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Ways of Understanding Religion

RSOC 9 Fall 2009

Course Description:

This is an introductory course designed to introduce students to the many different NON-RELIGIOUS ways of understanding religion, formally known as METHODOLOGY OF RELIGION. This class will be a joint effort between the students and teacher with the understanding that every single person in the room is both a learner and a teacher. With that in mind, the class will consist of a mix of lectures and group discussion. Each person in the classroom will be on a journey of discovery in this course. We will all seek to understand the roots of our own personal definitions of religion while simultaneously learning about academic (non-religious) understandings of religion which will include anthropological, sociological, psychological, and philosophical viewpoints. **Respect for all spiritual traditions will be the dominant theme.** At the end of the course, the students will be expected to be able to analyze their own personal understandings with any of these viewpoints, as well as be able to use their own personal understanding of religion to analyze academic viewpoints.

Course Goals:

1. Identification of the different academic ways of understanding religion.
2. Demonstration of knowledge of theories of religion and explorations of religion by thinkers important to the field.
3. Ability to apply these academic ways of understanding to the case studies of world religions in the textbook and in the Hicks reader.
4. Critical evaluation of definitions of religion and the root/s of religion presented by fellow classmates, important thinkers, and the textbook.
5. Critical evaluation of themes and readings of the class through writing both on exams and in the writing assignments
6. Development of individual and collaborative critical thinking skills.

Department Objectives: [adapted from RS "Description of the Three Levels"]

1. Students question and probe religion for what it reveals about human beings, their diverse societies, religions, convictions, and aspirations.
2. Students use diverse materials and demonstrate formal postures of inquiry into religion and in order to go beyond simple description of religion to a reflective engagement with it.
3. Students propose and investigate the 'big questions'—that is, the meta-reflective questions that ask how and why we ask the questions that we do about religion.

Core Curriculum Learning Objectives:

This course fulfills Santa Clara's Core Requirement for RTC 1.

- 1a. Students will be able to describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from several religions or within one, and from at least two globally distinct regions. (Knowledge of Global Cultures; Complexity; Ambiguity)
- 1b. Students will be able to use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence (Critical thinking; Complexity; Reflection)

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion: Introduction through Cases*, **Third Edition**
 David Hicks, *Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion*, Second Edition

THE FIRST AND SECOND EDITIONS OF *STUDYING RELIGION* BY KESSLER WILL NOT WORK FOR THIS CLASS. YOU NEED TO GET THE NEW THIRD EDITION.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Every student has to take 3 exams, participate in group discussions, hand in note-cards on the readings, POSSIBLY take randomly administered pop quizzes, and write one six to eight page paper. **Grading for each exam, writing assignment, pop quiz, and group discussion** will reflect the quality of a student's work as follows: A+ (100-98 = outstanding), A (97-94 = exceptional), A- (93-90 = excellent), B+ (87-89 = very good), B (86-84 = solid performance), B- (80-83 = more than adequate), C (adequate), D (barely passing), F (not passing). The grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by (+) or (-) suffixes, except that the grade of A may not be modified by a (+) suffix when it comes to the over-all class grade. **Grading for ALL WRITING, BOTH ON THE EXAMS AND ON THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT** will be based on both content and writing ability.

GRADING POLICY: In addition to the grading policy listed above, the schema for the (+) and (-) system for **over-all, final** class grades will be as follows:

1. NO A + (FOR OVER-ALL GRADE—THIS IS UNIVERSITY POLICY)
2. A is equivalent to 94 and above to 100.
3. A- is equivalent to 90-93.
4. B+ is equivalent to 87,88,89.
5. B is equivalent to 84, 85, 86
6. B- is equivalent to 80-83
7. C+ is equivalent to 77,78,79
8. C is equivalent to 74,75,76
9. C- is equivalent to 70-73.
10. D+ is equivalent to 67,68,69
11. D is equivalent to 65,66
12. F is equivalent to 64 and below.

I DO NOT DISCUSS GRADES OVER EMAIL OR THE PHONE. I WILL ONLY DISCUSS GRADES IN PERSON DURING OFFICE HOURS.

Exams

STUDENTS MUST BRING IN BLUE BOOKS TWO CLASSES AHEAD OF THE EXAM. YOU MAY NOT TAKE AN EXAM WITHOUT A BLUE BOOK HANDED IN BEFORE THE DAY OF THE EXAM.

Exams will consist of short answers and one essay question. Short answer is worth 1/3 of the exam grade and the essay is worth 2/3 of the grade. The second and third exams are not comprehensive. The first two exams provide you with one extra question for each section so you can choose which one NOT to answer, but the third exam will not provide choices, hence there will be no extra question for each section on the third exam and you will receive only the exact number of questions you need to answer.

Make-ups are at my discretion AND WILL ONLY BE GIVEN IF YOU HAVE A DOCTOR'S NOTE OR DOCUMENTATION OF AN EMERGENCY. MAKE-UPS CAN ONLY BE TAKEN DURING MY OFFICE HOURS. IF YOU CANNOT MAKE UP AN EXAM DURING MY OFFICE HOURS, YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO MAKE UP THE EXAM. I DO NOT GIVE MAKE-UPS BASED ON TRAVEL PLANS. IF YOU HAVE TRAVEL PLANS THAT CONFLICT WITH ANY OF THE EXAMS, YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO MAKE UP THE EXAM.

ATHLETES: IF YOU CANNOT TAKE AN EXAM BECAUSE OF A GAME OR TOURNAMENT, THEN THE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT MUST PROVIDE A ROOM AND PROCTOR FOR YOU TO TAKE THE EXAM OR YOU WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO MAKE IT UP. I WILL NOT PERSONALLY OFFER MAKE-UPS FOR ATHLETES, NOR WILL I PROCTOR THEM.

First exam -- -- -- -- Wednesday, October 14th

Second exam -- -- -- -- Monday, November 9th

Third exam -- -- -- -- DURING EXAM WEEK: Monday, December 7th at 1:30 p.m. IN OUR CLASSROOM. This exam is NOT comprehensive and will be 65 minutes long, similar to the previous exams. **NO CHANGES IN TIME OR DAY PERMITTED FOR THIS EXAM. IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO STAY FOR EXAM WEEK, YOU SHOULD DROP THIS CLASS.**

Pop Quizzes

If it appears that students are not reading, pop quizzes might be administered. If administered, they will be factored into the exam grade.

Writing Assignment

Each student will be required to do a six to eight page paper which will use Freud, Turner, Douglas, Durkheim, or Weber (depending on what the class eventually covers) to analyze case studies in the textbook and/or the reader and/or field research from visits to religious sites. This paper is designed to help the students learn how to apply different methods of academic analysis to religion and to get a taste of what it is like to be a scholar of religion. **PAPERS MUST BE HANDED IN DURING OUR CLASS TIME 10:30-11:35 A.M. ON FRIDAY, NOV. 20TH. ACCEPTANCE OF LATE PAPERS IS AT MY DISCRETION. FIVE POINTS PER DAY WILL BE DEDUCTED FOR LATE PAPERS IF I DECIDE TO ACCEPT THE LATE PAPER. EMAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. POINTS ARE TAKEN OFF IF YOU DO NOT FOLLOW THE FORMATTING DIRECTIONS AS FOLLOWS: 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING CITATIONS; 10 POINTS OFF FOR PAPERS THAT ARE TOO SHORT; 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING WORKS CITED OR BIBLIOGRAPHY PAGES, AND ADDITIONAL POINTS TAKEN OFF FOR NOT FOLLOWING OTHER FORMATTING STIPULATIONS.**

Paper due: Friday, November 20th, in class between 10:30-11:35 a.m.

Participation and Preparation for class:

NO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR CELL PHONES AND PDA'S:

IF YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS CLASS, YOU MUST TURN OFF AND PUT AWAY ALL CELL PHONES AND PDA'S. ANY USE OF CELL PHONES OR PDA'S IN THIS CLASS (IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, ETC.) WILL LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN CLASS. IF YOUR CELL PHONE/PDA IS OUT AND ON, EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT USING IT, YOU RISK LOSING CREDIT FOR CLASS PARTICIPATION THAT DAY, IN ADDITION TO LOWERING YOUR OVER-ALL PARTICIPATION GRADE. THEY CANNOT BE IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, OR OUT IN ANY WAY. THEY MUST BE PHYSICALLY TURNED OFF AND IN A BAG. THE SAFEST MEASURE IF YOU WISH TO EARN A GOOD PARTICIPATION GRADE IS NOT TO BRING THEM TO CLASS.

Students will be graded on participation and effort in the groups and in regular class lectures. At the beginning of every class for which there is scheduled reading, students must bring in an index card with the following on it:

1. What was easiest to understand about the reading. One to three sentences.
2. What was hardest to understand about the reading. One to three sentences.

THESE ARE NOT QUIZZES. THEY ARE SIMPLY TO SHOW EVIDENCE THAT YOU HAVE READ AND TO HELP FOCUS LECTURE. THEY WILL BE FACTORED INTO YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.

YOU WILL HAND THESE CARDS IN AT THE END OF CLASS.

Participation and Preparation for class continued:

Students receive two grace absences. Persistent tardiness and early departure from class will hurt your grade. Staring out the window, sleeping in class, chattering to neighbors when not in group discussion, and or putting your head down means you will get no credit for attendance. **USING YOUR CELL-PHONE OR ANY PDA DURING CLASS IN ANY WAY WILL ALSO LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION.**

Attendance in this classroom will be closely monitored. This not only helps me learn your name, but alerts me in time to pre-empt avoidable problems with absenteeism. Numerous unexplained absences are not acceptable. Stuff happens, but I want to know about it. **If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes and hand-outs from a fellow student who is part of your "buddy" group. Only if you have contacted all team members and no one has responded to you should you ask me for the material.**

Sleeping in class, not paying attention, chattering or whispering to fellow students during lecture or when others are answering or asking questions of the professor and other behavior that demonstrates the student is not participating will hurt your grade. Consistent disruption of class by talking to fellow students outside of group discussion periods will hurt your grade.

IF YOU PERSIST IN WHISPERING TO SEAT-MATES OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSION, I WILL ASK YOU TO MOVE DURING CLASS. WHEN ASKED, PLEASE RISE AND MOVE TO ANOTHER SEAT. IF YOU ARE TEMPTED TO WHISPER TO YOUR SEAT-MATE, SIT NEXT TO SOMEONE YOU DO NOT KNOW.

Please note that it will be difficult for you to do well on exams if you are not present during class discussion. If you do not make the effort to make up the material, even one absence can radically affect your ability to do well on the corresponding exam.

Participation will be graded in the following manner:

PHONES AND ALL PDA'S MUST BE OFF AND PHYSICALLY PUT AWAY DURING CLASS. STUDENTS WHO TEXT OR CHECK THEIR MESSAGES DURING CLASS (IN YOUR LAPS, ON THE DESK, ETC.) OR USE THEIR PHONES OR PDA'S IN ANY WAY DURING CLASS WILL NOT GET AN A IN PARTICIPATION. NO QUESTIONS ASKED. IF YOU PREFER TO TEXT DURING CLASS, THIS IS NOT THE CLASS FOR YOU.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WHISPERING OR CHATTERING TO FELLOW STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND USING ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES (CELL-PHONES, ETC.) WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE LEVEL EVEN IF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IS AT THE A, B, C, ETC. LEVEL.

A: Regular attendance and regular contributions and regular notecards.

The A student *displays that he or she has done the reading, references the reading in contributions*, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR, DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS and answers questions and asks questions regularly in class.

Grading of Participation contd.:

B: Regular attendance and regular notecards and occasional contributions.

The B student answers questions when asked point-blank, attends class regularly and hands in all participation assignments, **DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR.**

C: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. The C student cannot answer questions when asked, or when asked reflects that he/she has not done the reading. The C student does not take the participation assignments seriously. The C student disrupts class by chattering to fellow students outside of group discussion and does not pay attention **AND/OR USES ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS.**

D: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. Doesn't pay attention and chatters to fellow students outside of group discussion and ignores class-room protocol.

F: Serious problems

Calculation of over-all grade for class:

In order to calculate your **over-all grade for the quarter**, each component of the course requirements will be weighted as follows:

EXAMS AND POSSIBLE POP QUIZZES:	55 percent of your final grade.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT:	25 percent of your final grade.
PARTICIPATION:	20 percent of your final grade.
TOTAL:	100 percent.

Academic Honesty:

Cheating in any way will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating on an exam or quiz, you will fail the assignment and possibly the entire course. If you are caught plagiarizing material, you will receive no credit for the assignment and might fail the entire course.

Disability Accommodation Policy: To receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216. The phone number is 408-554-4109 or inquiries can be emailed to Robin Cole, Administrative Associate, rcole@scu.edu. Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations.

Respect in the Classroom:

The atmosphere in the classroom will be one of respect, both for me and for each other. Open discussion is taken for granted, but disruption will not be tolerated. If you are disrupting the class, I will give you a first warning. A second warning might include a request for you to leave the classroom. A third warning will entail your departure from the classroom.

Cell Phones and other P. D. A.'S

Cell phones and Palm Pilots, Blackberries, etc. are to be turned off and put away during class. Use of any of these items will **LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE BY ONE FULL LEVEL OR MORE.**

Laptops

I do not permit the use of laptops in my classroom unless you have an official form from the Drahnann Center explaining that you have a special need for one. You must take notes by hand.

Course Outline:

This is a flexible outline. At any time we might refer back to another previous reading if it informs our discussion.

FOCUS OF FIRST HALF OF CLASS:

**THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION:
HOW DO YOU DEFINE RELIGION?**

FIRST WEEK

Sept. 21st	Introduction and syllabus	What is the study of religion? What is methodology of religion? Can a person be religious and study religion objectively?
Sept. 23rd	Who is a student of religion?	Kessler, Chapter 1
Sept. 25th	What is the field of Religious Studies?	Kessler, Chapter 2 P. 24 to end of chapter. Start with Section 2.4.

SECOND WEEK

Sept. 28th	Definitions of Religion What makes a religion a religion and not something else?	Kessler, Chapter 2 pp. 14-24. Stop at Section 2.4.
Sept. 30th	WORK IN CLASS ON PERSONAL DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION AND GROUP DEFINITIONS.	
Oct. 2nd	Should the scholar of religion participate in the religion? Should the scholar of religion interfere in moral conflicts in the religion?	Hicks, Chapter 6, Reading 6-1 by Chagnon pp. 204-210.

THIRD WEEK

Oct. 5th	What is the role of a higher power in religion? How do you explain its existence? Is that possible?	Kessler, Chapter 3
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THIRD WEEK contd.

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| Oct. 7 th | What is a sacred story?
Is it a myth? Are
myths/sacred stories lies?
Why are they important?
What is a symbol? How
does symbol function in
sacred story? | Kessler, Chapter 4
Read pp. 60-68. Skip to
the last paragraph on p. 69
and continue to p. 71.
Stop at Section 4.4. Skip to
the Research Case on p. 78
and read to the end. |
| Oct. 9 th | How do you explain
the existence of religion
and/or higher power/s? | Hicks, Chapter 1, Reading
1-2 by Freud, pp. 8-11
Kessler, pp. 148-149 on Freud |

FOURTH WEEK

BRING BLUE BOOKS TO CLASS FOR ME TO HOLD UNTIL THE EXAM.

Oct. 12th FINALIZE DEFINITIONS
 OF RELIGION AND
 REVIEW

Oct. 14th FIRST EXAM

SECOND THIRD OF COURSE OUTLINE (UP TO SECOND EXAM)
THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE ROOT CAUSE OF RELIGION

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| Oct. 16th | What is religious
experience? How is it
possible? Can it be
proven? | Excerpts from the movie
<i>Agnes of God</i> |
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FIFTH WEEK

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| Oct. 19th | Analysis of <i>Agnes of
God</i> and crafting
group root causes of
religion. | PLEASE READ THE
SECTION ON RELATION-
SHIPS BETWEEN MYTH
AND SCIENCE IN KESSLER
PP. 74-78 AND RE-READ P.
148-149 on Freud IN KESSLER. |
| Oct. 21st | Religious Experience
Continued. | Kessler, Chapter 7, pp. 127-
142. Skip to the bottom of p. 149
and read about Jung and then Teresa
of Avila ending on page 156. |
| Oct. 23 rd | What is ritual? How are
sacred story and ritual/
sacred action related?
What functions do rituals
serve? | Kessler, Chapter 5, pp. 82-96. |

SIXTH WEEK

- Oct. 26th How can the symbols used in ritual reveal the structure of a society/culture? Hicks, Reading 4-2 by Turner, pp.-122-128.
- Oct. 28th How does a religion keep itself alive? What is needed in order for a religion to persist? Kessler, Chapter 11 pp. 240-260.
- Oct. 30th CLASS CANCELLED BECAUSE I WILL BE AT A RETREAT.

SEVENTH WEEK

- Nov. 2nd How does religion change the world? How does it influence culture? Hicks, Reading 11-1 by Weber, pp. 446-455.

BRING BLUE BOOKS FOR ME TO HOLD UNTIL THE EXAM.

- Nov. 4th How do religions explain evil? Why do they need to explain evil in order to survive? Kessler, Chapter 8, pp. 159-181.
- Nov. 6th REVIEW
FINALIZE ROOT CAUSES
OF RELIGION

EIGHTH WEEK

- Nov. 9th SECOND EXAM

COURSE OUTLINE FOR LAST PART OF RSOC 9 class

Focus: Is religious tolerance possible? If so, how and why? If not, how and why?

- Nov. 11th IN CLASS DISCUSSION OF PAPER ASSIGNMENT
AND WORK ON TOPICS AND OUTLINES.
Bring both of your books.
- Nov. 13th What is the relationship between religion and politics? Why do people harm others for religious reasons? Kessler, Chapter 10

Ninth Week

- Nov. 16th Why are some religions flexible and others rigid? Hicks, Reading 2-4
Are religious systems arbitrary? by Douglas, pp. 49-55
Is it possible for religions to change? How does the human mind relate to the way religions develop?
- Nov. 18th How might religion be used to control people and society? How might society be God? What is the relationship between religion and society? Hicks, Reading 1-3
by Durkheim, pp. 11-15.
- Nov. 20th PAPER DUE IN CLASS. JUST COME BY BETWEEN 10:30-11:35 A.M. TO HAND IT IN. EMAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOV. 23RD-27TH

Tenth Week

- Nov. 30th Is religious tolerance possible? What is the role of Religious Studies in religious tolerance? Kessler, Chapter 13, pp. 300-310.
Start again at Section 13.4 on p. 314 and read to p. 317.
Why is religious tolerance important to the academic study of religion?

BRING BLUE BOOKS FOR ME TO HOLD UNTIL EXAM.

- Dec. 2nd How can we apply critical tolerance to case studies and the Hicks' readings? Hicks, Reading 9-3, pp. 359-369.
- Dec. 4th REVIEW

EXAM WEEK

THIRD EXAM (NOT COMPREHENSIVE): MONDAY, DECEMBER 7TH AT 1:30 P.M. IN OUR CLASSROOM. 65 MINUTES LONG AS PREVIOUS EXAMS.
NO CHANGES IN TIME OR DATE ALLOWED FOR THIS EXAM. IF YOU CANNOT TAKE THE EXAM AT THIS TIME, YOU SHOULD DROP THE CLASS.