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## **REL 298: Thinking about Religion**

Tuesday- Thursday — 12:30-13:45

FOUST 111

**FOR WHOM PLANNED:** This course is required of all Religious Studies majors. This course is not strictly introductory, and expects that students have some familiarity with the academic study of religion before taking the course. Ideally it will be a third or fourth course in the major, taken within a semester of declaring the major.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:** On successful completion of the course students will:

- Demonstrate a solid foundation for participating in Religious Studies as a discipline in the liberal arts;
- classify and describe major theoretical issues in the study of religion and be able to articulate how theory shapes the study of religion;
- critically analyze data and apply major theories of religion to specific traditions, rituals, and social movements;
- and demonstrate a working knowledge of the history of the study of religion.

**TEACHING METHODS AND ASSIGNMENTS FOR ACHIEVING LEARNING OUTCOMES:** This course takes an imaginative and critical approach to introducing Religious Studies by focusing on case studies that illustrate how diverse religious ideas and practices may be interpreted as ways of map-making. Additionally, this course investigates how Religious Studies “maps” religious phenomena. Cases studies will be used to demonstrate how religious life in different times and places has been shaped by the dynamic interplay of social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic, and personal factors, and by peoples’ efforts to represent or “map” this interplay in order to bring meaning, purpose, and order to their personal and collective lives. In considering these religious mappings, the course will also attend to the ways in which students of religion are themselves map-makers and users. The course introduces the methods and materials that scholars, as students of religion, use to make sense of the religious worlds of their and other cultures.

This course is, therefore, not a *survey* of religious traditions, but rather an extended reflection on how scholars of religion imagine “religion” as an object of study, and how we frame our studies in a self-conscious and responsible way. This course is not, in the first instance, about description, though this is an essential part of the enterprise. It is, rather, about responsible interpretation—about how to productively approach the raw data of religious phenomenon and how to locate our perspectives in the larger context of humanistic inquiry. In short, this course is designed to introduce the problem of interpretation through selected case

studies that challenge our assumptions and illuminate our subjectivity.

This course is designed as a seminar and writing workshop. Student participation is essential, and while the professor will lead discussion and occasionally lecture, student-led discussion will drive the course. Students will also engage in library research, as well as study the craft of writing academic research papers.

## IN CLASS RULES

**What I try to cultivate in students:** Critical thinking, imagination, curiosity, and a healthy skepticism tempered by wisdom, compassion, diligence and a sense of humor.

- *Meta-rule*—There are no excuses for not being prepared for class, for not handing in assignments on time and for not following these guidelines. If you have a situation in which you are unable to comply, come and speak with me before the problem arises.
- *Reading*—You must come to class with material carefully read. Not coming to class prepared and with the text, whether a book, an article or information from the web—in hand counts as an absence.
- *Computer Access*—All students must have regular access to a computer that is connected to the internet and to a printer.
- *Group Work*—You must have a willingness to read and have other students read your writing. You have a responsibility of respect towards other student's views, and a duty to take seriously the ideas, words and writing that they put forward.
- *No late Assignments*—All assignments must be turned in on time; those turned in late will not be given credit (assignments are due at the beginning of the class period in which they are marked in the syllabus). If you must for any reason miss an exam, you must let me know in writing before not after the date. You will receive a zero on the exam if you do not inform me beforehand.
- *No Cellular Phones or Instant messaging!*—Cellular phones must be turned off in the classroom. If your phone rings I will deduct one half letter from your final grade. If you talk on the phone or text message, I reserve the right to fail you. Turn them off before you enter the room!
- *Proper use of laptop computers in classroom*—You may use computers to take notes. This privilege will be revoked if you use the computer for any other purpose. This includes "surfing" the internet, answering emails or playing games.
- *No Chatter*—If I am lecturing, or if a student "has the floor," other talking is highly distracting. If you have something to add to the conversation, please raise your hand and I will call upon you in turn. If you have something to say, which is not related to the class, please wait until the period is over.
- *No Hats, Sunglasses and Roller Skates*—Hats, sunglasses and roller skates are not appropriate in the classroom. Please take them off before you enter.
- *No Eating in Class*—It is not appropriate to eat in the classroom. Please eat outside of the class period.

**EVALUATION: (100 points possible)**

Student Participation, group work and in-class.....	10%
Portfolio . . . . .	.35%

Each Assignment in the portfolio must be typed, double spaced, in 12 point font in black ink, on white paper, with title and name. For format see "paper template" on blackboard. For citation use the *Chicago Manual of Style* [see web site below or the reference desk at the library] Also remember to follow rules of plagiarism [see academic integrity and plagiarism web pages listed below]).

(RESEARCH COMPONENT—20 points)

- Seed Data: Two 250-word descriptions of your most familiar and non-familiar religion. (5 points)
- Definition of Religion: 250 words (1 point)
- Map or calendar of Greensboro, 250 words (1 point)
- Map or calendar from "Familiar" Religious Tradition, 250 words (1 point)
- Map or calendar from "Strange" Religious Tradition, 250 words (1 points)
- Marx's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data. (1 point)
- Durkheim's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data(1 point)
- Freud's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data (1 points)
- Otto's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data (1 point)
- Psychological Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Phenomenological Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Feminist and Gender Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Anthropological Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Define Ritual, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Define Symbol, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)
- Define Myth, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words(1 point)

(WRITING COMPONENT—15 Points)

- Annotated Bibliography (2 points)
- X, Y Z Exercise (2 points)
- Paper Structure (2 points)
- Revised Paper Structure (2 points)
- First Version (2 points)
- Re-written Introduction and Conclusion (2 points)
- Second version (3points)

Two Exams . . . . .	10 points each 20%
Final Oral Exam . . . . .	5
Final Research Paper. . . . .	.30%

\*The standards for grading are those described in the Undergraduate Bulletin, pp. 37-40, and at <http://www.uncg.edu/reg/Catalog/0001/uncgGradingSys.htm>. Each student is required to sign the Academic

Integrity Policy on all major work submitted for the course. Refer to the UNCG *Undergraduate Bulletin* [see web site listed below].

**REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS/REFERENCES:**

**Text Books (available in the book store):**

Booth, Wayne. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Kunin, Seth. *Religion: The Modern Theories*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

**Electronic Reserve Reading (in order of appearance):**

[reading #1] Cherry, Conrad, Betty Deberg, and Amanda Poterfield. "Conclusion," in *Religion on Campus: What Religion Really Means to Today's undergraduates*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 275-295.

[reading #2] Miner, Horance. "Body Ritual Among the Nacerima, " in *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. Russel McCutheon (London: Cassell Academic, 1999), 2-5.

[reading #3] Mussee, Mark. "Religious Studies and 'Heaven's Gate': Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange, in *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. Russel McCutheon (London: Cassell Academic, 1999), 390-394.

Reading# 3a] Smith, Jonathan Z. "Imagining Religion, " in *Imaging Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi-xiii.

[reading #4] Smith, J. Z, "Map is Not Territory," in *Map in not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chcago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 291-309

[reading #5] Schwartzberg, Joseph. "Cosmological Mapping," in *The History of Cartography*, eds. J.B. Harley and David Woodward (University of Chicago Press, 1992), vol. 2, book 1 pages 332-383.

[reading # 6] Grieve, Gregory. "Cosmological Corrections: Mapping the Ideological Construction of Traditional Places in Bhaktapur, Nepal," *Studies in Nepalese History and Society* 9 (2004): 375-406.

[reading #7] Kimball, Stanley and R. Don Oscarson. "The Trek West," in *The Travelers' Guide to Historic Mormon America*, (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press), 70-83.

[reading #8] Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915).

[reading #9] Freud, Sigmund. "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices," in *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1948-1950), vol. 2, 25-35.

[reading #10] Otto, Rudolf "Mysterium Tremendum" in *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into The Non-Rational Factor In The Idea Of The Divine And Its Relation To The Rational*, trans. John Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 12-30.

[reading #11] Berger, Peter. "Religion and World Construction," in the *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociology Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 3-28.

[reading #12] Eliade, Mircea. "Approximations: The Structure and Morphology of the Sacred," and "Sacred Stones: Epiphanies, Signs and Forms," in *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (London: Sneed and Ward, 1958), 1-4, and 216-220.

[reading #13] Eliade, "Introduction," in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (London: A Harvest/HBJ book, 1957), 8-18.

- [reading #14] Shaw, Rosalind. "Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies." *Religion and Gender*. (1995): 65-76.
- [reading # 15] Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125.
- [reading # 16] Bitton, Davis. "The Ritualization of Mormon History," in *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 171-188.
- [Reading # 17] Firth, Raymond. "Symbolism of Flags," in *Symbol, Myth and Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 328-367.
- [Reading # 18] Doniger, "Other Peoples' Lies," in *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25-43.

### **E-Books (accessed through library catalogue)**

"Religion" [first and second editions] *Encyclopedia of Religion* / Lindsay Jones, editor in chief.  
[available through the library catalogue]

### **Websites (alphabetical order):**

Abebooks.com <http://www.abebooks.com/>

Academic Integrity (UNCG): <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/faq/>

Belief-o-matic: [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/76/story\\_7665\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/76/story_7665_1.html)

Chicago Manual of Style: <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.html> or  
<http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/chicago.html> or  
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>

Classroom Assessment Evaluation  
<http://www.siue.edu/~deder/partrub.html>

James, William . *The Varieties of Religious Experience*  
<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JamVari.html>

[Karl ]Marx, "The fetishism of Commodities and The Secret Thereof"  
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MODERN/FETISH.HTM>

Mormon Pioneer Historic Resource Study:  
[http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mopi/hrst.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mopi/hrst.htm)

Plagiarism (UNCG): <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/tutorial/integrate/plagdef.asp>

[Max] Weber. "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism"  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/WEBER/header.html>

### **Course Schedule:**

I. Week I—*Thinking About Religion*: The course begins by introducing you to what it means to think critically about religion on a university campus. Generating the "seed data" which will underlay your academic research in the class, you will begin the initial exploration of two religions: a tradition "familiar" to you, and one that you consider "strange."

Tuesday Aug 15: *Lining up the Duck/Rabbits: What does it mean to think about religion?*

HANDOUT: "Beyond Belief: What Happens when Religion meets critical thinking in the classroom?"

Thursday Aug 17: *Falling down the Duck/Rabbit hole. On Hermeneutics: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange*

READ: Reading #1- Cherry, Deberg and Poterfield (This is a PDF available in the library—print and bring to class).

Reading # 2 —Miner (This is a PDF available on blackboard—print and bring to class).

Reading #3 — Muesse (This is a PDF available on blackboard—print and bring to class).

DUE: Seed Data—Two 250 word descriptions of your familiar and non-familiar religions. (For help in finding religions, see the belief-o-matic web site, also try the *Encyclopedia of Religion* which can be accessed online as an e-book through the library).

II. Week 2-3: *Mapping the realm of religion.* We continue by using the idea of maps as representations, allowing us from the start to examine a variety of critical issues and perspectives. We begin by looking at how the term religion has been imagined. We then turn to J. Z. Smith's Article, "Map is not Territory," to introduce the concept of interpretation, especially as it pertains to the image of the "Duck/Rabbit.." We continue by exploring specific instances of religious maps, mapping and map makers. First, the *Khowpa Yantrara Dey* from Bhakapur, Nepal. Second, *The Traverlers' Guide to Historic Mormon America*.

Tuesday Aug 22: *What is the [academic] definition of Religion*

READ: [Reading# 3a] Smith, "Imagining Religion"

"Religion" [first and Further Considerations] *Encyclopedia of Religion /*

Lindsay Jones, editor in chief. [These are available through the library catalogue as an e-book—print and bring to class].

DUE: Definition of Religion— 250 words

Thursday Aug 24: *If the map is not the territory, is a rabbit a duck?*

READ: [reading #4] Smith, J. Z, "Map is not Territory," (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

HANDOUT: Duck/Rabbit

DUE: Map of Greensboro—250 words describing it.

Tuesday Aug 29: *Bhaktapur Mandala*

READ: *Khowpa Yantrara Dey* [image available on Blackboard— print, in color if possible, and bring to class]

[Reading # 5] Schwartzberg, "Cosmographical Mapping" (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

[Reading #6] Grieve, " Cosmological Corrections: Mapping the Ideological Construction of Traditional Places in Bhaktapur, Nepal." (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Map or calendar from "Familiar" Religious Tradition, 250 words

Thursday Aug 31: *Mapping The Pioneer Trail*

READ: [Reading #7] Oscarson and Kimball, "The Trek West"(This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

"Chapter 1: Introduction: Mormon Pioneer Historic Resource Study." (available on line—print and bring to class).

DUE: Map or calendar from "Strange" Religious Tradition, 250 words

III. Week 4-6: *Surveying the field*: Next, we turn to several major approaches—Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Freud and Otto—to the study of religion. These are the significant theorists, primarily from the early part of the twentieth century, who established the underlying warp of the current discipline.

Tuesday September 5: *Karl Marx—Religion as Alienation*

READ: Kunin, 6-15

Marx, "The fetishism of Commodities and The Secret Thereof" (available online—print and bring to class).

DUE: Description of Marx's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data.

Thursday September 7: *Emile Durkheim—Society as the Sacred*

READ: Kunin, 16-34

[reading #8] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (This is a PDF—print and bring to class.)

DUE: Description of Durkheim's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data.

(Note we are skipping Kunin, 34-65)

Tuesday September 12: *Sigmund Freud—Religion and Personality*

READ: Kunin, 44-61

[reading #9] Freud, "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices," (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Description of Freud's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data.

Thursday September 14: *Rudolf Otto—The Idea of the Holy*

READ: Kunin: 62-68

[reading #10] Otto, "Mysterium Tremendum" (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Description of Otto's approach 250 words. Also an example from your data.

Tuesday September 19:

EXAM # 1: Take home Exam, 3-5 pages

Due WED 11:30 PM

IV. Week 8—10 *Mapping the Discipline*: Next, we examine five of the significant theoretical modes by which the study of religion is accomplished—Sociological, Psychological, Phenomenological, Feminist and Gender Studies, and Anthropological.

Thursday, September 31—Sociology, Methodological Atheism and Secularism

READ: Kunin, 73-99.

[reading #11] Berger, "Religion and World Construction"(This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Describe the sociological method, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words.

Tuesday October 3—Psychological Approaches

READ: Kunin, 100-115.

William James—<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JamVari.html>

DUE: Describe the Psychological Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Thursday October 5—*Phenomenology and the History of Religions*

READ: Kunin, 116-136.

[reading #12] Eliade, "Approximations: The Structure and Morphology of the Sacred," and "Sacred Stones: Epiphanies, Signs and Forms." (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

[reading #13] Eliade, "Introduction" (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Describe the Phenomenological Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Tuesday October 10 (No Class for Fall Break)

Thursday October 12—*Feminism, Gender and Religion*

READ: Kunin, 137-148.

[reading #14] Shaw "Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies" (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Describe the Feminist and Gender Approach, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Tuesday October 17—*Anthropological Approaches to Religion*

READ: Kunin, 148-170.

[reading # 15] Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Describe the *Anthropological Approach*, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

V. Week 11— 12 *Navigating with the map*—We now begin to use the map we've drawn by examining three main categories of analysis—Ritual, Symbol and Myth. We will look both at examples from your work and my own, as well as read how other scholars of religion have used these analytic categories.

Thursday October, 19 *Ritual*

Read: Kunin, 186—193.

[reading # 16] Davis. "The Ritualization of Mormon History," (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

DUE: Define Ritual, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Tuesday October 24: *Symbol*

Read: Kunin, 194-212

[Reading # 17] Firth, "Symbolism of Flags." (This is a PDF—print and bring to class).

Examples of flag symbolism from Kamas, Utah

DUE: Define Symbol, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Thursday October 26: *Myth*

Read: Kunin, 213-222

[Reading # 18] Doniger, "Other Peoples' Lies" (This is a PDF—print and bring to



class).

Example: The Film *Legacy*

DUE: Define Myth, use an example to illustrate your point, 250 words

Tuesday October 31:

EXAM # 2: Take home Exam, 3-5 pages

Due WED 11:30 PM

Library Tour of Religious Studies databases

Reading: Booth 1-33 and 90-107

VI. Week 12-16: *Using the Map!* In the final section of the class we will put the map to work, by writing a final 5-7 page research paper. This creative undertaking is based upon the Wayne Booth's *Craft of Research*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). These will include the creation of an Annotated bibliography, XYZ problem, Claim, Introduction, Conclusion, Evidence (Sub-claims), Warrant, Qualification. At this time we will break down into smaller groups of five persons.

*Final Paper Topic:* Compare and contrast your "familiar" and "strange" religious traditions, by making an argument using one of the theorists from section III, a theoretical mode from section IV or a category from section V.

Thursday November 2—*Topics, Questions, Problems*

(SMALL GROUP)

Reading: Booth, 40-89

Due: Annotated Bibliography [At least five sources, three of which must be through the library.]

Tuesday November 7 — *Making a Claim*

(SMALL GROUP)

Reading: Booth, 111-138

Due: X, Y Z Exercise

Thursday November 9—*Subclaims: Evidence, Qualifications and Warrants* .

(SMALL GROUP)

Reading: Booth, 138-181

Due: Paper Structure

Tuesday November 11 — *Planning and Revising*

(SMALL GROUP)

Reading: Booth, 189-221

Due: Revised Paper Structure

(Thanksgiving Break)

MONDAY November 27, email first version to small group members and professor

Tuesday November 28—*Introduction and Conclusion*

(SMALL GROUP)

Reading: Booth, 222-237

Other Group members papers [print up and bring to class]

Due: First Version

Thursday November 30— Revising

Reading: Booth, 263-288

Due: Re-written Introduction and Conclusion

THE FINAL STRETCH Dec 4-Dec 11

- ✓ MONDAY December 4th, **Hard copy** of *second version* and Portfolio is due in my out box by 4pm. (Religious Studies Office, Foust 109). Remember the meta-rule. Emailed or late copies will not be accepted.
- ✓ WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY November 6 and 7th, FINAL ORAL EXAM and conversation about research paper.
- ✓ MONDAY December 11th, **Hard copy** of *final version* is due in my out box by 4pm. (Religious Studies Office, Foust 109). Remember the meta-rule. Emailed or late copies will not be accepted.