

Introduction to Religious Studies

RS 1301

University of Texas at El Paso

Department of Religious Studies

Spring 2024 RS 1301

Instructor: Dr. Glen J. Fairen

Time: N/A

Room: N/A

Office: Somewhere in the wilds of Oklahoma....

Office Hours: N/A

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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, not just the various discourses that get called “religion”, but (perhaps more importantly), the academic study of religion and current theories of religion in the field of Religious Studies today. Like any other key disciplinary term (such as “history” for historians, “culture” for anthropologists, “society” for sociologists, “literature” for Literary Studies, and so on), “religion” is subject to definitional debate in contemporary theorizing of religion. Equally subject to debate are questions about the relation of religion to other key terms in the study of society and culture. What does religion do in history, society and culture? What do people do with religion? In this course we will begin to think about the theoretical debates about “religion” with the aim is to become familiar with and engage scholarly debates over how religion is conceptualized so as to make it a suitable focus for critical, humanistic, social study.

Required Texts:

McCutcheon, Russel. “What is the Academic Study of Religion” (PDF provided)

Martin, Craig. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2014 (either edition, but second edition from 2017 would be preferred). **Also, while you are of course welcome to buy the book, it is available in the UTEP library as an ebook. But keep in mind it is still required.) Here is a permanent link**

https://utep.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UTEP_INST/7g1vpo/alma991023066601207051

Assignments and Grade Distribution:

40% 8 journal entries (5% each). These will be assigned at the end of relevant sections.

30% Midterm Exam

30% Final Exam

Assignment Notes:

Journals: This part of your grade is worth 40%. **You cannot afford to miss out on these.** Each journal entry will be graded on a 0.5-5.0 scale. Each Journal will be based on a prompt question that will be assigned ahead of time and need to be no less than one page (12 pt font, 1 inch margin all around) and no more than 2 pages. As a rule of thumb, each page is approximately 300 words. Prompts and guidelines will be provided.

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, definitions, and essay questions.

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.

Date	Topic	Required reading and Assignments
Jan 16-21	Laying the groundwork for the Study of Religion	<p>Readings: McCutcheon, Russel. "What is the Academic Study of Religion" (PDF on blackboard)</p> <p>Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 1 "Religion, and the Problem of Definition."</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 1 (Due Jan 21 by 11:59 PM)</p>
Date	Topic	Required reading and Assignments
Jan 22-Feb 4	Religion and Classification	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 2 "Functionalism and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion" and Chapter 3 "How Society Works: Classification."</p> <p>South Park "Trapped in a Closet" (Provided on Blackboard)</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 2. (Due Feb 4 by 11:59 PM)</p>

Date	Topic	Required reading and Assignments
Feb 5-18	Religion and Social Structure	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 4 “How Society Works: Essentialism” and Chapter 5 “How Society Works: Structure.”</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 3 (Due Feb 18 by 11:59 PM)</p>
Feb 19- Mar 3	Religion and Social Practices	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 6 “How Society Works: Habitus.”</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 4 (March 2 by 11:59 PM)</p> <p>Midterm Exam: Feb 27 from 12:01 AM-March 1 until 11:59 PM.</p>
March 4- 24	Religion and Legitimation	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 7 “How Religion Works: Legitimation.”</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 5 (Due March 24 by 11:59 PM)</p>
March 25- April 7	Religion and Authority	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 8 “How Religion Works: Authority.”</p> <p>South Park “All about Mormons” (provided on Blackboard).</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 6 (Due April 7 by 11:59)</p>
April 8- May 2	Religion and Authenticity	<p>Readings: Martin, <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i>, Chapter 9 and 10</p> <p>Assignments: Journal 7 and 8 (a two-part journal Due May 2 by 11:59 PM)</p>
	Final Exam	Final Exam. (May 3 12:01 AM-May 10 till 11:59 PM)

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>)

Policy for Late Assignments:

Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Otherwise, assignments may be handed in one class-day after the stated deadline without penalty, with a 10%-per-class-day penalty assessed for each subsequent class-day of lateness.

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