

RLST 300: Religious Methods and Concepts



FALL 2023 Dr. Jeanette Reedy Solano Th. 4:00-6:45 pm GH 207

Office Hours: online via email-rapid response Tuesdays 10:00 am-11:00 am & in-person on-campus (GH 311) Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:30 pm and by apt on Zoom if necessary.

Course Description: This course covers the academic study of religion which includes the definition, functions, and varieties of religion; the methods used to study it; and key figures who have shaped the development of this discipline (catalog description). In addition, we will hone your critical thinking, research, communication, and writing skills. This is a discussion-based course is required for both majors and minors in RLST and designed to ground you in the field. It also satisfies the upper division writing course requirement for majors in Religious Studies (RLST). **Prerequisite: Completion of any lower-division RLST course**-make sure you have met this requirement.

Theorists studied in-depth: Emile Durkheim, Rudolph Otto, Mircea Eliade, Clifford Geertz, Raymond Firth, Max Weber, David Morgan, Mary Douglas, Wendy Doniger, Catherine Bell, Alice Walker, Charles H. Long, Carolyn Walker Bynum, Jonathan Z. Smith, Mark Muesse, Gloria Anzaldua, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, George Chryssides, Tara Isabella Burton.

Learning Goals and Objectives: i.e. by the end of the term you should ...

- ✚ Have a foundational understanding of the origins of the academic study of religion.
- ✚ Have a firm grasp of how the discipline of religious studies has evolved as well as the various sub-disciplines within the field today.
- ✚ Be familiar with diverse methodological approaches in the study of religion.
- ✚ Be familiar with several key theorists in the field, be able to compare and contrast them and be able to apply their theories to lived religion today.
- ✚ Be able to articulate your views critically both orally and in written form.
- ✚ Have improved your academic writing skills by completing a formal research paper.
- ✚ Have a firm comprehension of contemporary trends in religion.

Required Texts (3 required)

1. Sarah J. Bloesch and Meredith Minister. *Cultural Approaches to Studying Religion: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (2018)
ISBN: 978-1-3500-2374-1
2. Daniel L. Pals: *Eight Theories of Religion*- second edition, (2006) ISBN: 978-0195165708
3. Tara Isabella Burton: *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*
ISBN-10 : 1541762533

Learning Assessment (A Breakdown of your Grade):

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT (35%): 15%: Participation & Attendance

20%: Critical Discussion Leading

CRITICAL WRITING (35%): 14%: 2 short reading response papers
21%: Final Research Paper

CRITICAL RECALL (30%): 18 %: Midterm Quiz #1
12 %: Final Quiz #2
100% / 100 pts.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT: 35%

DISCUSSION, PARTICIPATION, & ATTENDANCE: 15%

Attendance will be taken each week. This is a **discussion class** (not a lecture class) which means the majority of our time will be spent *discussing* the readings and topics. Being in an upper-division discussion course brings certain responsibilities: namely each of you are expected to have read materials thoroughly prior to each weekly class meeting and to be prepared to engage in *every* discussion. This is not a course where you show up and merely receive knowledge and information. The dynamic is very different than a lecture course. The quality of our discourse is directly related to every student's preparation for each week's meeting. Express your opinion and ideas! The **quality** of your comments is always more important than **quantity**. I understand that some of you are shy than others. That is OK. Note to those of you who find it easy to talk: make space for your quieter peers. You may earn up to one participation point each week, for a total of 15 points. Good participation means--in addition to preparation and speaking up in class--that you are a positive presence in the classroom: you arrive on time, have your book with you, you are focused on that day's topic, you sincerely listen to others. Dr. Solano keeps track of your participation each week. The most common behaviors that will result in deductions from your participation points are chronic tardiness, not being prepared, and cell phone disruptions--please keep them silenced and stashed away in your bag, *not* on your desk. Week 3 I will check for hardcopies of all 3 books--this will be recorded for a participation point--if you miss a week of class this 'extra' point will cover that missed point and if you *never* miss a week and show up with your books week 3, I will give you **one point extra credit** in this category to reward your consistency and dedication in 300. So, to be clear: if you miss 1 week (life happens, we get sick, etc) and have brought your books week 3, you can still earn 15 points total in this category. Beyond this first absence, one point will be deducted for each week missed unless it is a verified absence (familial or medical emergency, mandatory military service, etc)--in which case it is excused, and you won't be docked any points. You can email and let me know if you are sick and send dr. notes if necessary, just communicate, don't go silent.

Discussion Group Facilitation: 20%

On **one** occasion during the term each of you will be responsible for leading discussion. Sign up for the class session that most intrigues you. You will be evaluated (by the instructor and peers) on how skillfully you guide our discussion and communicate your ideas and critique. **The session you lead discussion may not be the same week you write one of your two your Reading Response Papers.** **Sorry, no double dipping.** Please see the Critical Discussion Facilitation handout posted on Canvas for formatting details, questions to put to the text, grading criteria, and further details.

CRITICAL WRITING: 35%

RLST 300 fulfills the upper division writing requirement for RLST majors and minors; thus there is an emphasis not only on critical, independent expression but also on form and craft.

2 Short Reading Response Papers: 14%

The purpose of these short reading response papers is to improve your critical reading and writing skills in preparation for your critical discussion leading and final paper as well as to ensure deeper discussions. There is basically one short paper due the first half of the semester (weeks 1-7) and the second is due the second half of the semester (weeks 8-15). Each paper is worth up to 7 points. Please see handout for details and follow the instructions carefully when writing up your response. Your paper is due the day we discuss the readings-print out a hard copy, refer to it during discussion, and give it to Dr. Solano at the end of class. You will sign up for the 2 weeks you desire to write these short reading response papers at the end of our first meeting. The only caveat is you may not write this short paper the same week you are leading discussion in RLST 300.

Final Research Paper: 21%

Learning to be an excellent writer is one of the things we pride ourselves on in our department. Clear and well-organized written expression is an invaluable skill you will carry with you for life! This paper will be formatted according to the standards of the Chicago Manual of Style. There are a variety of ways you may approach this research paper-please see handout and sample papers posted on Canvas for guidance and inspiration. This paper will have a formal outline, bibliography, and footnotes. Your outline, bibliography, and thesis are due **Week 13, 11/17. The edited, final paper is due at 4:00 before our final class session on 12/7 (however I will not close the Canvas assignment until 11 pm-don't miss our final class due to editing).** You may turn this paper in early. The TurnItIn link on Canvas will be open from 12/01. See handout for details.

CRITICAL RECALL: 30%

There will be 2 quizzes in this course. The first will focus on theorists and approaches covered the first 8 weeks of class and will be on 10/12 at the end of our class meeting. The second quiz will be during finals week on Thursday 12/14 from 5-6 pm and it will cover ideas and readings from weeks 9-15. The format will be multiple-choice, T/F. The questions will be drawn primarily from the readings as well as Canvas -posted materials, films, and videos. This assessment tool measures your ability to recall facts, ideas, history, theories, and content. We will go over the study guide **a week before** each quiz which will have 8-10 of the 40-50 questions on it (yes, 20% of the test) so you can get a sense of the level of detail and thought required by the quiz, beyond this, you need to read and review independently. The questions are fair, but not easy.

Department of Religious Studies Learning Goals & Outcomes:

A. Skills

Learning Goal: Students possess the ability to perform research and interpret materials related to the study of religion.

Outcome 1: Students can analyze written materials related to the study of religion.

Outcome 2: Students have acquired information literacy in the study of religion.

Learning Goal: Students can effectively communicate in written and spoken mediums.

Outcome 3: Students are able to write well-organized critical and analytical research papers related to the study of religion.

Outcome 4: Students are able to speak clearly and effectively using relevant and adequate supporting evidence.

B. Knowledge

Learning Goal: Students can demonstrate an understanding of the beliefs, rituals, texts, and figures related to a variety of religious traditions.

Outcome 5: Students can describe the basic teachings and practices of major religious traditions and can compare and contrast the principal similarities and differences between them.

Outcome 6: Students are able to identify the history and development of specific religions and their contemporary relevance.

Outcome 7: Students can compare key theories and theorists in the study of religion.

Outcome 8: Students can interpret key thinkers and figures within religious traditions.

RLST 300 is designed to address departmental learning outcomes 1-4 related to skills and outcome 7 related to knowledge.

Explanation of Assessment and Grading:

A+: 98-100 Superb

A: 93-97 Outstanding (participation and work consistently distinguished itself)

A-: 90-92 Excellent work across the board (exams, participation, written work)

B+: 87-89 Distinguished work

B: 83-86 Above average (high quality work in most areas)

B-: 80-82 Solid performance

C+: 77-79 Good work, but may have performed poorly in one area

C: 73-76 Average

C-: 70-72 Still a passing grade, you may have performed poorly in several areas

D+: 67-69 Majors and minors in religion need to score better than this, still passing for others

D: 63-66 Below average performance in many areas; may have failed to complete some work

D-: 60-62 Student did some work but probably did not complete a major assignment

F: below 60...well you don't want to go there! This score results in failure of the course.

This scale is firm. A few pts can make a big difference. Final grades use the plus/minus system.

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, and helping another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Cheating is the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, fraudulent, or unauthorized means. Plagiarism is the act of taking the specific substance of another source (whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim form) and offering it as one's own without giving credit to the source. Academic dishonesty includes submitting work for this course that you have previously submitted for another course (or are submitting concomitantly to another course). If you are found guilty of academic dishonesty, you will be assigned an appropriate academic penalty (ranging from a zero on the assignment in question to an F in the entire course) and reported to the Judicial Officer on campus. Please, refer to the Academic Dishonesty Policy document issued by the university: UPS 300.021 (<http://www.fullerton.edu/senate/documents/PDF/300/UPS300-021.pdf>). PLEASE, if you have any questions about how to appropriately cite a source, ASK ME before you submit your work. DO NOT use AI generated text for your reading response papers or your final research paper. If any portion of your work is flagged for being AI-generated, you will be alerted, and most likely receive a zero on that assignment and if egregiously-dependent on AI, a failure in the course. The CSUF protocols take several months when cheating is discovered.

Learning Special Needs...If You Need Assistance...

Visit DSS to begin the process. They will verify your needs and list your accommodations. Then I can work to accommodate your need, whatever that may be: taking the exam in DSS, more time, etc. Do not be afraid to seek the help you need to do your best in college! If you have a verified learning disability, please communicate with me-I want you to succeed.

Emergency Procedures Notice to Students

The safety of all students attending California State University Fullerton is of paramount importance. During an emergency it is necessary for students to have a basic understanding of their personal responsibilities and the University's emergency response procedures. In the event of an emergency, please adhere to the following guidelines **EMERGENCY CALLS DIAL 9-1-1** All campus phones and cell phones on campus reach the University Police Department Non-emergency line: (657) 278-2515 **24-hour recorded emergency information line: (657) 278-0911 (657) 278-4444**

Know the safe evacuation routes for your specific building and floor. Know the evacuation assembly areas for your building. In Gordan Hall we exit and gather in parking lot F directly east of our building.

After an emergency occurs- If an emergency disrupts normal campus operations or causes the University to close for a prolonged period of time (more than three days), students are expected to complete the course assignments listed on the syllabus as soon as it is reasonably possible to do so.

Dr. Solano's Classroom Policies

Being There: Absence/Tardiness policy

Missing Class: Being in class is vital, but I understand life happens (sicknesses, family emergencies, deaths, etc.) and sometimes we have to miss class. See above for details. I will take attendance each week.

Tardiness: CSUF is a crowded place full of traffic, little parking, crowded elevators, etc. Give yourself time to get to GH. Please make every effort to be in your seat at 4:00! If you are late, here are my policies... **1-2 minutes:** This is your grace period; **3 mins onwards:** your tardiness will be noted. One tardy **will not** adversely affect your participation grade, more than one will. Every 2 tardies equal one pt. deduction from the pts you have earned in participation. Don't sabotage yourself by being tardy, plus it is disrespectful to your peers who may be leading discussion. That being said, do not miss class because you are running late-we still want you there, just slip in quietly and do your best to not let it happen again.

Snacks: If our class desires, we will have snacks each week during our break, it makes a long, late afternoon class a bit easier! There will be a sign-up sheet. Dr. Solano will bring snacks the 1st week.

Late Work: Unfortunately deadlines are deadlines. No late work is accepted (to be ethical, what I do for one, I must do for all). If you miss your reading response week, you miss the opportunity to earn 7 points. It is vital that you show up for the one session you chose to lead discussion, as there will not be another opportunity available. If there is a *verified* familial or medical emergency, please reach out to me and communicate *before* any deadline and we will work something out.

Dr. Solano's Tips for getting a Good Grade

I don't grade on a curve, so **each of you** may potentially earn an A. *I really want you to do well and have fun in this seminar.* I collected some tips to help you succeed in this class. I reflected on the habits and characteristics of my students who earned A's and B's and thought I would share them with you along with the following encouragements:

#1: Be Consistent!

A student who aces the quizzes, yet misses a lot of class will not earn an A. Similarly, a student who shines in discussion, yet does not put in the required time to research and write their term paper will likely not earn an A. The A student must *consistently* excel in all areas. Starting off on the right foot will make it easier. This is critical, start off with gusto!

#2: Be Enthusiastic, Positive, & Prepared!

Whether tackling a difficult reading assignment or preparing to lead discussion, the excellent student attacks her or his studies with enthusiasm. This interest is contagious and manifests itself in a variety of ways. This person is a positive team player, offers constructive feedback to peers and sincerely wants to learn. They have done the reading and are ready to contribute. I love seeing readings all marked up with comments and highlighting: proof of your avid critical reading!

#3: Be There!

Over the past 20 years I have discovered one fundamental truth: students who rarely miss class do better. This also demonstrates a dedication to the course and results in high participation points. Your constancy and dedication count. Do not miss class when the term starts getting stressful. Even if you are not caught up with the day's reading, please come and be part of the class, you can contribute and learn something. You are welcome and important to this seminar.

4: Follow Directions!

It sounds easy, but you'd be surprised how many students sabotage their grade on assignments or papers by not closely following directions. For example, if I ask for a 4-page double-spaced paper I mean *precisely* that (not 24 pages as one student thought-true story). Turn your papers in on time. Use CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) formatting and style. In other words, follow the guidelines *to the letter*. Meet deadlines.

6: Do Extra Credit Assignments!

If events arise this semester related to our study I may offer extra credit-no promises, but I will try. In the end they can really make a difference between an A or B, or a B and C. Augmenting your point total always helps. The maximum you can earn through extra credit is 5 points. If you never miss a class and bring your books week 3 I will give you 1 pt. extra credit.

Fall 2023 Course Reading & Assignment Schedule

The total pages per week are listed in parentheses, as is the page count for each reading. It averages out to be approximately 50 pages per week, some weeks are lighter, and some are heavier. Please have access to our reading for the day since we refer to it. Page totals are listed so you may plan ahead! Always complete all readings *before* class. There are 16 slots available to lead discussion this term. Select a week that most interests you-have at least 4 in mind before you sign up the end of our 1st meeting. There will be student-led discussions every week except: Wks 1, 11, & 15. “CPD” (is a Canvas Posted doc) or “CPL” (is a Canvas Posted Link to a video or article).

I. Introduction to Course, Each Other, and the Field

Wk 1: Introduction to the Course & One Another (10 pgs-read before class)

(8/24) Overview of the Semester

CPD *101 definitions of Religion* (please pick your top 3 and be ready to share) (6)

CPD: Nathan Schneider: *Why the World needs Religious Studies* (4)

<http://religiondispatches.org/why-the-world-needs-religious-studies/>

II. Classical Theorists & Methodological Approaches: *How do we Approach Religion?*

Wk 2: Functionalistic Sociological Approaches (34)

(8/31) Pals 3: Durkheim: *Society as Sacred* (34) Sociological Approach

Wk 3: Phenomenological Approaches: Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade (59p)

(9/07) CPD: Rudolph Otto: *The Idea of the Holy Chapters I-III* (24)

CPD: Rudolph Otto overview/outline

Pals: 6: Mircea Eliade: *The Reality of the Sacred* (35)

Wk 4: Anthropological Approaches: Clifford Geertz & Raymond Firth (43 p)

(9/14) Pals 8: Clifford Geertz: *Religion as a Cultural System* (31)

CPD: Raymond Firth: *An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Religion* (12)

Wk. 5: Sociology of Religion-Max Weber (43p)

(9/21) Pals 5: Max Weber: *A Source of Social Action* (43)

Wk 6: The Materialistic Approach: David Morgan

(9/28) CPD: David Morgan: Selections from *The Thing About Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religions* (44)

III. Cultural Approaches to Studying Religion (readings wks 7-9 from *Bloesch & Minister eds.*)

Wk 7: Introduction and Part 1: Comparative Approaches (59 p)

(10/5) Introduction and Chapters by Lofton, Patton, and O’Neill (chpts 1, 3, 4)

Scholars focused on: Mary Douglas, Wendy Doniger, and Catherine Bell

Wk 8: Part 2: Examining Particularities-Race and Gender (47 p)

(10/12) Chapters by Medine, Floyd-Thomas, Boon

Scholars focused on: Alice Walker, Charles H. Long, and Caroline Walker Bynum

Wk 9: Part 3: Expanding Boundaries: Mestiza Religion, Queer Theory, Secular Anthropology (54 p)

(10/19) Chapters by Winters, Armour, Tareen

Scholars focused on: Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood

Midterm-Quiz # 1: covers weeks 1-9 on 10/19

Quiz will begin after discussion at approximately 6 pm in-class-please bring laptop to connect to Canvas. (worth 18 pts)

IV: Applying Religious Studies Theories to New Religious Movements

Week 10: California Case Studies: Heaven's Gate & The People's Temple:

(10/26) **When Religious Devotion ends in Death**

CPD: Johnathan Z. Smith: *The Devil in Mr. Jones* (18)

CPD: Mark W. Muesse: *Religious Studies and "Heaven's Gate"...* (5)

CPD: George D. Chryssides: "Come Up and I will show thee: Heaven's Gate as a Postmodern Group" (18)

Week 11: Using Doc films to understand New Religious Movements

(11/2) There is **no in-person class meeting, nor assigned readings this week** as you will learn by watching, reflecting on, and discussing a documentary film on a New Religious Movement. You may choose from the following films: *Waiting for John* (Kanopy-cargo cult in the South Pacific, 70 mins), *Holy Hell* (Buddhism/New Age/ Ca. NRM, 1:43 mins-stream on Peacock, tubi, plex-rent on Youtube or Google play), *Wild, Wild Country* (Hinduism, 403 mins-Netflix). *Heaven's Gate: The Cult of Cults* (HBO-Max). *The Way Down: God, Greed, and the Cult of Gwen Shamblin* (HBOmax-Roku), *The Vow* (HBO) or *Waco: American Apocalypse* (Netflix). TW: Please note *Holy Hell* and *Wild, Wild Country* have brief scenes that show nudity and they *allude* to sexual abuse, but do not show it, *The Vow* (Nxivm) is much more explicit about sexual exploitation of women within the group-avoid this doc if this is trigger for you. Instead of discussing your chosen documentary in class, you will write a very brief reaction paper responding to specific questions. Your posting and responses are due by Thursday, 7 pm, 11/2 the end of our normal class time. This discussion, based on your screening, will be worth up to 2 participation points. Happy viewing-the docs range in time from 70 mins to 400 mins-be prepared to be enthralled....

Week 12: Case Study: Scientology (55)

(11/9) CPD: Hellsoy: *Scientology: The Making of a Religion* (13)

CPD: Laurence Wright excerpts from *Going Clear* (169-200-31 p)

CPD: Excerpts from L.Ron Hubbard's *Scientology Fundamentals & Dianetics* (11)

CPL: Clips from documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Unbelief* (2015-2 hrs-watch free on Amazon prime, HULU, HBO max/go)

CPL: Various episodes from Leah Remini's Show: *Scientology and the Aftermath* (available for free on HULU, AE-cable, 1.99 on various platforms) **optional**

V. 21st Century Changes-Religiosity and Movements-*Strange Rites*

(all readings Wks.13-15 are from Burton's book *Strange Rites*)

WK. 13: New-er Religions for a Godless World (45p)

(11/16) **Religiously Remixed, America's 3rd Great Awakening** (45)

Burton: Intro: *Who are the Religiously Remixed?* (19)

Burton: 2 *A (Brief) History of Intuitional Religion in America* (17)

Burton: 3 *Today's Great Awakening (And Why It's not Like the Others)* (9)

Final Paper Work: Your typed 1 page thesis statement and formal CMS alphanumeric outline and a 1 page Bibliography (2 pages total-1 doc is fine) is due 11/16 We will devote some time to peer-editing in class and going over CMS citations and you will leave this 2-page typed hardcopy with Dr. Solano. She will return this to you Week 14 with further feedback. Be sure to turn in this original doc at the end of the term along with your final paper. See handout for details.

THANKSGIVING BREAK (entire week off): 11/20-24! Enjoy your families & come back refreshed!

Week 14: Magical Movements: Harry Potter Fandom & Neopaganism (52)

(11/30) **Burton: 4** *Harry Potter and the Birth of Remix Culture* (27)

Burton: 6: *The Magic Resistance* (25)

Week 15: Is this Religion in the 21st Century? (43)

(12/7) **Burton: 8:** *Two Doctrines for a Godless World* Social Justice Movements (BLM, etc) and Techno-Utopianism (36)

Conclusion: *Clash of the Titans* (7)

FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS due at our final class session on December 7th. Please submit both a hardcopy along with original thesis/outline/bibliography AND a copy of your final paper (with outline and bibliography) at 4 pm as well as a copy on Canvas by 11 pm.

Papers will be graded, and course totals posted on Canvas. Grades will be submitted to Registrar between 12/20 and deadline 1/2/24. You will be notified when final grades post.

FINALS WEEK: Final-Quiz #2: Dec. 14th 5-6:45 pm (exam-window is 5-6:50 pm Multiple Choice, T/F online exam).

Quiz # 2 covers Sections IV and V-weeks 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 only-5 weeks of material. (12% of grade).

Congrats, you have finished a RLST rite of passage by completing RLST 300: Method and Theory. You are now grounded in classical and contemporary theorists and methodological approaches in the field. Your toolbox for understanding religion has expanded and you should feel better equipped to understand how religion and theories about it are evolving today.

Have a great Winter Break, you earned it.

Important Dates & Deadlines for CPRL 300

Week 9: (10/19) Quiz # 1 (end of class, in-person, bring laptop to connect to Canvas)

Week 11: (11/2) Film week-Screen documentary on a NRM-Cult (no in-person meeting)
Discussion posts due by 7 pm.

Week 13: (11/17) Research Paper Thesis, Bibliography, Formal Outline due (2 pages typed)

Week 14: (11/30) Dr. Solano returns thesis, Bibliography, and Outline with comments

Week 15: (12/7) Research Paper Due at last class session (hardcopy & TurnItIn link on Canvas)

Finals Week: (12/14) Quiz # 2 (in-person, 5-6:00 pm, bring laptop to connect to Canvas)

Be sure to note your weeks to lead critical discussion AND the 2 dates of you will submit your short reading response papers-hard copy due in class (if you miss your week there is no way to make it up). These dates will be different for each of you based on your selected dates-do not forget. Be sure to note these 3 important dates (unique for each of you) in your schedule or calendar.