

Introduction to Religious Studies

RS 1301 (CRN – 22425)

University of Texas at El Paso

Department of Religious Studies

Spring 2023

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench

Time: T/Th 10:00 – 11:20AM

Room: 201 Cotton Memorial Building

Office: 210 Worrell Hall

Office Hours: M – F, 8:30 – 9:15AM

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Course Description and Objectives:

What does the term 'religion' mean? Is it static or does it mean a variety of things depending on the context in which it is used? This course will introduce you to the academic study of religion and current theories of religion in the field of Religious Studies today. Many would argue that the academic study of religion is an essential part of modern discourses about a wide range of topics from politics to private family life. I agree with this argument and this course will not only explain why religious studies is so important, it will also introduce you to how to engage with the challenges that 'religion' presents (and will continue to present) in past, present, and future societies. These challenges include how to read religious texts, how to analyze and engage with truth claims, and how to, generally, engage with religion in the public sphere (politics, social movements, revolutions, etc.). This course will introduce you to the methodology of Religious Studies so as to provide you with a foundational skillset for engaging with the complex world around you.

Required Texts:

Martin, Craig. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2014.

(other required readings will be provided as necessary)

Pals, Daniel. *Ten Theories of Religion*. 4th Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015

Assignments and Grade Distribution:

30% Participation (group discussions)

20% Midterm Exam

30% Written Assignment (5 - 7 pages not including title page and bibliography)

20% Final Exam

Assignment Notes:

Participation: Participation points will be given if the student actively participates in the weekly in class discussions and submits the weekly class discussion summary (done in class). This part of your grade is worth 30%. You cannot afford to miss out on the participation assignments.

Midterm Exam: The midterm examination will be based on your readings from the beginning of the course up to the midterm. It will include multiple-choice questions and two essay questions.

Written Assignment: Students are required to submit a 5 - 7 page written research assignment following these instructions: (1) choose a topic from the written assignment topics document in the written assignment course content folder; (2) write a 5 - 7 page essay that contains the following; a) an explanation of your object of study; b) your analysis of the topic from the perspective of **one** of the following: classification, social structure, social practices/habitus, legitimation, authority, and authenticity (each of these terms is discussed extensively in the textbook so please use it to guide your analysis). **Note:** You may choose to write your paper using Chicago, MLA, or APA citation styles. However, you must be consistent throughout your paper. Your paper must contain proper citations and a bibliography/works cited page. You are also required to *use at least four academic/peer-reviewed sources* (not including the textbook) in your paper.

Final Exam: The final exam will have the same form as the midterm but will be based on the readings assigned in the second half of the semester (i.e., the readings assigned after the midterm).

Course Outline:

The following schedule/outline is tentative. Time constraints, unforeseen events, and class interest may result in slight alterations.

Week 1	Topic	Readings
1/17	Introduction and Review of Syllabus	
1/19	Thesis on Method – What is the study of Religion?	“Theses on Method” Bruce Lincoln (in week 1 folder)
Week 2	Topic	Readings
1/24	Laying the groundwork for the Study of Religion	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 1 “Religion and the Problem of Definition” Chapter 2 “Functionalism and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion”
1/26	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 3	Topic	Readings
1/31	Religion and Classification	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 3 “How Society Works: Classification” Chapter 4 “How Society Works: Essentialism” Douglas, <i>Purity and Danger</i> “Introduction” and “Chapter 1: Ritual Uncleaness”
2/2	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 4	Topic	Readings
2/7	Religion and Social Structure	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 5 “How Society Works: Structure”
2/9	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 5	Topic	Readings
2/14	Religion and Social Practices	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 6 “How Society Works: Habitus”
2/16	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 6	Topic	Readings
2/21	Religion and Legitimation	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> ,

		Chapter 7 “How Religion Works: Legitimation”
2/23	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 7	Topic	
2/28	Religion and Authority	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 8 “How Religion Works: Authority”
3/2	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 8	Topic	
3/7	Midterm Examination Review	
3/9	Midterm Examination – In Class	
Week 9	Topic	
3/14	Spring Break – No Classes	
3/16		
Week 10	Topic	
3/21	Emile Durkheim and the Sociology of Religion	Pals, D. <i>Nine Theories of Religion</i> , “Society as Sacred: Emile Durkheim” 81-111
3/23	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 11	Topic	
3/28	Karl Marx	Pals, D. <i>Nine Theories of Religion</i> , “Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx” 113-142
3/30	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 12	Topic	
4/4	Max Weber	Pals, D. <i>Nine Theories of Religion</i> , “A Source of Social Action: Max Weber” 143-184
4/6	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 13	Topic	
4/11	Mircea Eliade	Pals, D. <i>Nine Theories of Religion</i> , “The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade” 227-261
4/13	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 14	Topic	
4/18	J. Z. Smith	(to be provided)
4/20	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 15	Topic	
4/25	Bruce Lincoln	“Theses on Religion and Violence” and “Thesis on Method” (to be provided)
4/27	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 16		
5/2	Final Exam Review	

5/4	Final Examination – In Class	Written assignment due – Submit via link on Blackboard by midnight on Sunday, May 7th
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Grading:

Marks for assignments, tests, and exams are given in percentages, to which letter grades are also assigned, according to the table below. The percentage mark resulting from the entire term work and examination then produces the final letter grade for the course.

Grading Scale

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Points
90-100%	A	4.0
80-89%	B	3.0
70-79%	C	2.0
60-69%	D	1.0
0-59%	F	0.0

Academic Standing and Integrity:

“Academic Integrity

The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards.

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#) (HOP) (available through the [Dean of Students Office](#)) may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.” (“Academic Standing,” for more information, please visit

<http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=61879&submenuheader=1>)

Special Needs

If you have a disability and require special needs classroom accommodations, please contact *The Center for Accommodations and Support Services* Monday through Friday 8:00a.m. – 5:00p.m. at the Union East Room 106. You can also reach the center by phone at (915) 747-5148 or by email: cass@utep.edu .