

Introduction to Religious Studies

RS 1301 (CRN – 22231)

University of Texas at El Paso

Department of Religious Studies

Spring 2024

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench

Time: T/Th 9:00 – 10:20AM

Room: 100 Hudspeth Hall

Office: 210 Worrell Hall

Office Hours: M – F, 8:30 – 9:15AM

E-Mail: cbench@utep.edu

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)

30% Research Essay (5 - 7 pages not including title page and bibliography)

20% Midterm Exam

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.

Research Essay: Students are required to submit a 5 - 7 page research essay assignment following these instructions: (1) choose a topic from the Research Essay Topics document in the Research Essay course content folder; (2) write a 5 - 7 page essay that contains the following; a) a clear and concise research question; b) a clear and concise thesis statement (i.e., reform your research question into a statement); c) an introduction that includes your thesis statement and a brief summary of the facts/evidence behind why you are taking the position you are taking; d) a paper body that explains and justifies the facts/evidence stated in the introduction; e) a conclusion that summarizes and restates the facts/evidence supporting the position you've taken. (3) You must use the Society of Biblical Literature Style Guide; I have provided the Society of Biblical Literature Style Guide Student Supplement in the Research Essay folder. (4) You are also required to use at least four academic/peer-reviewed sources (not including the textbook) in your paper. (5) For questions about the structure of the Research Essay, review the sample essay and Research Essay Rubric in the Research Essay folder.

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.

Final Exam: The final exam will have the same format 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
1/16	Introduction and Review of Syllabus	
1/18	Theses on Method – What is the study of Religion?	“Theses on Method” Bruce Lincoln (in week 1 folder)
Week 2	Topic	Readings
1/23	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”
1/25	In Class Group Discussion	

Week 3	Topic	
1/30	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”
2/1	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 4	Topic	
2/6	Religion and Social Structure	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 5 “How Society Works: Structure”
2/8	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 5	Topic	
2/13	Religion and Social Practices	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 6 “How Society Works: Habitus”
2/15	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 6	Topic	
2/20	Religion and Legitimation	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 7 “How Religion Works: Legitimation”
2/22	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 7	Topic	
2/27	Religion and Authority	Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , Chapter 8 “How Religion Works: Authority”
2/29	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 8	Topic	
3/5	Midterm Examination Review	
3/7	Midterm Examination – In Class	
Week 9	Topic	
3/12	Spring Break – No Classes	
3/14		
Week 10	Topic	
3/19	The Background of Emile Durkheim and the Emergence of the ‘Sociology of Religion’	Pals, D. <i>Ten Theories of Religion</i> , “Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer” 15 - 48
3/21	In Class Group Discussion	

Week 11	Topic	
3/26	Emile Durkheim and the Sociology of Religion	Pals, D. <i>Ten Theories of Religion</i> , "Society as Sacred: Emile Durkheim" 81-111
3/28	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 12	Topic	
4/2	Karl Marx	Pals, D. <i>Ten Theories of Religion</i> , "Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx" 113-142
4/4	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 13	Topic	
4/9	Max Weber	Pals, D. <i>Ten Theories of Religion</i> , "A Source of Social Action: Max Weber" 143-184
4/11	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 14	Topic	
4/16	Mircea Eliade	Pals, D. <i>Ten Theories of Religion</i> , "The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade" 227-261
4/18	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 15	Topic	
4/23	Bruce Lincoln	"Theses on Religion and Violence" and "Thesis on Method" (to be provided)
4/25	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 16		
4/30	Final Exam Review	
5/2	Final Examination – In Class	Research Essay due – Submit via link on Blackboard by midnight on Sunday, May 5th

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>)

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is prohibited in this course

Use of AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, is *not allowed* for assignments in this class. Each student is expected to use critical and creative thinking skills to complete tasks and not rely on computer-generated ideas. Any direct use of AI-generated materials submitted as your own work will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

Special Needs

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Students who become pregnant or have parenting responsibilities may also request reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. The UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) will process requests for accommodations based on a disability, pregnancy, or parenting. Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.