Course Description

Build an understanding of the contexts of religious studies; participate in ongoing scholarly discussions; and expand the serious student’s skills in critically analyzing religions.

Course Overview

This course offers a critical approach to the academic study of religion through the lens of religious ethics. We begin with a broad look at some of the main issues concerning theory and method for the study of religion. We will then analyze two recent arguments for the role of religious ethics in contemporary society, and conclude with an examination of how evolution, game theory, and non-human animals have come to be a central part of today’s discourse on religious ethics.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

- Identify current issues and debates concerning the connection between religion, ethics, and morality;
- Compare and engage various theories and methods used within the academic study of religion;
- Conduct research and analysis on a topic associated with religious ethics.

Required Textbooks


**Recommended Textbooks** (the required sections are available on Blackboard as PDF files)


**Assignments, Requirements, and Grading**

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

- **Reading Summaries** (25% of the final grade) For each reading assignment, students must write and submit a one or two paragraph summary of the main argument and/or salient points of the assigned text. Students who miss class due to an unexcused absence cannot receive full credit for the day’s summary.

- **In-class Presentation** (25% of the final grade) Once during the semester, each student will be responsible for summarizing the day’s readings at the beginning of the class, developing three discussion questions related to the reading, and helping to facilitate the discussion of these questions during class.

- **Research Paper** (25% of the final grade) During the second half of the course, students—in consultation with the professor—will identify a topic of interest. Students will prepare a brief research presentation to share with the class, who will discuss the topic and offer feedback that may be used to improve the quality of the paper before its final submission. Papers 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. Details will be distributed and discussed 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).

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance will be taken at each class session. In the case of an unexcused absence, students cannot receive full credit for that day’s reading summary. If the student desires to earn partial credit for the summary associated with the day of the unexcused absence, she/he must submit the reading summary within 24 hours of the missed class. Students who accumulate three or more unexcused absences risk having their final grade lowered by ten points, in addition to having received no (or partial) credit for the missed assignments. Unless the absence is discussed with and approved by the professor ahead of time (or unless the student has a compelling reason for not doing so), the absence will be considered unexcused.
**Grading Scale**

The final grade will be determined on a 100-point scale as follows:


**Schedule**

January 14  Course Introduction

Part One: Theory and Method

January 16  *Critical Introduction*, 1-44
January 21  *Critical Introduction*, 45-116
January 23  *Critical Introduction*, 117-163
January 28  *Critical Introduction*, 165-192
January 30  *Holy Terrors*, 1-32

February 4  *Holy Terrors*, 33-92
February 6  *Holy Terrors*, 93-142

Part Two: Some Perspectives on Human Interaction

February 11  *How to be Secular*, xv-52
February 13  *How to be Secular*, 53-102
February 18  *How to be Secular*, 103-154
February 20  *How to be Secular*, 155-210
February 25  *Beyond Religion*, 1-56
February 27  *Beyond Religion*, 57-100
March 4  *Beyond Religion*, 101-154
March 6  *Beyond Religion*, 155-188

March 11  Spring recess
March 13  Spring recess

Part Three: Topical Studies and Student Research

March 18  Student Research Workshop
March 20  Student Research Workshop
March 25  *Evolution, Games, and God*, sections TBD
March 27  *Evolution, Games, and God*, sections TBD
| April 1 | *Evolution, Games, and God*, sections TBD |
| April 3 | *Communion of Subjects*, sections TBD |
| April 8 | *Communion of Subjects*, sections TBD |
| April 10 | *Communion of Subjects*, sections TBD |
| April 15 | Student Research Presentations |
| April 17 | Student Research Presentations |
| April 22 | Student Research Presentations |
| April 24 | Student Research Presentations |