

Introduction to the Study of Religion
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 100-001 § FALL 2003

PROFESSOR: DR. RUSSELL MCCUTCHEON
OFFICE: MANLY HALL 211 (348-8512)
DEPARTMENT OFFICE: MANLY HALL 212 (348-5271)

EMAIL: RUSSELL.MCCUTCHEON@UA.EDU
OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY 2:00-3:00
OR BY APPOINTMENT

LECTURES
12:30-1:45 Tues/Thurs § tenHoor 30

DEPARTMENT WEBSITE
WWW.AS.UA.EDU/REL/

DESCRIPTION

As a general introduction to the academic study of religion, REL 100 examines the function of religion in relation to human beliefs, social practices, and culture in general. The course surveys a broad number of important debates in the history of religious studies, such as the definition of religion, the insider/outsider problem, theories on the origins of religion, the comparison of religions, religion=s psychological, sociological, and political functions, and the manner in which human communities authorize systems of behavior. As a Core Curriculum Humanities course, REL 100=s goal is for all students to learn to define, accurately describe, and compare in a non-evaluative manner so as to discover significant similarities and differences in various forms of human behavior. **Note:** Although we will examine some of the world=s religious traditions, **this course is not simply an introduction to world religions**; rather, it is an introduction to the study of religion where religion is conceived as an ordinary aspect of human culture and history. **Beware:** This course requires that you engage in critical thinking and not take anything for granted.

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide an opportunity for critical reflection, open debate, and discussion on the relations of religion, myths, and rituals to human thought and practice.
2. To learn to see ones own cultural practices as having points of similarity with, and difference from, those of other peoples, removed from us both in time and space.
3. To learn to define an area of study as well as to practice and refine the skills of empathetic description and non-evaluative comparison.
4. To develop and improve critical reading and thinking skills.

BOOKS

The course has the following **required** texts that can all be purchased at the university=s bookstore or at such sites as amazon.com or bn.com; used copies are probably also available:

- John Lyden (ed.), *Enduring Issues in Religion* (the portions we=ll use are on electronic reserve)
- Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*
- Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*
- Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates* (containing the dialogue we will read, *Euthyphro*). This text is also available free on-line at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html>
- *The Bhagavad Gita* (any translation of this Hindu epic is fine)
- *The Dhammapada* (any translation of this early Buddhist text is fine)

The course also has one **highly recommended** book; it will come in handy when learning technical vocabulary for the unit on Hinduism and Buddhism. Knowing this vocabulary is essential and comprises an important part of your tests:

- John Hinnells (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*

Reserve readings can be found at Gorgas Library's ACourse Reserves@ link at <http://www.lib.ua.edu/> (search AMcCutcheon@ **and** AREL 100@). You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to open and print these electronic reserve essays. This software is installed on all campus computers. Or, you can go to www.adobe.com to obtain a free copy of the software to read these PDF files on your home computer.

The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day. Doing all of your assigned readings well in advance of our classes is important because our lectures and discussions all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings. Although regular attendance is mandatory, alone it will not suffice. Regular attendance **and** informed class participation are necessary for a satisfactory grade in this course.

COURSE WEBSITE

The course website, <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100mccutch.htm>, is one way in which reading material is sometimes distributed to the class. Although some readings are available through Gorgas Library's electronic reserves, other readings are instead available through the course website (posted as PDF files). Please visit the site and familiarize yourself with it and periodically check it for updates.

HANDOUTS

Periodically you will receive handouts either in preparation for an upcoming class or during a class period as a supplement to that day's lecture. Sometimes they will be announced in class and posted on the course web site immediately after class. You are expected to retain these handouts, in the order in which they were first distributed, for future reference and for preparation for tests. If you miss a class when something was distributed, it is your responsibility to obtain a copy of the handout (check the course website). **Note:** do not expect to obtain copies of handouts from the professor long after they were first distributed.

TESTS

Tests are both in a multiple choice and long answer format and are based on material presented in: assigned readings, handouts, written assignments, films, and lectures. Having said this, students should understand that this course emphasizes material presented in the lectures; class readings, handouts etc., are primarily meant either to prepare students for lectures by providing the necessary background information or as complements to material being presented in the lectures. There are five tests: four during the semester and one final examination. **If you miss a test, you must contact the professor immediately to explain your absence; make-up tests are *not* automatically an option in this course.** The results of all multiple choice tests can be obtained at www.ssc.ua.edu/query, which requires that you enter your student User ID and Password.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance and participation that reflects your thoughtful preparation for each class are all required and will count toward **10%** of your final grade. Although I do not take attendance, I offer unannounced Apop quizzes@ worth approximately 1 point each, such that ten quizzes will comprise the attendance and participation portion of your course grade. There are no make-up opportunities if you miss a quiz.

2. During the regular semester there will be four tests, one in each unit (Defining Religion, the Insider/Outsider Problem, Hinduism, and Buddhism). Generally, these will be multiple choice tests, though at least one may be a long answer test and they will each be worth **between 10% and 20%** of your final grade. The dates for these tests are listed in our schedule as well as the amount that each test is worth. We will

discuss the format of these tests well in advance.

3. A final exam, covering material from the entire semester and consisting of multiple choice questions, is worth **20%**. See the schedule for the date and location.

GRADING SCALE

A+	95-100	C+	75-77
A	90-94	C	70-74
A-	88-89	C-	65-69
B+	85-87	D+	60-64
B	80-84	D	55-59
B-	78-79	D-	50-54
		F	0-49

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructor suspects that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will immediately be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

2. No grades of AI@ (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course. In my experience, grades of AI@ rarely lead to the completion of course requirements. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course=s requirements on time or if you anticipate your absence from class becoming routine. Although I cannot guarantee in advance that accommodations will/can be made for all occasions that may arise, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance our ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

3. Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the professor outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment to see him at his office), as soon as possible, to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations which can be made to meet their needs. However, prior to contacting the professor, ensure that you contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located at 220 Research Drive, P.O. Box 870185 (two blocks east of the Ferguson Center, between Shelby Hall and Bryce Hospital) or call them at 348-4285.

TENTATIVE LECTURE SCHEDULE

Th Aug 21	Introduction to the Course
T Aug 26	The Study of Religion and the Public University (On-line reading: http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100introhandout.pdf)
Th Aug 28	Defining Religion: Plato=s <i>Euthyphro</i> (Online reading: http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html)
T Sept 2	Defining Religion: Plato=s <i>Euthyphro</i>
Th Sept 4	No class
T Sept 9	Defining Religion: Rudolf Otto, Paul Tillich, and the Experience of Faith (electronic reserve reading: Lyden, Chpt 1, pp. 33-38 and pp. 51-56)
Th Sept 11	Defining Religion: Karl Marx and the Opiate of the People (electronic reserve: Lyden, Chpt 1, pp. 26-32)
T Sept 16	Defining Religion: Sigmund Freud and Social Dreaming (electronic reserve: AObsessive

	Acts and Religious Practices@)
Th Sept 18	Defining Religion: Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Existentialism (electronic reserve: Lyden, Chpt 1, pp. 45-50 and Albert Camus= AThe Myth of Sisyphus@)
T Sept 23	Defining Religion: Ludwig Wittgenstein=s Family Resemblance Approach (electronic reserve reading: <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , paragraphs 66-70).
Th Sept 25	Test 1 (20%)
T Sept 30	Insider/Outsider Problem (on-line reading: http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100nacirema.pdf)
Th Oct 2	Insider/Outsider Problem: Emic and Etic Perspectives (On-line reading to be posted on course web site)
T Oct 7	A Test Case in Studying Athe Other@: Heavens Gate (on-line reading: http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100heavensgate.pdf)
Th Oct 9	The Scholar and the Devotee (Knott 1-11)
T Oct 14	Test 2 (10%)
Th Oct 16	Describing Religions: Hinduism (Knott on Hinduism; also, begin reading <i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ; see the glossary posted at course web site)
T Oct 21	Describing Religions: Hinduism
Th Oct 23	Describing Religions: Hinduism
T Oct 28	Describing Religions: Hinduism (class discussion on <i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>)
Th Oct 30	Test 3 (20%)
T Nov 4	Describing Religions: Buddhism (Keown on Buddhism; also, begin reading <i>The Dhammapada</i>)
Th Nov 6	Describing Religions: Buddhism
T Nov 11	Describing Religions: Buddhism
Th Nov 13	Describing Religions: Buddhism
T Nov 18	Describing Religions: Buddhism (class discussion on <i>The Dhammapada</i>)
Th Nov 20	Test 4 (20%)
T Nov 25	Comparison: Religions as Ordinary Aspects of Culture
Th Nov 27	No Class
T Dec 2	Explanation: Religions as Ordinary Aspects of Culture
Th Dec 4	Review Session

Final Exam (20%): Wednesday, December 10 from 11:30 - 2:00 p.m. in tenHour 30