

**RSOC 9 | Ways of Understanding Religion**  
Winter 2016 | MWF 2:15-3:20 | 310 Kenna Hall  
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Office Hours: Wednesdays, Noon-1:00PM and by appointment

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

What is religion and how do we understand it as an object of intellectual inquiry? How does study of religion related to other fields of academic study? This course introduces students to ways of thinking about and approaching religion as an academic discipline through an exploration of a variety of religious traditions across history and around the globe. Course readings and discussions will explore different ways of describing and analyzing religion, as well as considering the various understandings of the phenomenon of religion. After examining categories, terms, and ideas useful in the study of religion, we will explore case studies that will enable us to apply these tools to religion as it functions in the varied contexts of everyday life in contemporary society. During the quarter, students will also undertake their own exploration of religion in the local Silicon Valley context.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Provide students with basic categories and a vocabulary to describe, analyze, and understand religion and its connection to the world in which we live
- Enable students to reflect critically and with self-awareness about the challenges and promises of religion as the subject of scholarly inquiry
- Provide a brief introduction to a variety of religious traditions and the diverse ways that they can be studied, with particular concern for helping students choose future Religious Studies courses
- Lay foundations for a liberal education by reflecting on the relationship between religion and human experience, exploring various manifestations of the human struggle with “existential” questions, including how and why we ask the questions that we do (e.g. who am I? what kind of world do we live in? how do we make sense of our experience and condition? how ought we to act in the world?)

## **CORE CURRICULUM: RELIGION, THEOLOGY AND CULTURE 1**

RSOC 9 fulfills the Core 2009 RTC 1 requirement, which forms an important component of a Santa Clara University education. The RTC 1 course is part of the Foundations dimension of the Core Curriculum, normally taken in the first year, which introduces students to university learning through small classes that promote intentional, reflective learning that emphasizes relationships among global cultures and both diverse and shared human experience across historical periods. In particular, as an RTC 1 course, we will focus on:

1. Describing and comparing the central religious ideas as practices from several traditions
2. Using critical approaches to the study of religion to reflect both on our own beliefs and upon the religious dimensions of human existence

## **BOOKS**

The following books are required and are available for purchase at the University Bookstore:

Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (2003) – ISBN-13: 978-1845930622  
Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (2011) – ISBN-13: 978-0520267527  
James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011) – ISBN-13: 978-1626980051

Readings not in the above texts will be posted on Camino and/or distributed in class. Additional readings may also be announced in class.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Intellectual Engagement (15 Points). Your presence and participation is essential to your success in this course and to the success of the course as a whole. We each bring unique life experiences, understandings, and perspectives to our topics, whether or not we have not studied them before. The more these different perspectives are brought to bear on our discussions, the richer the learning experience for everyone, including the instructor. Not participating denies others the opportunity for deeper learning. As a result, the intellectual engagement grade extends beyond mere attendance to emphasize engagement with course materials and research, including fieldwork with local religious communities.

This engagement is most clearly manifest through active participation in class discussions. Therefore, attendance is only a necessary pre-condition for participation, not the measure of it. Intellectual engagement will be evaluated by the extent to which you contribute to the intellectual environment of the class, including coming to class prepared and on time, asking questions, and discussing the assigned readings, fieldwork, and other research in a serious and respectful manner. Because attendance is a precondition for intellectual engagement, students who miss more than one class will be lose at least one point per absence. The use of electronic devices for purposes other than direct course engagement is disruptive to the intellectual environment of the classroom and will adversely affect one's intellectual engagement grade (Core objective 1, and especially 2).

In addition to thoughtful participation in class discussions, intellectual engagement will be assessed through three further assignments. These help to focus the participation of students and to illuminate the thinking of students who may be less comfortable talking in class (though they do not replace the requirement to participate in class discussions).

Introductory Essay: Becoming a Student of Religion. Write a short paper (750-1000 words, or about 2-3 pages) in which you introduce yourself and describe your expectations about becoming a student of the academic study of religion. Include any information that you think will be helpful for the professor to know you better, not just what is specifically relevant to this course. Include any previous experience studying religion (formal or informal). Finally, describe what you hope to get out of this course (including any specific topics or issues that do not appear to be covered in the readings or syllabus), what challenges or difficulties you anticipate or concern you, what you will need to do to be successful in achieving your goals for the course, and how you will know if you have been successful in achieving your expectations.

Honesty trumps posturing, so be true to yourself in reflecting on the role of this course in your education and in relation to your sense of self and your place in the world. Additional guidelines for the paper are posted on the course Camino site. Please read these carefully as failure to follow guidelines will adversely affect your grade for the paper.(Core Objective 2).

Fieldwork and Reading Journals. The readings for this course are generally complex and challenging, requiring thoughtful reflection, especially for students who are not used to considering religion from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and thinking through its role in the diverse contexts of everyday life. Likewise, fieldwork for the course—forays into the local religious landscape—may not be familiar to many students. To help make these experiences as meaningful as possible both for individual students and for class discussions, students are required to keep a course journal in which they document their responses to and reflections on the readings. In these journals, students should go beyond taking basic content notes—though this may be helpful, too—to reflect on questions raised by their reading and engagements in local religious communities or with individual religious practitioners.

What concepts are new to you in the reading? What are the core arguments made by the people we're reading? How are they defining religion? How is that different from what you might have thought previously? When you visit local religious communities, what do your hosts highlight as important in their religions? How does that connect—or not—to what you've picked up from the readings?

As you reflect further on these experiences, what has been particularly illuminating? What is confusing to you? What captures your attention even if you're not quite sure why? What readings and experiences with local religion suggest possible areas of interest for your critical engagement presentation or essay? Spend time after each reading assignment or religious site visit to jot down your thoughts, focusing in particular on your own interests, questions, and concerns. These need not be formally developed, but they should prepare you for substantive engagement in class discussion. Journals contribute to your intellectual engagement grade and will be collected at the middle and end of the quarter. (Core Objective 2)

Critical Reflections (15 Points). Your regular journaling will also prepare you for three short critical reflections. These papers typically range from one to two pages, although there is no minimum page requirement. The only requirement is that comments engage the questions or topics posted for the assignment due date on Camino. These assignments will form a basis for class discussion and students will be called upon in class to share their thoughts. These assignments may not be turned in late, since the intent of reflect and respond papers is to facilitate discussion for the day they are due. If you are not able to turn in the paper on the day of the related discussion, you will not receive credit for the paper.

Ways of Defining & Understanding Religion Application Essay (10 Points). Students will write a 1500-word essay (4-5 pages) critically reflecting upon definitions of religion and ways of understanding religious practice drawing on the perspectives of Tara Burton, Robert Orsi, David Morgan, Talal Asad, Courtney Bender, and Pascal Boyer.

As with all course papers, your work on this essay should reflect a commitment to thoughtful academic reflection that does more than “answer the questions” for the sake of the instructor, but rather shows your ability to connect the questions posed in the assignment to your particular interests, concerns, questions, and experience. This is to say that a stream-of-consciousness reflection written at 2AM the night before the paper is due may help you to get a first draft down, but it won't be sufficient for the paper you submit for a grade. As a rule of thumb, plan on spending at least an hour for each page of the paper. (Core Objective 1).

Critical Engagement Project (35 Points): Students will participate in a complex project that engages them with the local religious landscape. The goal of this project is to reflect upon the relationship between the academic study of religion and the ways that people experience or describe religion outside of the academic context. In other words, how well has our introduction to the study of religion equipped us to understand and reflect upon religion as a dimension of human existence as it is experienced and described by those we read about and/or observe? (Core Objectives 1, 2)

There are two parts to this project, one undertaken with a group, and one working independently:

Group Project (15 Points): On Friday of the first week of class (January 8), students will be organized into 6 groups of 4-5 students (depending on class size). Each group will randomly select two different religious traditions that will be the focus of their common work. Groups will then visit two different religious sites at a time when they can observe religious practices or the articulation of religious beliefs (e.g. during worship or a religious festival). It is best if the traditions you visit are different than traditions in which you grew up, now practice, or of which you have considerable knowledge.

Student groups will consider the dimensions of religion we have discussed as they appear in the religious communities they visit. How do those dimensions enable (or complicate) your ability to make comparisons between the groups and sites you visited? (Additional information on how to plan a site visit will be posted on Camino.)

Based on your site visits, background research on the religious traditions you are studying, and your own reflections in light of the individual research of each group participant, the group will prepare a 3 minute video on each religious community in its local context and as a broader community of

practice. These videos will be used as part of a 20-minute final presentation the last week of the quarter. Groups will also prepare and distribute a 1-page profile of each religious group on the day of the presentation. The videos and profiles will be included on the Religious Studies departments "Living Religions Project" website. (Additional guidelines for the presentation will be posted on Camino.)

To make sure student groups are on track for the final presentation, *mandatory* research consultations will be held with the professor during class the week of February 8. Student groups will present an outline of their presentations and a preliminary bibliography at that time.

Individual Research Essay (20 Points). For the individual essay, you will analyze your own findings from the site visits and reflect upon critical questions relating to the content of the course in light of your own, independent research on a particular approach to the study of religion. For example, you might want to consider how a local Zen Center contributes to the economy of the neighborhood in which it is located based on your research on religions as economic entities. You may be interested in the culture of celebrity as it has influenced the growth of the Church of Scientology. How, you might wonder, have continuing debates about evolution contributed to the development of the Sunday Assembly "Atheist church"?

Your individual research will of course contribute to the work of the group, but the presentation is not meant to be a display of each, individual student's research. Rather, it should be an elegant, integrated presentation about the community you have studied that illustrates your understanding of multiple ways of approaching the study of religion. (Core Objectives 1, 2)

Required Research Workshop. To help you prepare for fieldwork research, students will participate in a *mandatory* research workshop conducted by the University librarians on January 11. The workshop will help students to identify appropriate academic resources for background research, to develop a research question, and begin to shape a thesis statement for their papers. Students who do not attend the workshop will have 5 points deducted from their final grade.

Campus Religion Event Review (5 Points). Each quarter presents a variety of opportunities to learn about religion outside of class. As part of trying to integrate classroom learning with people's real experience, students will be required to attend one event and write a 2-3 page review (a description and analysis) of the event, focusing especially on connections to your own beliefs or experiences of religion and/or the its connection with larger questions of the role of religion in human experience. A list of events, updated regularly, will be posted on Camino. **Do not put this off until the end of the term**, as most events occur during the first six weeks of the quarter. The review is due within one week of the event you attend. All reviews must be completed by MARCH 4. (Core Objective 2)

Examinations (20 Points). There will be two, 10-point quizzes covering material from readings and class lectures/discussions. (Core Objective 1)

**Format Guidelines for Papers:** As with every paper you write as a university student, your papers for this course should be well organized and clear, with minimal grammatical errors and typos. If these are areas of challenge for you, please visit the Drahnann Center for help with planning, writing, and proofreading your papers. Please format your papers as follows: double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12 point font. Make sure that your name is on the paper and that there are page numbers on every page. Staple the pages of the paper in the upper left-hand corner before turning it in. Up to 5 points will be deducted for not conforming to these guidelines. Please print on both sides of the paper to reduce paper waste if at all possible.

## LATE POLICY

Assignments turned in late will penalized a minimum of one point per day late. Exception: No credit will be given for critical reflections turned in late (see assignment description above).

## GRADING

Grading is based on a possible 100 points for the quarter, weighted as follows:

Intellectual Engagement 15  
Quizzes (10 each) 20  
Critical Reflections 15  
Campus Religion Event 5  
Applying Definitions and Ways of Understanding Religion Essay 10  
Group Presentation 15  
Critical Engagement Independent Research Essay 20

For each written assignment, students will receive feedback intended not only to evaluate critically that assignment, but also to offer constructive suggestions for improvement on future assignments. In addition, students are encouraged to meet individually with the instructor for additional feedback as necessary and desired.

Final grades will be based upon the following scale:

A (95-100); A- (90-94); B+ (87-89); B (83- 86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D (60-69); F (below 60). Final grades are not negotiable, and cannot be changed, except in the case of clerical error.

Grade values are based on the Undergraduate Bulletin, which defines grades as follows: A (excellent), B (good), C (adequate), D (barely passing), F (not passing). At the beginning of the quarter, we will discuss what students and the professor understand these evaluative designations to mean so that our expectations are aligned as clearly as possible.

## COUSE POLICIES

### Attendance

Attendance will be taken in each class. Prompt attendance for each class session is required. **More than two excused or unexcused absences will negatively impact a student's final grade.** Arriving late or leaving early more than two times will count as an absence. If students must miss a class, it *is their own responsibility to get notes from a classmate and make up missed work.* The professor *will not* meet with students during office hours to make up material from missed classes.

### Academic Integrity

Students should read and understand the University's policy with regard to academic integrity:  
<http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/upload/Academic-Integrity-Policy-and-Protocol.pdf>

Suspected violations of academic integrity ("e.g., plagiarism, falsification of data, misrepresentation of research...and other acts generally understood to be dishonest") will be investigated immediately, and students shown to have violated the University academic integrity policy will receive a failing grade on the assignment and may also fail the course.

It is worth noting that what constitutes plagiarism is often misunderstood, and students often plagiarize unintentionally. Students are advised to take particular care when quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing another source in writing assignments or oral presentations so that the student does not appear to be representing the words, thoughts, or ideas of the source as her or his own. The University of North Carolina provides a handout on plagiarism that may be helpful for students to review:  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>.

## Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact Disabilities Resources, Benson 216, [www.scu.edu/disabilities](http://www.scu.edu/disabilities) as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodations with the University. If you have already arranged accommodations through Disabilities Resources, please discuss them with me during my office hours. Students who have medical needs related to pregnancy or parenting may be eligible for accommodations.

While I am happy to assist you, I am unable to provide accommodations until I have received verification from Disabilities Resources. The Disabilities Resources office will work with students and faculty to arrange proctored exams for students whose accommodations include double time for exams and/or assisted technology. (Students with approved accommodations of time-and-a-half should talk with me as soon as possible). Disabilities Resources must be contacted in advance to schedule proctored examinations or to arrange other accommodations. The Disabilities Resources office would be grateful for advance notice of at least two weeks. For more information you may contact Disabilities Resources at 408-554-4109.

## Electronic Devices

With the permission of the professor, students may use laptops for note taking and group work in class, including online research. However, cell phones and other electronic devices are not permitted and will be collected at the beginning of each class. Students may not make or respond to phone calls or text messages nor may they send or receive emails or update social networking statuses during class.

Should the use of *any* electronic devices by *any one student* to be disruptive, the privilege of using laptops will be revoked for *all students* and the offending student(s) will be marked absent for that class session.

Cell phones or other electronic devices used for personal communications in class (e.g., texting, tweeting, posting) will be removed from the offending student and returned at the end of the quarter.

## Title IX Statement

Santa Clara University upholds a zero tolerance policy for discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct. If you (or someone you know) have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence or stalking, we encourage you to tell someone promptly. For more information, please go to [www.scu.edu/studentlife](http://www.scu.edu/studentlife) and click on the link for the University's [Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) or contact the University's EEO and Title IX Coordinator, Belinda Guthrie at 408-554-3043 or by email at [bguthrie@scu.edu](mailto:bguthrie@scu.edu). Reports may be submitted online through [www.scu.edu/osl/report](http://www.scu.edu/osl/report) or anonymously through Ethicspoint: [www.ethicspoint.com/http://stage-www.scu.edu/hr/quick-links/ethics-point/](http://www.ethicspoint.com/http://stage-www.scu.edu/hr/quick-links/ethics-point/)

While I want you to feel comfortable coming to me with issues you may be struggling with or concerns you may be having, please be aware that there are some reporting requirements that are part of my job at Santa Clara University.

For example, if you inform me of an issue of harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination, I will keep the information as private as I can, but I am required to bring it to the attention of the institution's EEO and Title IX Coordinator. If you inform me that you are struggling with an issue that may be resulting in, or caused by, traumatic or unusual stress, I will likely inform the campus Student Care Team (SCU CARE).

If you would like to reach out directly to the Student Care Team for assistance, you can contact them at [www.scu.edu/osl/report](http://www.scu.edu/osl/report). If you would like to talk to the Office of EEO and Title IX directly, they can be reached at 408-554-3043 or by email at [bguthrie@scu.edu](mailto:bguthrie@scu.edu). Reports may be submitted online through [www.scu.edu/osl/report](http://www.scu.edu/osl/report) or anonymously through Ethicspoint: [www.ethicspoint.com](http://www.ethicspoint.com). Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to the Office of Student Life (OSL), Campus Safety Services, and local law

enforcement. For confidential support, contact the Counseling and Psychological Services office (CAPS), the YWCA, or a member of the clergy (for example, a priest or minister).

Finally, please be aware that if, for some reason, our interaction involves a disruptive behavior, a concern about your safety or the safety of others, or potential violation of University policy, I will inform the Office of Student Life. The purpose of this is to keep OSL apprised of incidents of concern, and to ensure that students can receive or stay connected to the academic support and student wellness services they need.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule is tentative, may be supplemented by additional readings, or may be modified to reflect class interests and needs. Updates to the course schedule will be announced in class and posted on Camino. Readings are to be completed *before* class on the assigned day.

Date	Topic	Assignment
Jan 4	Course Overview	Tara Isabel Burton, "Study Theology, Even If You Don't Believe in God," <i>The Atlantic</i> (2013). [Camino]
Jan 6	Approaches & Definitions (Part 1)	<b>**Class will meet at Mission Church**</b> Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion" (1997). [Camino] David Morgan, "The Look of the Sacred" (2012). [Camino]
Jan 8	Approaches & Definitions (Part 2)	Pascal Boyer, "Bound to Believe?" (2008). [Camino] Pierre Liénard and Pascal Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behavior" (2006). [Camino] Pascal Boyer, "Why Is Religion Natural?" (2004). [Camino]
Jan 11	Preparing for Research in Religious Studies	<b>**INTRODUCTORY ESSAY DUE**</b> (See guidelines on Camino) Class will meet in the Learning Commons, room 203.
Jan 13	Approaches & Definitions (Part 3)	Talal Asad, "Thinking about Religion, Belief and Politics" (2012). [Camino]
Jan 15	Religion as/and Politics	<b>**Critical Reflection 1 Due**</b> (See guidelines on Camino) Cone, "The Cross and the Lynching Tree," 1-29 Jayme Wooten, "Who Has the Right to Be Violent?" [Camino]
Jan 18	<b>MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR HOLIDAY</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
Jan 20	Religion and Social Transformation	Cone, "Bearing Down he Cross and the Lynching Tree," 65-92; "Legacies of the Cross and the Lynching Tree," 152-166.
Jan 22	Religion as Practice	Courtney Bender, "Practicing Religions" (2012). [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 1-50
Jan 25	Religion as Experience	<b>**Application Essay Due**</b> Robert H. Sharf, "Experience" (1998). [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 51-81
Jan 27	Religion as Ritual	Catherine Bell, "Ritual Reification" (1997). [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 82-117
Jan 29	Religion and Gender (Part 1)	<b>**JOURNAL REVIEW**</b> Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father" [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 118-147
Feb 1	Religion and Gender (Part 2)	Alice Walker, excerpt from <i>In Search of Our Mother's Gardens</i> (1967). [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 148-189

Feb 3	Religion as Meaning-Making	Ninian Smart, "Principles of Meaning in the Study of Religion" [Camino] Lofton, <i>Oprah</i> , 190-212
Feb 5	Religion as a Social System	Émile Durkheim, "Definition of Religious Phenomenon and of Religion" (2014). [Camino]
Feb 8	<b>Final Research Consultations &amp; Group Presentation Prep</b>	Group A: 2:15-2:30 All groups will meet in the Religious Studies Group B: 2:35-2:50 conference room on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of Kenna. Group C: 2:55-3:10
Feb 10	Religion as a Way of Knowing	<b>**Critical Reflection 2 Due**</b> (See guidelines on Camino) Donald S. Lopez, "Belief" (1998). [Camino]
Feb 12	<b>Final Research Consultations &amp; Group Presentation Prep</b>	Group D: 2:15-2:30 All groups will meet in the Religious Studies Group E: 2:35-2:50 conference room on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of Kenna. Group F: 2:55-3:10
Feb 15	<b>PRESIDENTS' DAY HOLIDAY</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
Feb 17	Religion as a Cultural System	Clifford Geertz, "Religion as Cultural System," excerpt from <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i> (1973). [Camino]
Feb 19	Religion in Culture	<b>**Critical Reflection 3 Due**</b> (See guidelines on Camino) Tomoko Mazuzawa, "Culture" (1998). [Camino] Guest Speaker, Maha Elgenaidi, Islamic Networks Group
Feb 22	Understanding Religious Practice in Contemporary Culture	Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> , ch. 1-2
Feb 24		Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> , ch. 3
Feb 26		<b>**Quiz #2**</b> Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> , ch. 4
Feb 29		Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> , ch. 5-6
Mar 2		Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> , Conclusion and Appendix
Mar 4	Religion in the Secular World	<b>Have you completed your campus event reflection?</b> Jacques Berlinerblau, "Introduction: Secularists and the Not Godless World" (2014). [Camino] Drescher, <i>Choosing Our Religion</i> excerpt [Camino]
Mar 7	FINAL PRESENTATIONS	Groups A and B
Mar 9	FINAL PRESENTATIONS	Groups C and D
Mar 11	FINAL PRESENTATIONS	Groups E and F
Mar 14	Finals Week	<b>**FINAL CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT ESSAY DUE**</b> <b>**Turn in Journals**</b> <b>Due by NOON, MARCH 14</b> <b>in the Religious Studies Office, 323 Kenna</b>