



**RSOC 09-01 (46880): Ways of Understanding Religion**  
**Winter 2017: MW- 3:30-5:15 PM; Engineering Ctr. 325**

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**Professor Joe Morris, Ph.D. ([jamorris@scu.edu](mailto:jamorris@scu.edu))**  
**Office Hours: MW 2:15-3:15 PM or before/after class or by appointment.**  
**Office Location: Kenna 315**

*What is religion? Does something called “religion” actually exist or is it a clustering together of similar social and cultural practices and characteristics grouped under this term? Are all religions relatively the same or is one truer than any of the others? How does one evaluate a religious experience? What are some of the approaches and tools used for understanding religion? How has globalization influenced our understanding of religion? Does the convergence of media, pop culture and religion influence the ways we comprehend religion?*

### **Course Description**

Introduces the categories by which religion is formally studied. Explores distinct perspectives or ways of thinking about religion (e.g., psychological, phenomenological, anthropological, theological, and sociological); also considers a variety of religious data (e.g., symbols, myths, rituals, theologies, and modern communities).

### **Objectives**

In this course, we will examine various ways of understanding religion by using a series of lenses to explore it from different perspectives. The lenses will be of two types: method and content. While the primary “method” lens will be phenomenological, we will also have occasion to benefit from the insights drawn from other ways of thinking about religion, i.e., anthropological, psychological, sociological, historical, philosophical and theological. Likewise, while we will have the opportunity to study a plethora of “content” issues and questions raised by religion, three general categories will organize our study: 1] globalization, 2] media and the representation of religion, and 3] approaching and understanding the “other” (religions). The goal of such examination is the development of respectful, critical, informed and insightful approaches to understanding religion and the various benefits, challenges and problems it presents in our present situation. Thus, the primary course objectives are the following:

1. Students will be able to describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from several religious traditions, and from at least two globally distinct regions;
2. Students will be able to use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence.

### **Required Texts**

Understanding Religion in a Global Society, Kent E. Richter, Eva M. Rapple, John C. Modschiedler, R. Dean Peterson. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005. (ISBN: 0-534-55995-6) [Various Formats]

Additional readings posted on CANVAS/CAMINO.

## Assessment and Grading

- **Class attendance and participation:** involves on-time attendance, engagement in class activities, small and large group discussions, and online (Camino) activities and discussions. There are three things included in class participation: attendance and contributing qualitatively and quantitatively to discussions. Therefore, all students are expected to be present, on time, prepared and active participants at each class for presentations and discussions. Should an absence be necessary it can be excused only with written notification which must be submitted at the first class after the absence. No late notifications will be accepted. Points are lost for lateness and please make sure you check with the instructor after the class you arrived late to assure that you get marked present. ***No participation points are given for the use of computers for other purposes than class, nor for texting – even if you participate during that specific class.*** (25%) [Students form small groups that select a religion (other than their own) for study throughout the quarter. Employing features, characteristics and categories of religion in a globalized context, each class requires the student to **describe** how their group's religion embodies or relates to that feature or characteristic, and then **compare** how the various religions of the other groups display that feature or aspect. Distinctions are examined between both **eastern and western forms of religion**, as well as between traditional so-called **world religions and new religious movements** (Objective 1a). The primary **critical approach** is phenomenological stressing the need for observation and description before comparison and evaluation. This approach along with the group project provides an occasion to examine a local expression of their group's religion. This encourages a functional appreciation for their group's religion, along with awareness and appreciation for the diversity of the religious dimensions of human existence (Objective 1b).]
- **Mid-term Examination:** This will be a subjective, short essay format. A study guide will be distributed one week prior to the mid-term examination. [Tentative Date: 2/13] (15%) [The examination is designed to be **comparative** requiring the inclusion of **their group's religion and one other religion** (Objective 1a), and while subjective in format requires the application of **critical approaches** in the comparison (Objective 1a and 2a).]
- **Final Examination:** This will be subjective, short essay format. A study guide will be distributed one week prior to this final examination. (15%) [The examination is designed to be **comparative** requiring the inclusion of **their group's religion and one other religion** (Objective 1a) and subjective in nature requiring the application of **critical approaches** in the comparison (Objective 1a and 2a).]
- **Co-Curricular Events/Field Experience:** Co-Curricular events are various events on campus and locally that focus on some aspect of religion as discussed in the course. Each student is required to select and attend **one** such event and post an assessment and reflection on it in the designated folder on CANVAS. A list of the various co-curricular events will be posted online at CANVAS. Or students can choose instead to visit the worship space of their group's specific religion and write a reflection on that field experience. (5%) [The reflection and assessment of the co-curricular activity should be comprised of three sections: first, a **description** of the event/experience; second, a **comparison** of the event/experience with an aspect(s) of religion focused on in class; and third, a **reflection** and assessment of how the co-curricular event impacts own beliefs and those studied in their group's religion (Objective 1a and 2a).] **[Due by 3/8 by 3:00 PM]**
- **Group Project and Presentation:** In class multi-media, group presentation on each

group's religion viewed through the three lenses examined in class (globalization, representation in media and culture, and attitude toward the "other") as they are brought to bear on a specific religious issue, problem or question in its manifold manifestations. The group project employs the methods introduced throughout the quarter for the study of religion, collates the group's research on their religion, and incorporates the resources of the local expressions of the religion as it reflects on them in their selected issue, question or problem. These will be presented by the groups in class in the final class session. (15%) [The group project involves **description** of the issue or problem; a **comparison** of religious ideas and practices of their group's religion in light of the characteristics and features of religion studied throughout the quarter; communicating a response stemming from the group's religion to the issue or problem presented in the presentation (Objectives 1a and 2a).] **[Group Presentation: 3/13 & 3/15]**

- **Reading Responses:** These will be a typed response to question(s) focusing on the readings and discussion for the specific day. There will be 14 or 15 of these questions posted throughout the quarter on CANVAS. The student is required to post a response by the assigned date and time in the designated drop box on CANVAS. Rubrics are provided for each assignment on CANVAS. (25%) [Some reading responses focus on the methods stressed for approaching the study of religion (sociological, historical, anthropological, phenomenological) and seek to **apply** them to their group's religion, as well as **compare** them with their application to religion in general (Objective 1a). Other reading responses **reflect** on the various features and/or characteristics of many religions (conception of the Absolute; Origins and Founders; scriptures; myths, stories and history; responses to suffering and evil; expression in art, music, film, literature; ritual; morality and ethics; religious experience; salvation and the meaning of life; personality and the individual; consequences in an emerging globalized society) and evaluate how they function within the group's selected religion (Objective 1a). These assignments encourage **reflection** on the various dimensions of religion (Objective 2a).] **[Reading Responses must be in drop box by 3:00 PM the day they are due.]**

#### **Grading Scale**

95%-100% A  
 90%-94% A-  
 87%-89% B+  
 83%-86% B  
 80%-82% B-  
 77%-79% C+  
 73%-76% C  
 70%-72% C-  
 67%-69% D+  
 63%-66% D  
 60%-62% D-  
 59% & below F

#### **Other Resources**

1] The course website on CANVAS will be an important place to find course requirements and procedures, reading response questions and drop boxes, co-curricular events and response drop boxes, online discussion, exam study guides, etc. In hopes of

reducing the amount of paper, all course materials and communications will be posted on CANVAS.

Feedback will be provided in writing to students for the Reading Responses, Examinations, Co-curricular Activities and group project.

#### **OTHER INFORMATION:**

##### **Disabilities Syllabus Statement**

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.

In alignment with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and with the California Education Code, Section 66281.7, Santa Clara University provides reasonable accommodations to students who are pregnant, have recently experienced childbirth, and/or have medically related needs. Pregnant and parenting students can often arrange accommodations by working directly with their instructors, supervisors, or departments. Alternatively, a pregnant or parenting student experiencing related medical conditions may request accommodations through Disability Resources.

##### **Title IX Syllabus 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](tel: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)

##### **Academic Integrity Policy**

###### *Academic Integrity Pledge*

*The Academic Integrity pledge is an expression of the University's commitment to fostering an understanding of -- and commitment to -- a culture of integrity at Santa*

*Clara University.*

*The Academic Integrity pledge, which applies to all students, states:*

*I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code.*

*Students are expected to uphold the principles of this pledge for all work in this class*

The University is committed to academic excellence and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work and to cite any sources they use. A student who is guilty of a dishonest act in an examination, paper, or other work required for a course, or who assists others in such an act, may, at the discretion of the instructor, receive a grade of F for the course. In addition, a student found guilty of a dishonest act may be subject to sanctions up to and including dismissal from the University as a result of the student judicial process as described in the Community Handbook. A student who violates copyright laws, including those covering the copying of software programs, or who knowingly alters official academic records from this or any other institution is subject to similar disciplinary action.