-of-a-hmong-shaman-in-america>)

Recommended Readings found on Canvas

Isaiah 1 – 6

John 1 – 8, 18 – 21

Acts 1 – 9

Selections from *The Book of Shadows*, by Gerald Gardner

"America's Grace," by David E. Campbell and Robert D. Putnam

"Becoming an Atheist in America," by Jesse M. Smith

"Civil Religion in America," by Robert Bellah

"Creation In And Creation Of Norse Poetry," by Kevin J. Wanner

"General Introduction" to *Shamanism*, by Graham Harvey

"Islam in America: Separate but Unequal," by Geneive Abdo

The Land of Bliss Sutra

"Letter from a Birmingham Jail," by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Putting the Blood back into Blot," by Michael Strmiska

Qur'an, sura 2

"Religion, Religions, Religious," by J. Z. Smith

"Secularism and Its Discontents," by Nikki R. Keddie

"The Heart of Practice" from *Being Peace*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

"What is Enlightenment," by Immanuel Kant

"Where Do They Get These Ideas? Changing Ideas of Cults," by Joseph Laycock

"Witchcraft for Sale," by David Waldron

EVALUATION

Grading for this course has three elements totaling 100 possible points.

Close Reading Worksheets: Ten times throughout the semester you will be given close reading worksheets asking guiding questions about the reading for that week. These will not be announced in advance; they will be distributed on Canvas the day of the exercise. It is therefore worth your effort to keep up with the assigned readings. Sometimes you will need to complete the exercise before you can watch the video lecture; sometimes you will need to watch the lecture to do the exercise. Each worksheet submission will be worth up to 5 points; the lowest 3 scores will be dropped.

Total: 35 points

Discussion Boards: Ten times throughout the semester you will be given discussion board prompts on Canvas. Discussions will provide space to think about key features of Western monotheism, Eastern religions, and religion in America alongside different theoretical perspectives. Each week marked “Discuss Online” in the schedule, you should do one or both these things: (a) *post* a formal and thoughtful answer to the discussion thread prompt; or (b) *reply* to at least two of your classmates’ posts or replies. Posts will be graded based on engagement with readings, comprehension, and application of important ideas. Replies will be graded on how well they move a conversation forward or spark new avenues of thought. Each post or new prompt will be worth up to 4 points; each response will be worth up to 2 points. Each discussion is worth up to 5 points. The lowest 3 scores will be dropped. And remember, you can always “keep the conversation going” to boost your score up to 5 on a discussion board.

Total: 35 points

Essays: Three times throughout the semester you will be given an essay assignment asking you to apply a specific theoretical framework to concrete religious phenomena. Essays will ask you to draw on material from assigned readings and from previous assignments. You will be given a copy of the essay assignments one week before it is due. Each essay will be worth 10 points.

Total: 30 points

GRADING

The course will be graded according to a standard 100-point distribution, based on points earned.

97 - 100 = A+

93 - 96 = A

90 - 92 = A-

87 - 89 = B+

83 - 86 = B

80 - 82 = B-

77 - 79 = C+

73 - 76 = C

70 - 72 = C-

67 - 69 = D+

63 - 66 = D

60 - 62 = D-

0 - 59 = F

UW-SP COVID-19 POLICIES

FACE COVERINGS

At all UW-Stevens Point campus locations, the wearing of face coverings is mandatory in all buildings, including classrooms, laboratories, studios, and other instructional spaces. Any student with a condition that impacts their use of a face covering should contact the [Disability and Assistive Technology Center](#) to discuss accommodations in classes. Please note that unless everyone is wearing a face covering, in-person classes cannot take place. This is university policy and not up to the discretion of individual instructors. Failure to adhere to this requirement could result in formal withdrawal from the course.

OTHER GUIDANCE

Please monitor your own health each day using [this screening tool](#). If you are not feeling well or believe you have been exposed to COVID-19, do not come to class; email your instructor and contact Student Health Service (715-346-4646). As with any type of absence, students are expected to communicate their need to be absent and complete the course requirements as outlined in the syllabus.

Maintain a minimum of 6 feet of physical distance from others whenever possible.

Do not congregate in groups before or after class; stagger your arrival and departure from the classroom, lab, or meeting room.

Wash your hands or use appropriate hand sanitizer regularly and avoid touching your face.

Please maintain these same healthy practices outside the classroom.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART ONE: PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION & WESTERN MONOTHEISM

Week 1 (Sept. 2 – 3)—Introduction

No reading

Week 2 (Sept. 6 – 10)—Creation & Prophecy in Hebrew Scripture

Genesis, chapters 1 – 12

Discuss Online #1

Week 3 (Sept. 13 – 17)—Prophets & the Messiah: An Introduction to Christianity

The Gospel of Mark

(Recommended readings: John 1 – 8, 18 – 21; Acts 1 – 9)

Discuss Online #2

Week 4 (Sept. 20 – 24)—Introducing Eliade & Phenomenology of Religion

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: "Introduction" and Chapter I

Discuss Online #3

Week 5 (Sept. 27 – Oct. 1)—Introduction to Islam, Ancient & Modern

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: Chapter II

(Recommended reading: The Qur'an, sura 2)

PART TWO: HINDU & BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHIES

Week 6 (Oct. 4 – 8)—Introducing Hinduism

No reading

Essay 1 due—No Class Tuesday

Discuss Online #4

Week 7 (Oct. 11 – 15)—Hinduism to Buddhism

Selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*

Discuss Online #5

Week 8 (Oct. 18 – 22)—Time, Nature, & Pure Land Buddhism

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: Chapter III

(Recommended reading: *The Land of Bliss Sutra*)

Discuss Online #6

Week 9 (Oct. 25 – Oct. 29)—Peace, Conflict, & Rituals of Initiation

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: Chapter IV

(Recommended reading: “The Heart of Practice,” by Thich Nhat Hanh)

PART THREE: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION & RELIGION IN AMERICA

Week 10 (Nov. 1 – 5)—Introducing Sociology & *The Sacred Canopy*

No reading

Essay 2 due—No class Tuesday

Discuss Online #7

Week 11 (Nov. 8 – 12)—Sociology & Christianity in America

Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*: “1. Religion and World-Construction”

Discuss Online #8

Week 12 (Nov. 15 – 19)—American Civil Religion

“Civil Religion in American Schools” by Adam Gamoran

Discuss Online #9

Week 13 (Nov. 22 – 26)—Break

No reading

Instructor at Conference & Thanksgiving Break—No class Tuesday and Thursday

Week 14 (Nov. 29 – Dec. 3)—Nomos & Anomy

Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*: “2. Religion and World-Maintenance”

Discuss Online #10

Week 15 (Dec. 6 – 10)—Religion & Alienation

Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*: “4. Religion and Alienation”

Finals Week

Final Essay Due Monday, Dec. 13, 2021

THE SACRED & THE PROFANE – FOCUSED READING

*While reading the entire assigned text is optimal, the following selections are essential.
If you cannot read the entire text, make sure to read these carefully.*

Introduction

Opening

“When the Sacred Manifests Itself”

Chapter I: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred

“Homogeneity of Space and Hierophany”

“Theophanies and Signs”

“The Center of the World”

“Some Conclusions”

Chapter II: Sacred Time and Myths

“Profane Duration and Sacred Time”

“Templum – Tempus”

“Regeneration Through Relation to the Time of Origins”

“Periodically Becoming Contemporary with the Gods”

“Sacred History, History, Historicism”

Chapter III: The Sacredness of Nature and Cosmic Religion

Opening

“The Celestial Sacred and the Uranian Gods”

“The Remote God”

“The Religious Experience of Life”

“The Perenniality of Celestial Symbols”

“Terra Mater”

“Other Cosmic Hierophanies”

Chapter IV: Human Existence and Sanctified Life

“Existence Open to the World”

“Rites of Passage”

“Second Birth and Spiritual Generation”

“Sacred and Profane in the Modern World”

THE BHAGAVAD GITA – FOCUSED READING

*While reading the entire assigned text is optimal, the following selections are essential.
If you cannot read the entire text, make sure to read these carefully.*

The First Teaching: Arjuna's Dejection

The Second Teaching: Philosophy and Spiritual Discipline

The Third Teaching: Discipline of Action

The Eleventh Teaching: The Vision of Krishna's Totality

The Thirteenth Teaching: Knowing the Field

THE SACRED CANOPY – FOCUSED READING

*While reading the entire assigned text is optimal, the following selections are essential.
If you cannot read the entire text, make sure to read these carefully.*

Chapter 1: Religion and World Construction

Pages 6 – 7, beginning at the first paragraph break on page 6 and ending at the last paragraph break on page 7.

Pages 8 – 11, beginning at the paragraph break on page 8 and ending at the paragraph break on page 11.

Pages 14 – 26, at the paragraph break on page 14 and ending at the first paragraph break on page 26.

Chapter 2: Religion and World Maintenance

Pages 29 – 34, beginning at the start of the chapter and ending at the paragraph break on page 34.

Pages 45 – 51, beginning at the first paragraph break on page 45 and ending at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4: Religion and Alienation

Pages 81 – 87, beginning at the start of the chapter and ending at the second paragraph break on page 87.

Pages 92 – 95, beginning at the second paragraph break on page 92 and ending at the paragraph break on page 95.

Pages 100 – 101, beginning at the paragraph break on page 100 and ending at the end of the chapter.

CONCERNS & RESOURCES

Academic Concerns

Being a Pointer means going to class regularly, doing your work outside of class, and asking for help if there are questions or concerns.

Academic Misconduct: Copying off 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](#).

Academic Success: Your full-time job at UW-Stevens Point is *to be a student*. Being successful depend a lot on how much effort and time you invest. It also asking questions or finding support if you feel lost. We have an amazing [Tutoring-Learning Center](#) if you want to learn how to be a better student or need subject-specific help.

Disability Services: UW-Stevens Point is committed to supporting students with disabilities the academic and other accommodations, plus the auxiliary aids necessary to ensure your success. To learn more, check out their [site](#) or visit them in Albertson Hall, room 609 (library building).

Other Concerns and Resources

Responding to student concerns with care, concern, and resources is critical in supporting the success of our students and campus community. Here is a brief list of helpful resources.

Absence from Class

Contact faculty directly or if a crisis/emergency
Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Academic Difficulty

Academic & Career Advising Center
715-346-3226, uwsp.edu/acac

Disability Services & Assistive Technology
715-346-3365, uwsp.edu/dtac

Tutoring-Learning Center
715-346-3568, uwsp.edu/tlc

Students should visit with faculty of the course in which they are having trouble.

Add/drop Class; Withdrawal Questions

Office of the Registrar
715-346-4301 uwsp.edu/registrar

Students should visit with their Academic Advisor.

Academic Misconduct

Faculty for the specific course or Office of the Dean of Students to discuss process
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Alcohol or Drug Use

Center for Prevention

715-346-3121, uwsp.edu/dos/aoda-ipv

Bias or Hate Incidents

Office of the Dean of Students to report
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Diversity and College Access
715-346-4076, uwsp.edu/dca

Concerning Behavior

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Employment

Campus Activities and Student Engagement
715-346-4700, uwsp.edu/centers/case

Family Crisis or Emergency

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Financial Insecurity

Enrollment Services Center/Financial Aid
715-346-3300; uwsp.edu/enrollmentservices

Emergency Grants
Office of the Dean of Student
715-346-2611; [Grant Application Form](#)

Financial Coaching Program
UW-Stevens Point School of Business and Economics
[Website](#) or email: fincoach@uwsp.edu

Financial Literacy - Online
[GradReady Program](#)

Financial Literacy - In Person
Financial Literacy Association (Student Org.)
College of Professional Studies, finlit@uwsp.edu

Food Resources

The Cupboard - Stevens Point campus
715-346-4700, uwsp.edu/centers/case
[List of food resources in the community in Marshfield, Stevens Point, and Wausau](#)

Housing/Roommate Concerns

Residential Living (your Hall Director first)
715-346-3511 (central office), uwsp.edu/resliving

Identity and Difference

Diversity and College Access
715-346-4076, uwsp.edu/dca

Involvement

Campus Activities and Student Engagement
715-346-4700, uwsp.edu/centers/case

Legal Questions

Student Legal Services
715-346-4282, uwsp.edu/dos/sls

Loss of Family Member or Friend

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Counseling Center (confidential services)
715-346-3553, uwsp.edu/counseling

Mental Health Concerns

Counseling Center (confidential services)
715-346-3553, uwsp.edu/counseling

Mental Health Crisis Line (outside agency)
866-317-9362 for after hours mental health support

Missing Student

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

University Police
715-346-3456, uwsp.edu/protsv

Non-academic Misconduct

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Physical Health / Injury

Student Health Service (confidential resource)
715-346-4646, uwsp.edu/stuhealth

Procedural Issue or Conflict

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Stalking, or Harassment

Office of the Dean of Students to report
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos

CAP Services - Stevens Point (confidential advocacy services, outside agency)

715-340-7882, 715-346-4039, 800-472-3377 (toll free), kpetrick@capmail.org, capservices.org

PDC - Marshfield (confidential advocacy services, outside agency)

715-421-1509 or 844-210-8899 (toll free)

The Women's Community - Wausau (confidential advocacy services, outside agency)

715-842-8323 or 888-665-1234 (toll free)

Center for Prevention (confidential services)
715-346-3121, uwsp.edu/dos/aoda-ipv

Counseling Center (confidential services)
715-346-3553, uwsp.edu/counseling

University Police and Security Services to report
715-346-3456, uwsp.edu/protsv

Title IX

Haeryon Kim, 116 Old Main, 715-346-3020, hakim@uwsp.edu, [Title IX site](#)

Transportation

[UWSP Rideshare Facebook Page](#)
[Stevens Point Bus Route](#)
[Bus connections from Stevens Point](#)

Questions or Concerns Not Listed Here

Office of the Dean of Students
715-346-2611, uwsp.edu/dos