

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

SUMMER 2008 • 1ST SESSION

REL 100-002 MTWTh 10:00-11:45 A.M. • REL 100-003 MTWTh 2:00-3:45 P.M.

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OFFICE: MANLY 211 (348-8512)

OFFICE HOURS: AFTER CLASS.

DEPARTMENT OFFICE: MANLY 212 (348-5271)

OR BY APPOINTMENT

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100mccutch.html>

Introduce (L. *intro* [inward, on the inside] + *ducere* [to lead]): to lead or bring into a given place or position; to place into from the outside, or put within; to bring or add as a new feature to some action, as in the introduction of a new plant species into an ecosystem.

DESCRIPTION

REL 100 examines the function of religion in relation to human beliefs, social practices, and culture in general, and surveys a broad number of important debates in the history of Religious Studies, conceived as the cross-cultural study of human behavior. The course emphasizes general, cognitive skills essential throughout the human sciences.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Learn to distinguish between essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance definitions
2. Learn the history of the study of religion, along with its key theorists
3. Learn to distinguish and apply an emic and an etic perspective
4. Learn to identify and define basic concepts deriving from Hinduism and Buddhism
5. Learn to apply theories of myth and ritual to human behavior

BOOKS

The course has two **required** texts that can all be purchased at the university's bookstore; used copies are probably available also:

- Russell McCutcheon, *Studying Religion: An Introduction*
- Jonathan Z. Smith, *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*

We will also read Plato's *Euthyphro*, an online reading (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html>; see course web page for link). A variety of other online readings are posted on the course website in a "secure" folder. Your Bama ID/Password are required to open these PDF readings. (Adobe Acrobat reader is on all campus computers and available free on the web at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>.) The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day.

REQUIREMENTS

Consistent attendance is mandatory; students will not excel in this course if their attendance is sporadic. **Please keep in mind that there is no room whatsoever for procrastination in a summer course.**

1. Working with a partner, students must submit, on June 5, a list of 5 different definitions of religion found in Gorgas Library's reference section (ground floor), with each definition typed and quoted in full, with full citations in a style with which you are familiar, and with the students' names on the front page. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade.
2. On two occasions students must summarize the main points addressed in class readings that have a sign-up space beside them in the schedule (see below). Each summary is worth 5% of your final grade, for a

total of **10%** of your final grade.

3. On June 16 students will submit a 500 word essay on a topic described in the schedule below. This is worth **20%** of your final grade.
4. On June 19 students will write an in-class essay on a piece of data to be distributed that day. This is worth **20%** of your final grade.
5. From June 23-26 we will begin each class with a short pop quiz on defining some of the technical terms related to Hinduism and Buddhism that are listed for each day in the schedule below. These quizzes are collectively worth **10%** of your final grade.
6. On July 3 a final in-class writing assignment will be completed (see schedule for the topic). This is worth **30%** of your final grade.

GRADING SCALE

Because this course is worth a total of 100 points, 90 and above = A; 80 and above = B; 70 and above = C; 60 and above = D; 59 and below = F.

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If a student is caught plagiarizing the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or a published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences.
2. No grades of "I" (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course.
3. Prior to speaking with the professor about reasonable accommodations, students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located at 133B Martha Parham Hall East (on the corner of 6th Ave. and Bryant Dr.); call them at 348-4285 or visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu>.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

- June 3 *Introduction to the class; library assignment (work with a partner; due June 5)*
- June 4 McCutcheon, Introduction **and** What's in a Name?
- June 5 McCutcheon, The History of 'Religion'
Smith, Comparative Religion _____; Religion, Definition of _____
(library assignment due)
- June 9 *What is Piety?*
Plato's *Euthyphro* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>)
- June 10 McCutcheon, The Essentials of Religion
Course web page
Rudolf Otto _____; Paul Tillich _____
Smith, Essence _____; Religion, Phenomenology of _____
- June 11 McCutcheon, The Functions of Religion
Smith, Religion, Explanation of _____
Course web page
Karl Marx _____; Sigmund Freud _____
- June 12 Smith, Existentialism _____
Course web page
Jean Paul Sartre _____; Albert Camus _____
- Weekend Assignment*
Select an item that could be described as "sacred" or "profane" and write a 500 word analysis of how Mary Douglas, Emile Durkheim or Mircea Eliade might approach the study of this object. Be sure to describe the object and the scholar's approach sufficiently before offering your analysis. To prepare for this assignment, read:
McCutcheon (Scholars section), M. Douglas or E. Durkheim or M. Eliade
Smith, Sacred, Profane; Sacred, the; Purity and Impurity
- June 16 McCutcheon, The Public Discourse on Religion

Smith, Law and Religion (in the United States) _____;
Church and State _____; State Religion _____
(assignment 1 due today)

June 17 McCutcheon, Religion and the Insider/Outsider Problem
Course web page

Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"

Smith: Emic/Etic _____; Understanding _____

June 18 *Example: Heaven's Gate* (film)

Course web page

Mark Muesse, "Making the Strange Familiar ..." _____

Smith, Church/Sect _____; Cult _____;

Religion, Sociology of _____; Jainism _____

June 19 **Assignment 2** (format: in-class writing assignment): a piece of writing describing some human belief, behavior, or institution will be distributed at the start of class and you will be asked to read it and, drawing on the technical tools learned so far in the course, comment on it/analyze it as would a scholar of religion.

June 23 McCutcheon, The Resemblance Among Religions

Course web page

Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*, 66-70 _____

Describing Religions

June 23 *Hinduism*

Smith: 424-440 and the following entries: Ganges, Indo-European Religion, Indus Valley Civilization, Veda, Sanskrit, Atman, Brahman, Brahmin

June 24 *Hinduism*

Smith: Caste, Dharma, Karma, Maya, Purusha, Four Goals, Ganesha, Kali, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Yoga, Krishna, Path of Devotion (Bhakti), Reincarnation

June 25 *Buddhism*

Smith: 135-150 and the following entries: Buddhas, Pali, Sangha, Siddhartha, Dharma/dharma, Mahayana, Theravada

June 26 *Buddhism*

Smith: Three Jewels, Amitabha, Meditation, Bodhisattva, Four Noble Truths, Enlightenment, Nirvana, No-self (anatman), Wheel of Dharma, Pure Land, Precepts, Zen

Comparing Religions

June 30 Film: *Avalon* (please be prepared to stay a few minutes longer than usual, to see the entire film)

July 1 *Myth: Origins Tales and Social Identity*

Course web page

McCutcheon, "Myth" _____; _____

Smith, Myth _____; Smith, Cosmogony _____

July 2 *Ritual: Making Social Transitions*

Course web page

Ronald Grimes, "Ritual" _____; _____

Smith, Initiation _____; Community/Communitas _____;

Sacred Space/Sacred Time _____

July 3 **Assignment 3 (in-class writing)**: Prepare by reading Jonathan Z. Smith's, "Disciplinary Lying," the Afterword in *Studying Religion: An Introduction* and come to class prepared to write on the relationship of Smith's views on education to your experience as an undergraduate student at the University of Alabama.