

Professor Wasserman
Loree Building, Room 106
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Office hours: Tues 2:00–3:00
and by appointment

Spring 2018
RAB, 208
In-class: Tues 12:35–1:55
Online assignments due: Fri 1:55

Religion 101: Gods, Myths, and Religions in a Secular Age

This course introduces students to the academic study of religion, in part by drawing on major theorists of religion, including E. B. Tylor, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Clifford Geertz. We will also use diverse primary source material for case studies, including Indian, Muslim, Greek, and Jewish traditions, and seek to understand how these traditions are appropriated and re-interpreted in new and changing contexts. Major topics include: popular notions of “cults” and illegitimate religion; myth and mythmaking; religious and textual authority; religious space and ritual practices; and religiously motivated violence.

Course-Specific Learning goals:

- 1) To critically analyze practices, traditions, and discourses about the sacred or religious as human phenomena
- 2) To develop critical acumen in reading and interpreting texts
- 3) To categorize, analyze, and compare diverse systems of value, belief, and practice
- 4) To develop global and local religious literacy. This means, in particular, cultivating the skills of identifying and interpreting religious traditions, practices, and discourses and of understanding the centrality of religious worldviews and communities in New Jersey, the United States, and on the global stage.

Core Curriculum Goals:

21st Century Challenges [21Cb]

- b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Arts and Humanities [AHo]

- o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation: regular attendance and participation is a significant part of your grade. In the case of illness or emergency, please inform the instructor as soon as possible that you will not be able to attend class. Absences will be excused on a case-by-case basis. In the case of more long-term illnesses or other issues, please provide a note from a health-care provider, or, if appropriate, from a dean. *More than two unexcused absences will result in a zero grade for attendance and participation.* (10%)
 - a. All readings and assignments must be completed prior to the class or discussion session for which they are assigned. The standards by which I grade participation are attached to the bottom of this syllabus. Please familiarize yourself with these standards. Participation is an active and rewarding process which requires more than mere attendance.
2. Forum-posts and quizzes: 30%
 - a. Online forum posts: (15%) In smaller Forum “discussion” groups of 4–5, students will post reading reflections once per week and later respond to at least one of their peers (min. 200 words). Responses to their peers must be completed by 11:55 pm on the same day.
 - b. Quizzes: (15%) online and in-class quizzes will focus on the assigned readings. Online quizzes will be a standard part of the online meeting and typically consist of 5-10 multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank questions that test reading comprehension.
3. Midterm Exam: Students will prepare responses to essay questions circulated in advance and then write them during an 80-minute class period: 20%.

4. Field-report project: during the last 4 weeks of the course, students will attend a religious ritual from a tradition that is relatively new/foreign to them. They will engage as an observer, compose field notes, and write up an interpretation that draws on some of the readings assigned for the course. Due on Thurs April 26, uploaded to the sakai assignments page. 20%
5. Final Exam: Students will prepare responses to essay questions circulated in advance and then write them during the final (May 4, 8–11 am): 20%

Classroom Policies:

- Student conduct and participation in class and in online forums must be generous and respectful towards other students and towards the instructor. See the attached agreement outlining these expectations.
- Students with disabilities who require accommodations should provide the instructor with their “accommodation letter” from the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please consult the website of the Office of Disability Full disability policies and procedures are at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>
- No laptops or cell-phones during class meetings. Please see the instructor if you would like to make a case for why you absolutely must use your laptop; decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Plagiarism and cheating will be penalized according to the full extent of University policy. Please consult Rutgers University’s Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity>
 - For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident. http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism

Required textbook and use of Sakai:

Daniel Pals, *9 Theories of Religion* (Oxford, 2015) (available used on Amazon etc.)

All other materials are available on Sakai; see the course page for reading suggestions, prompts, links, and updates.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS ****Please consult Sakai for the most up-to-date schedule****

Tues 1/16: Introduction to the course

1. Discussion of syllabus and requirements
2. In-class guided viewing assignment of Heaven’s Gate documentary

Fri 1/19: Illegitimate religions? Religious “Cults” and the Specter of Violence

1. Finish watching *Inside Story: Heaven’s Gate* (BBC, 90 mins)
2. Read M. Meusse, “Religious Studies and ‘Heaven's Gate’: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April, 1997 (3 pp.)
3. Read Hall, “Finding Heaven’s Gate,” in *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence*, 155–188.

Tues 1/23: The Idea of “Cults” and the Academic Study of Religion

1. Watch *Jonestown: Life and Death in the People’s Temple* (PBS, 120 mins)
2. Read J. Z. Smith, “The Devil and Mr. Jones,” 102–112

Fri: 1/26: Interpretation and the Academic Study of Religion

1. Read J. Z. Smith, “The Devil and Mr. Jones,” 112–120

Tues 1/30: Myths and Types of Myth

1. Read Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 141–151

2. Rig Veda 10.89; 10.90
3. Native American creation accounts (2 examples)

Fri 2/2: Myths and Theories of Myth

1. Read Hesiod's *Theogony*, lines 1–210 (approx. 6 pp.) and *Works and Days* (approx. 6 pp.)
2. Read *Bilgamesh in the Netherworld* (approx. 20 pp.)

Tues 2/6: Religious Specialists, Authority, and Sacred Space

1. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 151–159
2. Read *History of Joseph Smith*, selections (Mormon tradition)
3. Genesis 1–4 (i.e. chapters 1 through 4)
- 4.

Fri 2/9: Introducing Theories of Religion

1. Pals, *Nine Theories*, 1–14
2. Carl Ernst, “India as a Sacred Islamic Land,” 556–563

Tues 2/13: Animism and Magic

1. Pals, “Animism and Magic: E. B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer,” 15–44
2. Primary sources to be discussed in class

Fri 2/16: The Romance of Primitive Origins

1. Pals, “Society as Sacred,” 81–102
2. M. Serazio, “Just How Much is Sports Fandom Like Religion?” *Atlantic*, 2013

Tues 2/20 Religion and the Social: E. Durkheim

1. Pals, “Society as Sacred,” 102–109
2. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, selections

Fri 2/23: Psychology: Personality and Neurotic Projections

1. “Religion and Personality,” 49–77

Tues 2/27: Religion and Social Theory

1. Pals, “A Source of Social Action: Max Weber,” 143–152, 174–182
2. Selected primary sources

Fri 3/2: Weber and Prep for Midterm

1. Pals, “A Source of Social Action: Max Weber,” 152–174

Tues 3/6: ****Midterm Exam****

Fri 3/9: Marxists and Material Critique

1. Pals, “Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx,” 113–131

Tues: 3/13 *****Spring Break*****

Fri: 3/16 *****Spring Break*****

Tues: 3/20 Marxists Continue

1. Pals, 131–140
2. Marx on religion, selections
3. Laurence A. Iannaccone & William Sims Bainbridge, “Economics of Religion”

Fri: 3/23 Phenomenology and Religious Experience

1. Pals, "The Verdict of Religion Experience: William James," 185–204
2. Dan Merkur, "Psychology of Religion"

Tues 3/27 The Sacred and Profane

1. Pals, "The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade," 227–259

Fri 3/30: Social Anthropology and Religion

1. Pals, "Society's 'Construct of the Heart': E.E. Evans-Pritchard," 263–283

Tues 4/3: Social Anthropology and Religion

1. Pals, "Society's 'Construct of the Heart': E.E. Evans-Pritchard," 283–290
2. Selected primary texts

Fri 4/6: Religion and Culture: Clifford Geertz

1. Pals, "Religion as a Cultural System: Clifford Geertz," 293–304

Tues 4/10: Religion and Culture cont.

1. Pals, "Religion as a Cultural System: Clifford Geertz," 304–321
2. Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," by Clifford Geertz

Thurs 4/13: Gender and Religion

1. *Gender and Religion* (pgs. 245–259)
2. Genesis 1–2
3. Screen: Women of Islam: Veiling and Seclusion (at home) with guided reading questions
4. Screen: Miriam's Daughter's Celebrate (in-class)

Tues 4/17: Gender and Religion.

Readings TBA

Fri 4/20: Religion, Violence, and Fundamentalism after 9/11

1. Lincoln, "The Study of Religion at the Current Political Moment," in *Holy Terrors*
2. G. Wood, "What Isis Really Wants," *Atlantic*

Tues 4/24: Religion, Violence, and Fundamentalism after 9/11

1. Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, selections

Fri 4/26 Field Report Projects Due

Final exam: May 4, 8–11 am

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CLASS CONDUCT

What I Expect from You:

1. That you be punctual for every class.
2. That you maintain communication with me about any illnesses or emergencies that arise.
3. That you will concentrate exclusively on this course during class hours and no receive or make telephone calls, text messages, or use any electronic device during class.
4. That you will listen to and engage with the lecture and class discussion in a way that is respectful towards other students and the instructor.
5. That you come to class ready to ask and answer questions of substance on the day's readings.
6. That you will maintain openness to critique and argument of all kinds, even if they do not fit with your own deeply held beliefs or opinions.

What You Can Expect from Me:

1. That I will be clear about what I am looking for on exams and written work.
2. That I will make myself accessible outside of class to address questions and concerns you may have about the lectures, readings, or your performance in the course.
3. That I will listen to your questions and comments and work to integrate them into the class discussion.
4. That I will encourage you to work on note-taking and study skills.
5. That I will push you to retain knowledge rather than simply retrieve it.
6. That I will focus on critical thinking skills, especially in relation to historical analysis and the close, reading of texts.
6. That I will emphasize the distinction between critical thought and personal opinions, beliefs, and received knowledge.

Signature

Date

Weds 2/15 Ritual and Practices

Assignments:

1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 29–40
2. Zoroastrian Vestas (excerpts on defilement)
3. Manual of Hadith 29, “Toilet” [in the sense of “hygiene”]
4. Leviticus 11–15, 18

Mon 2/20: Religious Figures and Types of Authority

Assignments:

1. Read Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, selections on Moses and Mt. Sinai
2. Read Qur'an, selections on Mohammed

Weds 2/22: Religious Practices: Bodily Discipline, Food, Prayer, and Dance

Assignments:

1. Read Bielo, “Bodies, Words, and Things,” 54–80
2. Watch *Embrace* (2011, 55 min) on Tibetan Buddhists

Mon 2/27: Religious Practices and Ritual

Assignments:

1. Watch: Greek orthodox baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3fbMDU0fec>
2. Evangelical baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoPEMVTA19M>
3. Demon manifestation post baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI8vCOHqMXc>
4. Screen: *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1997, 87 mins)