

RS100, Fall 2017

Professor: Randal Cummings

Office: Santa Susanna 418

Office Hours: SN 418 W 11-12:15p.m. and 3:30-4:15; Virtual 5-6 p.m. M and by appointment.

Moodle: <http://moodle.csun.edu>

Email: randal@csun.edu

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION:

An exploration of approaches to the evaluation and understanding of religious phenomena, paradigms, myths, motifs, and their interpretation in a global and academic perspective.

Description: This course meets the general education C3 requirements for study in Humanities since the study of religion is central to the thought structures, social patterns, art, literatures, and war-and-peace endeavors of humanity. Though this course will largely be aimed at gaining an understanding of the foundations and development of the concept of "religion" we will also avail ourselves of the larger context with which the issues surrounding religious plurality gains momentum in the contemporary world. We will look at a gamut of religious expression and the "deep-structure" religious paradigms which undergird and are expressed in the religions of humanity, while at the same time we will be looking at some of the theoretical issues involved in the interpretation of religion. Among other things we will examine myth as sacred communication and observe the transformations of myth into cultural symbolism in a vast array of everyday, exotic, and even esoteric contexts. We will become aware of the history of interpretation and the contemporary hermeneutical options as well as the ambivalent, contradictory, and complementary paradigms that sift and shift through the multivalent religious traditions found in human culture. By necessity this course is inter-disciplinary, aims for multi-cultural lucidity, and emphasizes empathy and understanding of the other and cautiousness in interpretation of otherness (*epoche*), hence, critical thinking. Since there is much that appears as exotic and esoteric to the uninitiated, this course will serve as an initiation into the mysteries of the scientific study of religion as well as an invitation to self-scrutiny and personal quest. My ambition is to render sophisticated philosophical concepts accessible, to create an appreciation for the subtle, and to build an "ecosystem of the spirit" in the minds of my students that values the quest for transcendence, human identity, purpose, and meaning within the traditions of humanity. My teaching philosophy is quite simple, it's my work ethic that makes the demands.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: reading assignments, class participation via the internet, mid-term examinations, one research paper on a relevant topic of your choice, multi-media field trips (i.e. video watching), one final-examination, and, of course, good mental hygiene.

THE RESEARCH PAPER: The choice of paper topics has a wide range of flexibility in the hopes that the students will pursue subjects that command their interests and spark their imaginations. You will want to begin exploring possible topics from practically the beginning of the course and should not only feel free but consider it a necessary step in

your preparation to consult the instructor concerning your topic. Various strategies for generating a viable topic will be discussed in class.

Texts:

A Beginner's Guide to the Study of Religion 2nd Edition by Bradley L. Herling;
Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic; 2 edition (December 3, 2015) **ISBN-13:** 978-1472512772

Movies Are Prayers: How Films Voice Our Deepest Longings by Josh Larsen;
Publisher: IVP Books (June 13, 2017) **ISBN-13:** 978-0830844784

Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred by Jeffrey Kripal
Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition (November 30, 2011)
ISBN-13: 978-0226453873

Between The World And Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates **Publisher:** The Text Publishing Company (July 16, 2015) **ISBN-13:** 978-1925240702

Student Learning Objectives

You will learn:

- ❖ To distinguish and articulate the difference between religion as an object of academic, social-scientific, philosophical, and historical investigation as opposed to personal experiences of individual devotion, piety, faith, and/or partisan persuasions.
- ❖ To be conversant with scholarly theories, criticisms, hermeneutics, exegetical skills, and methodological approaches generated, problematized, and otherwise dialogically sustained within the academic study of religion.
- ❖ To acquire a demonstrable conceptual understanding of the vocabulary and terminology associated with the study of religion including such terms/concepts as religion, religious, myth, ritual, symbol, community, code, creed, philosophy, subjectivity, objectivity, secularization, cult, sect, mysticism, theism, atheism, polytheism, monotheism, spirituality, magic, paganism, animism, canon, religious violence, and post-colonialism, among others.
- ❖ How to discuss and explain social functions of religion pertaining to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, politics, and globalization.
- ❖ To recognize “the religious” in various aspects of modern culture such as media, art, music, films, politics, sports, and the public discourse on science.
- ❖ To demonstrate a basic level of sophistication in describing at least two specific religious traditions including their historical development, theoretical, practical, and sociological elements.

GE Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;
2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;

3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

Assignments and grading criteria: All assignments will be posted. Preparation and class participation are factored into the grading. Students must participate in all posted class assignments. This cannot be emphasized enough. The mid-term accounts for approximately 20% of your grade, the final about 20%, and the research paper 20% with a 40% margin based on online class participation (quality of comments, thoroughness of thought, evidence of reading, timeliness, etc). In addition, 2% will be subtracted from your overall grade for untimely participation for each assignment. My scale includes plus and minuses. Make-ups are possible only by divine intervention.