Introduction to Religious Studies
RS 1301 (CRN – 12728)
University of Texas at El Paso
Religious Studies Program
Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench
Time: T/Th 9:00 – 10:20AM
Room: Health Science/School of NURS 206
Office: 210 Worrell Hall
Office Hours: T/Th 10:30 – 11:30 AM
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Course Description and Objectives:

What does the term religion mean? Is it a fixed concept, or does its meaning shift depending on context? This course explores these questions through an introduction to the academic study of religion and contemporary theories in the field of Religious Studies.

The study of religion is deeply relevant to modern discussions on topics ranging from politics to family life. In this course, you will learn why Religious Studies is critical for understanding the challenges posed by religion in past, present, and future societies. These challenges include interpreting religious texts, analyzing truth claims, and navigating the role of religion in public life, such as politics, social movements, and revolutions.

Through this course, you will develop foundational skills in the methodologies of Religious Studies, equipping you to critically engage with the complexities of religion and its influence on the world around you.

Required Texts:

Martin, Craig. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*. 3rd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2023.
Pals, Daniel. *Ten Theories of Religion*. 4th Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015
(other required readings will be provided as necessary)

Assignments and Grade Distribution:

30% Participation (In-class Group Discussions, Research Essay rubric review sessions)
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 group discussions in class and Research Essay rubric review sessions; students must be present in class to submit the weekly group discussion/rubric review summary (submitted as a group in class). Additionally, the Research Essay Rubrics and Common Methods Quiz will count toward your participation grade. The participation component 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**) closely follow the Research Essay rubric document in the Research Essay folder; (**2**) attend all Research Essay rubric review sessions in class; (**3**) choose a topic from the Research Essay Topics document in the Research Essay course content folder; (**4**) write a 5 – 7 (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt font) 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, a description of your approach/method, and a brief summary of the facts/evidence that support 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. (**5**) 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 the Research Essay.

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 short 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
8/25	Introduction to the Course Syllabus	
8/27	Theses on Method – What is the study of Religion? Research Essay Rubric Review Session	"Theses on Method" Bruce Lincoln (in week 1 folder)
Week 2		
9/1	Laying the groundwork for the Study of Religion	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Chapter 1 "Religion and the Problem of Definition" Chapter 2 "Functionalism and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion"
9/3	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 3	Topic	Readings
9/8	Religion and Classification	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Chapter 3 "How Society Works: Classification" Chapter 4 "How Society Works: Essentialism"
9/10	Research Essay Rubric Review Session	
Week 4	Topic	
9/15	Religion and Social Structure	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Chapter 5 "How Society Works: Structure"
9/17	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 5	Topic	
9/22	Religion and Social Practices	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Chapter 6 "How Society Works: Habitus"
9/24	Research Essay Rubric Review Session	
Week 6	Topic	
9/29	Religion and Legitimation	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Chapter 7 "How Religion Works: Legitimation"
10/1	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 7	Topic	
10/6	Religion and Authority	**Readings**: Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*,

		Chapter 8 "How Religion Works: Authority"
10/8	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 8	Topic	
10/13	Midterm Examination Review in Class	
10/15	**Midterm Examination – In Class**	
Week 9	Topic	
10/20	The Background of Emile Durkheim and the Emergence of the 'Sociology of Religion'	Pals, D. *Ten Theories of Religion*, "Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer" 15 - 48
10/22	Research Essay Rubric Review Session	
Week 10	Topic	
10/27	Emile Durkheim and the Sociology of Religion	Pals, D. *Ten Theories of Religion*, "Society as Sacred: Emile Durkheim" 81-111
10/29	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 11	Topic	
11/3	Karl Marx	Pals, D. *Ten Theories of Religion*, "Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx" 113-142
11/5	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 12	Topic	
11/10	Max Weber	Pals, D. *Ten Theories of Religion*, "A Source of Social Action: Max Weber" 143-184
11/12	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 13	Topic	
11/17	Mircea Eliade	Pals, D. *Ten Theories of Religion*, "The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade" 227-261
11/19	In Class Group Discussion	
Week 14	Topic	
11/24	Bruce Lincoln	Lincoln, B. "Theses on Religion and Violence"
11/26	**Thanksgiving Holiday**	
Week 15	Topic	
12/1	Final Examination Review in Class	
12/3	**Final Examination – In Class**	**Research Essay due – Submit via link on Blackboard by midnight on Sunday, December 6th**

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, and/or Grammarly Premium's AI are ***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.