University of South Carolina
Department of Religious Studies

RELG110: Introduction to Religious Studies
Fall 2014, Dr. Roberts

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to the study of religion, with attention to questions of theory and method as applied to various case studies. Readings, lectures, discussions, and in-class activities encourage students to consider how individuals and groups organize themselves around belief in the existence of god/s, spirits, and ancestors, and how recourse to such agents impacts the legitimacy, authority, and authenticity of particular practices and institutions.

Learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

- Evaluate different approaches to the academic study of religion;
- Identify basic themes and terminology related to the academic study of religion;
- Discuss ways that human behavior is shaped by belief in god/s, spirits, ancestors, or other non-ordinary agents;
- Analyze, explain, and compare specific examples of religious discourse, practice, and social formation.

Textbooks


Assignments, Requirements, and Grading

Students will be evaluated in a variety of ways. The following four components contribute equally toward the final grade:

**Group Discussions** (25% of the final grade): Each class meeting will include time for group discussions about particular questions. Each group must submit a page of written answers and students who are present will sign their names to the paper; alternatively, the professor will visit each group and record the names of the students who are present and participating. Students who
miss class or who do not participate constructively will not receive credit that day. Students who record the names of absent students in an attempt to help them get credit for that day will receive zero points toward their overall discussion grade.

**Midterm Exam** (25% of the final grade): An in-class written exam covering the assigned readings as well as material delivered in class (lectures, films, discussions, and so forth). The midterm exam aims to evaluate students’ understanding of basic terminology related to the study of religion and their ability to think critically about specific examples of religious discourse, practice, and/or social formations.

**Final Project/Report** (25% of the final grade) Students will work alone OR in groups to identify, research, and discuss a particular topic, issue, event, or text related to the general topic of the course. This work will culminate in the preparation of an individual or group report. Reports will be evaluated in terms of clarity, attention to detail, critical analysis, and ability to assess the project in terms of the academic study of religion. Further details will be distributed and explained in class.

**Final Exam** (25% of the final grade): A comprehensive in-class written exam covering the assigned readings as well as material delivered in class (lectures, films, discussions, and so forth). The final exam aims to evaluate students’ understanding of basic terminology related to the study of religion and their ability to think critically about specific examples of religious discourse, practice, and/or social formations.

**Grading Scale**

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:


**Attendance Policy**

In the case of an unexcused absence, students will receive no credit for that day’s discussion. Students who accumulate three or more unexcused absences risk having their final grade lowered by ten points, in addition to having received no credit for the missed classes. Students who anticipate needing to miss a class for any reason must contact the professor ahead of time via email (erinroberts@sc.edu) to receive permission to make up the work and receive credit. Unless the absence is discussed ahead of time, or unless there is a compelling reason for not doing so, the student will not receive credit for that day.

**Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>Studying Religion: Martin, 1-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 1</td>
<td>No class</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sept 3  Covington, Chapters 1-3  
In-class case study: *Holy Ghost People*

Sept 8  Covington, Chapters 4-6  
Sept 10  Covington, Chapters 7-9

Sept 15  Covington, Chapters 10-11 & Afterward  
* Extra Credit Opportunity: Evening Lecture by Buddhist Monk *

Sept 17  Classification: Martin, 19-44


Sept 24  In-class case study: SCOTUS & Religion

Sept 29  Structure: Martin, 45-69  
Oct 1  Habitus: Martin, 71-91

Oct 6  In-class case study: *Wrestling for Jesus: The Tale of T-Money*
Oct 8  Review

Oct 13  **MIDTERM EXAM**
Oct 15  In-class case study: *Dancing for the Dead: Funeral Strippers in Taiwan*

Oct 20  Legitimation: Martin, 93-116  
Oct 22  Authority: Martin, 117-143

Oct 27  In-class case study [reading TBD]  
Oct 29  In-class case study [reading TBD]

Nov 3  In-class case study [reading TBD]  
Nov 5  Authenticity: Martin, 145-163

Nov 10  In-class case study: *Kumare*  
Nov 12  In-class case study: *Kumare*

Nov 17  Urban, 1-56  
Nov 19  Urban, 66-117

Nov 24  Urban, 118-177

Nov 26  

Dec 1  Urban, 178-216  
Dec 3  Course Wrap-up

Dec 8  Final exam, 9am