Introduction to the Study of Religion

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion and provides students with the basic knowledge required to think critically about religion, religions, and being religious. Students will explore different definitions of religion as well as different ideas about how best to study religion. After an introduction to some of the “classic” approaches to religion from the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, we will evaluate some of the more recent attempts to explain religion, including evolutionary and cognitive approaches. Students will apply their knowledge of the various definitions and methods to case studies involving Christianity in modern-day America.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the major accounts of religion from the 19\textsuperscript{th}, 20\textsuperscript{th}, and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries, and be able to think critically about them;

- Understand various ways that scholars have defined religion and develop his/her own working definition of religion;

- Distinguish between the practice and the study of religion in order to develop his/her own ideas about how best to study religion.

Textbooks (available through the bookstore; used copies are available for good prices on amazon.com)


- Barrett, Justin L. *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Alta Mira Press, 2004)


Course Requirements

Each of the following four components is worth 25\% of the final grade:

- Discussion section participation: Nearly every class meeting will include plenary or small group discussion. The onus is on each student to prepare for discussion and to take the discussion questions and each other seriously.

- Quizzes or other short assignments: At least once a week students will take a short (10-15 minute) quiz. The quizzes aim to inspire students to do the reading and to think critically about the different approaches covered during the semester. Students may make up missed quizzes and other assignments only with prior consent by the Professor.
- Midterm exam (October 20)
- Final exam (December 13)

**Class Schedule**

**Week One**
No class

**Week Two**
August 23  Introduction to course
August 25  Topic: Frazer and Tylor  
Read: Pals 18-52  
Prepare: For quiz

**Week Three**
August 30  Topic: Freud  
Read: Pals 53-84; Balmer 12-47  
Prepare: For quiz
September 1  Topic: Application and analysis  
Read: Balmer 48-91

**Week Four**
September 6  No class, Labor Day
September 8  Film: *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Part One (1<sup>st</sup> ¾ of film)

**Week Five**
September 13  Topic: Durkheim  
Read: Pals 85-117; Balmer 92-108  
Prepare: For quiz
September 15  Topic: Application and analysis  
Read: Balmer 109-46  
Film: Final Segment of Part One (*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*)

**Week Six**
September 20  Topic: Marx  
Read: Pals 118-48  
Prepare: For quiz
September 22  Topic: Application and analysis  
Read: Balmer 147-92  
Film: *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Part Two (1<sup>st</sup> half only)

**Week Seven**
September 27  Topic: Weber  
Read: Pals 149-92  
Prepare: For quiz
September 29  Topic: Application and analysis  
Read: Balmer 193-246  
Film: *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Part Two (2<sup>nd</sup> half)
Week Eight

October 4  
Topic: Eliade  
Read: Pals 193-228  
Prepare: For quiz

October 6  
Topic: Application and analysis  
Read: Balmer 247-92  
Film: Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, Part Three (1st half only)

Week Nine

October 11  
Topic: Evans-Pritchard  
Read: Pals 229-59  
Prepare: For quiz

October 13  
Topic: Geertz  
Read: Pals 260-91  
Prepare: For quiz  
***Review handout for midterm to be distributed***

Week Ten

October 18  
Film: Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, Part Three (2nd half)  
Read: Balmer 292-334  
***Review session; prepare questions from the review handout***

October 20  
Midterm exam, in class

Week Eleven

October 25  
Topic: Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR)  
Read: Barrett 1-44  
Prepare: For quiz and discussion

October 27  
Topic: CSR  
Read: Barrett 45-93  
Prepare: For quiz and discussion

Week Twelve

November 1  
Topic: CSR  
Read: Barrett 95-124  
Prepare: For quiz and discussion

November 3  
Topic: Recent Approaches (Whitehouse & Bourdieu)  
Read: Covington 1-63  
Prepare: Discussion questions

Week Thirteen

November 8  
Topic: Recent Approaches (Asad, Schillerback, Arnal, Smith…)  
Read: Covington 64-132  
Prepare: For quiz and discussion

November 10  
Topic: Application and Analysis  
Read: Covington 133-196  
Prepare: Discussion questions
Week Fourteen

November 15  Topic: Application and Analysis  
             Read: Covington 197-249  
             Prepare: Discussion questions  
November 17  Film: Holy Ghost People  
             Prepare: Discussion questions  

Week Fifteen

November 22  No class, SBL Annual Meeting in Atlanta  
November 24  No class, Thanksgiving break  

Week Sixteen

November 29  Discussion about final exam  
December 1   Course wrap-up and review  

December 13  Final Exam, 9am
Policies, Procedures, and Tips

Academic success

Nobody is born with all of the skills necessary for becoming a successful college student. These skills, instead, are learned through practice and hard work. The University offers many resources for students to develop academic skills, such as the Writing Center, the Student Success Center, and the Academic Center for Excellence. You will find links to these resources on Blackboard’s “External Links” section. Please do not hesitate to use one or more of these services, or to speak with Prof. Roberts or the Teaching Assistant about how to improve your work. We are here to help you learn.

Assignments

Each student is responsible to consult the syllabus and complete all assignments (readings, preparing for discussions, and so forth) in a thorough and timely manner. Discussion sections will be productive only if students come to class prepared.

In-class assignments such as quizzes, exams, presentations, or discussion sections may be made-up only in cases where the student has received prior permission from Prof. Roberts.

Written assignments must be submitted by the date and time listed on the syllabus. When the assignment is to be submitted on Blackboard, the option to submit the assignment will be eliminated at the date and time that the assignment is due. Thus, students should submit their work before the deadline in order to avoid problems. It is the responsibility of the student to make sure that electronic files are readable and not corrupted.

Cases of plagiarism, cheating, or copying will not be tolerated. Students should familiarize themselves with the Honor Code and the Carolinian Creed. The Office of Academic Integrity also offers information related to these issues on its webpage. All of these resources are on the “External Links” section of Blackboard.

When students submit assignments through Blackboard, the assignments will be analyzed by SafeAssign. SafeAssign is a powerful program that can identify sections of text that have been copied from other works and not properly cited. It also compares all student papers with each other in order to identify cases of student-to-student copying. Proper citation formats may be found through the Library webpage as well as in the “External Links” section of the course page on Blackboard.

Attendance

Attendance is required. Students should arrive on time and be well prepared for class. Missed classes should be cleared with Prof. Roberts ahead of time.

Communication

Email correspondence concerning the course should be sent to roberts.usc@gmail.com. This mailbox will be checked once daily by either Prof. Roberts or the Teaching Assistant. During the week, you may generally expect a response within 24 hours; weekends and holidays may take a bit longer. Please be patient! We encourage general questions about logistics to be posted on the discussion forum. You may receive a quicker response from your classmates than from us.

Students wishing to schedule an appointment outside normal office hours should speak with Prof. Roberts or the Teaching Assistant after class or send an email describing the nature of the appointment (paper conference, tutoring, research discussion, and so forth) and some possible meeting times.

The Blackboard Discussion Board may be used for communication concerning any topic related to the course. Discussion is not required. Students who use the Board must maintain an appropriate sense of
decorum and be careful not to use language or a tone that is offensive or disrespectful to others. Abusive language or comments will be reported, as will use of the Board for personal communication (party announcements, bike for sale, and so forth).

In-class technology

Laptops and cell phones may not be used in the classroom unless otherwise noted. In order to more fully understand the rationale for this policy, students are encouraged to watch the video *Digital Nation*, which is available on the “External Links” section of the course site on Blackboard.

Students with disabilities who need to use a laptop or other electronic device during class should feel free to speak with Dr. Roberts; appropriate accommodations will be made on a case-by-case basis.