

Introduction to the Study of Religion

RLG101H LEC0101 (Winter 2016)

Department of Historical Studies, University of Toronto

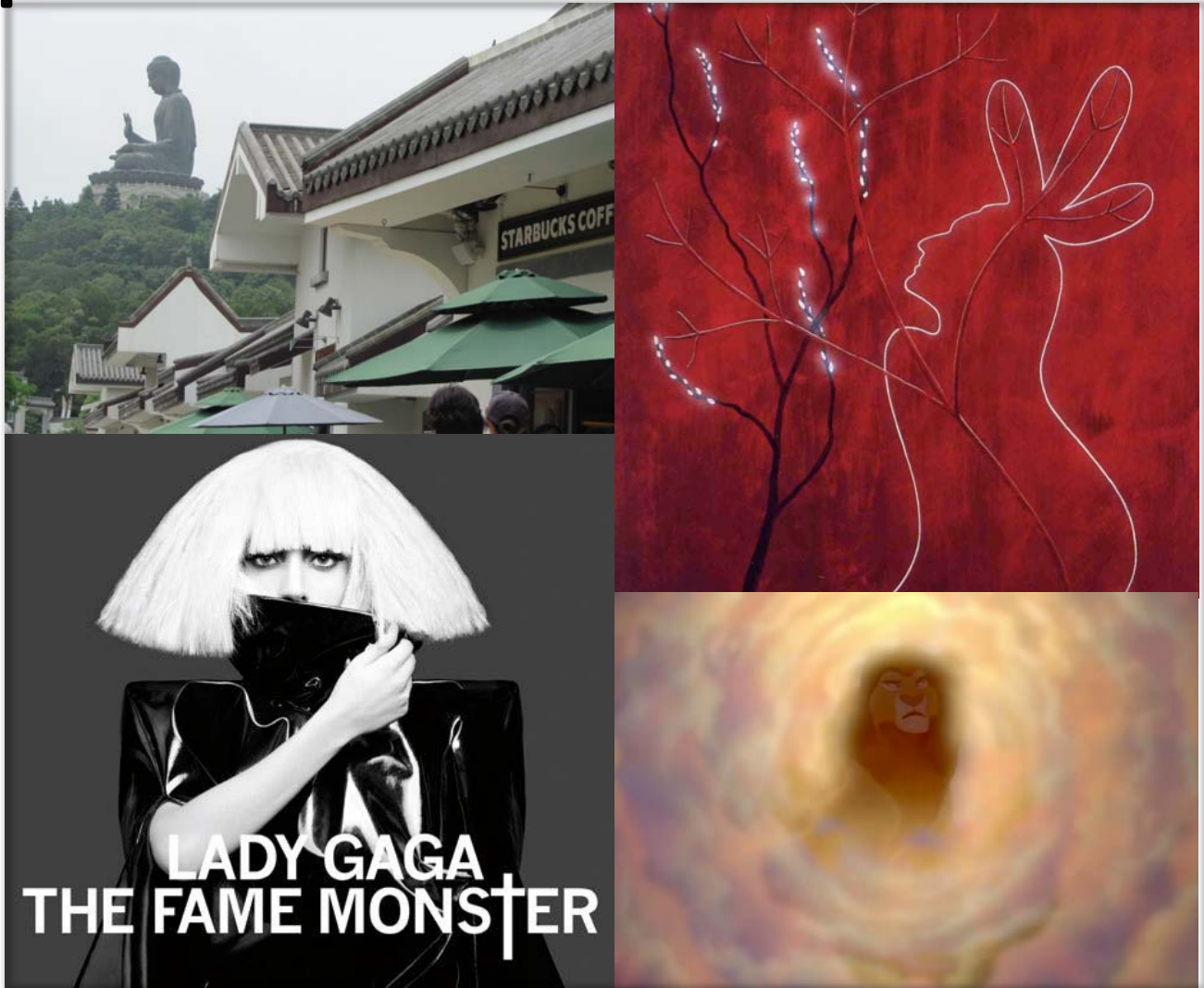


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BASIC INFORMATION

Instructor:	Ken Derry
Office:	Room 208B in Erindale Hall (between the Student Centre and Deerfield)
Office Hours:	Tuesdays 2:30-4pm (UTM Library, near the loans desk) Thursdays 11am-12:30pm (EH 208B)
Email:	Blackboard (see “Protocols and Etiquette” below)
Faculty page:	http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/historical-studies/people/derry-ken
Lectures:	Tuesdays 5-7pm (IB110)
Tutorials:	Fridays, various times and rooms (see UTM <i>Timetable</i> for details)

RESOURCES

1. RLG101H website (Blackboard)

The course website is a key resource that you should refer to at *least* once a week. It will contain:

- All important announcements;
- Lecture slides, as pdf files;¹
- Online class discussions;
- All course handouts, as pdf files. No handouts—including this syllabus—will be printed and given out in class, except under exceptional circumstances.

In addition to the above, the course website will be used by students to email the instructor, and the instructor will similarly use it to email students.

****IMPORTANT:** Blackboard emails and announcements will be sent to your utoronto email address, so **you are responsible for checking your utoronto address regularly** (again: at *least* once a week). Failure to check your email is NOT an acceptable excuse for missing important information. You are also strongly advised not to forward your utoronto email to another account (e.g., Google, Hotmail, etc.) as these providers sometimes view utoronto email as junk, which means you may not get all (or perhaps any) of your RLG101H messages.

2. Teaching Assistants (TAs)

There are several TAs assigned to this course, who will be responsible for running weekly tutorials, grading your essays and final exam, and keeping track of online discussions.

3. Departmental staff

The Department of Historical Studies is located in room 209 in Erindale Hall. There you will find two key people who may be of assistance to you:

- Shabina Moheebulla, Departmental Secretary
- Sharon Marjadsingh, Academic Counsellor

Please speak with either Ms Moheebulla or Ms Marjadsingh if you have any concerns you think they might be able to help you with. Such concerns could include clarifications on departmental policies and procedures, or information on resources for academic or personal assistance.

4. Other students in this course

I strongly encourage you to get to know other students in RLG101H, if you don't already. You can be a great resource for one another, provide mutual encouragement, and work together to understand the course material. It is amazing sometimes how much more we can accomplish when we combine our talents and resources.

¹ These slides will only be posted *after* each class. This is because I am always changing the slides just before class, and also because I believe that it is good training to learn to take notes based only on what you see and hear during the lecture.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Simply put, religion is complicated and important. No one has arrived at a definition of the term that everyone can agree on, yet few dispute the idea that religion—however one defines it—has always had a critical impact on the world, even on people who do not see themselves as religious. It affects us on public and private levels, influencing economics, politics, and art, as well as the ways in which we interact with other people and how we understand the meaning of our own lives. We are rooted *in* religion, and also at times uprooted *by* it.

The questions about religion are virtually endless. What is a “ritual”? Is “belief” the most important aspect of religion? What makes a particular story/person/object/place “sacred”—an inherent quality, or something imposed from without? In what ways are practices that we think of as “religious” similar to, and different from, the “non-religious”? This course will examine such questions by providing a broad, basic introduction to *the academic study of religion*, using examples from contemporary popular culture as well as Indigenous and other religious traditions to illustrate theoretical material. Students will also be directly involved in the attempts to answer questions about religion, and ask many of their own, by doing first-hand original research.

PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

Whether or not you plan to continue studying religion, knowing something about it can offer insight into the workings of virtually every other aspect of human culture, including philosophy, business, film, science, and the university itself. The study of religion also provides wonderful training in how to see and think in general. We all have many deep-seated ideas about this topic, prejudices both for and against religion, so that trying to push beyond our assumptions and really look at what is in front of us can at times be almost impossible. But aspects of religion will always confound our expectations, if we are willing to see what is there—it will be more violent than we think or more peace-promoting, more interesting or more mundane. How we think about religion is also often a key element in how we see ourselves, and how we think about, and interact, with the world in general. One hope of this course therefore is that you will not just know more about religion by the end of it, but that you will leave with new insights into (and questions about) a whole range of people, institutions, and cultural forms.

Learning Objectives:²

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Gather, review, interpret, present, and critically evaluate several arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts, methodologies, and theoretical approaches related to the study of religion;
- Critically apply relevant theories and methods within the study of religion to primary source material, including ostensibly non-religious expressions of popular culture (music, film, television, etc.);
- Express information, arguments, and analyses accurately and with clarity in writing;
- Formulate coherent lines of argument;
- Explain various historic, methodological, and theoretical reasons for uncertainty, ambiguity and limits to knowledge within the study of religion, and how such limits influence analyses and interpretations.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The “texts” for this course include materials to read *and* to watch:

1. Malory Nye, *Religion: The Basics*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2008). Available from the UTM Bookstore, and placed on short-term loan at the UTM Library.
2. Short readings posted on the course Blackboard site each week.
3. *The Lion King* (1994). Placed on short-term loan at the UTM Library. You are expected to have watched the entire film by the second class (January 12). If you have seen the film before you are still advised to re-watch it so that the details are fresh in your mind.

² Adapted from the *Guidelines for University of Toronto Mississauga Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations*.

Important: The success of this course depends greatly upon active student class participation. Your engagement with the course material is crucial to help all of us gain better insight into it, and into our own worldviews. As such, you are expected to have completed, and reflected on, the required readings before we discuss them in class. This requirement does not involve a huge amount of reading. Generally you must complete between 25 and 35 pages per week. Much of this material is highly theoretical. You must read closely and carefully, paying attention to the many ideas to which each chapter will introduce you. The readings should leave you with many questions, which I hope that you will raise in class and during tutorials.

GRADING

The grading requirements for this course are as follows:

1. Online participation	5%
2. Tutorial quizzes	5%
3. Tutorial participation	10%
4. Film essay	20%
5. Field research essay	25%
6. Final exam	35%

1. Online participation (5%)

Every student must contribute a total of five comments (of at least **125 words** each) on the course Blackboard site over the duration of the term. This equals one comment every few weeks of class:

- Jan 5 to Jan 26: first comment due
- Jan 27 to Feb 9: second comment due
- Feb 10 to Feb 23: third comment due
- Feb 24 to Mar 8: fourth comment due
- Mar 9 to Mar 22: fifth comment due

Comments must be spread throughout the term as above. Students who submit all five comments during the first two weeks of the course, for example, will only receive credit for one. Comments must be posted in TA group forums created on Blackboard by the instructor. Further information will be provided in class.

Comments can concern any aspect of the course content, which means that you may write on any religion topic raised in **class** or **tutorial** or in the **readings**. Comments may begin a discussion thread or reply to someone else's post. The point is to *state a perspective* (related to the course material) that is different than one already provided by other students or the instructor, or to *pose a question* that interests you. You will not be graded on the content of your submissions; as long as you have offered a reasonable contribution to the online discussion you will receive one point for each comment (up to a possible total of five points).

3. Tutorial quizzes (5%)

During each tutorial a very short quiz will be given designed to test whether or not you have done the required readings for that week.

4. Tutorial participation (10%)

Tutorials will be held once a week, and will mainly focus on developing two skills: 1) academic writing; 2) the application of theoretical material to practical examples.

You will also be required to do a small amount of work for each tutorial in advance (along with the assigned readings). The assignments will be announced each week in the lecture and sent out to the class by email. This work must be completed before the **START** of the tutorial session, and **will not be accepted late under ANY circumstances**. You should also come to tutorial prepared to participate in discussions and writing activities. Your tutorial participation grade will be based on the completion of the pre-tutorial work and the quality of your engagement during each tutorial session. If you have serious concerns about the prospect of speaking up during tutorials, please talk to your TA about this issue right away.

5. Film essay (20%)

This assignment requires you to use theories of religion to analyze a modern non-religious film. More details (including the list of films to choose from) will be provided in class and during tutorials. The deadlines for the essay are as follows:

- Feb 2: draft of one paragraph for the film essay due
- Feb 12: film essay due

6. Field research essay (25%)

This assignment requires you to attend (and then analyze) an official service/ritual of a particular religious tradition. The tradition you select must be one with which you are not too familiar. If you belong to a Christian church of any denomination, for example, you cannot attend the services of a different Christian denomination. You must also attend the service with one or two other students from your tutorial group, and have a photo of your group taken at the location of the service. If you have any concerns about the site visit component of this assignment, you must discuss them with the instructor before February 5. More details about the essay will be provided to you during class and tutorials. The deadlines for the essay are as follows:

- Mar 1: field research contract due
- Mar 15: field research observations due
- Mar 29: field research essay due

7. Final exam (35%)

The exam will take place at some point during the regular exam period in April. It will include questions on material from all course readings, lectures, tutorials, and class discussions. Questions will be in a variety of formats, and may include multiple choice, short answers, essays, etc.

WRITING

IMPORTANT! The writing assignments for this course **must be submitted through the course Blackboard site**. Students will also be required to submit their essays (and components such as the film essay sample paragraphs) to **Turnitin.com** for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site. Students who do not wish to submit their essay to Turnitin.com must consult with the course instructor.

ALSO IMPORTANT! It is **each student's responsibility** to ensure that all assignments are submitted on time. Allowances will NOT be made for students who upload the wrong files, or who run into technological difficulties (e.g., your Internet service goes down for any reason).

File Format: The essays must be submitted as Microsoft Word files (.doc or .docx).

Deadlines: All writing assignments must be submitted by 11:59pm on the due date indicated.

Late penalties: The final essays will be penalized one per cent (out of 100) per day late. The shorter assignments listed in the course schedule on page 9 (e.g., the discussion board comments; the film essay sample paragraph) will not be accepted late, but will receive a grade of zero. **No extensions for any assignments will be given before the due dates**, although reasonable allowances will be provided for acceptable circumstances (e.g., documented illness) *after* the deadlines have passed. For further information please see "Absences and Academic Consideration" (under "Protocols and Etiquette" below).

Writing issues: All writing assignments must conform to standard academic expectations, including the use of: unbiased/gender inclusive language; correct grammar and spelling; and an accepted method of citing sources (Chicago Manual of Style). Resources on these and other writing issues are available here:

- <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/undergraduate-students/skills-and-writing-workshops>
- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice>

SUPPORT AND ACCOMMODATION

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please contact the instructor and/or the **AccessAbility Resource Centre** (DV2037) as soon as possible (<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/accessability>). Here are some additional resources for other forms of student support:

- ****Academic Resources**** (a comprehensive list of the many resources at UTM that help to support student academic success): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/dean/undergraduates/academic-resources>
- ****Service Directory**** (a general gateway to most campus services, such as the library, Career Centre, UTM Bookstore, Aboriginal Centre, etc.): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/current-students>
- **Campus Police**: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/campus-police>
- **Information and Instructional Technology Services**: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/iits>
- **Registrar & Registration Services** (including course information, tuition and scholarship information, petitions, and academic advising): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/registrar>
- **Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre** (for assistance with various academic skills including individual appointments, writing workshops, study groups, etc.): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc>
- **Student Affairs & Services** (including health & counselling, housing, international student resources, multi-faith programs, study abroad, etc.): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sas>
- **Student Transition** (for students in their first year at UTM): <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/transition>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from UofT is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (see <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the *Code*. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see <http://sites.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>).

GRADE DEFINITIONS

These are the official grade definitions of the University of Toronto Mississauga:

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Definition	
90-100	A+	Excellent	Strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
85-89	A		
80-84	A-		
77-79	B+	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with literature.
73-76	B		
70-72	B-		
67-69	C+	Adequate	Student who is profiting from his/her university experience; understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.
63-66	C		
60-62	C-		
57-59	D+	Marginal	Some evidence of familiarity with subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed.
53-56	D		
50-52	D-		
0-49	F	Inadequate	Little evidence of even superficial understanding of subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; with limited or irrelevant use of literature.

PROTOCOLS AND ETIQUETTE

1. Laptops, phones, and recording devices

The use of laptops and other electronic/mobile devices is NOT permitted in class. Instead, please bring paper and pen and take notes the (literally!) old school way. If you have a special need to use a laptop in class you must speak to the instructor about it, and receive his written permission to do so (i.e., by email).

Copyright in Instructional Settings: If you wish to tape-record, video-record or otherwise reproduce lecture presentations, course notes, or other similar materials provided by the course instructor, you must obtain written consent beforehand. Otherwise all such reproduction is an infringement of copyright and is absolutely prohibited. In the case of private use by students with disabilities, consent will not be unreasonably withheld.

2. Absences and academic consideration

Final essays are subject to a late penalty of 1% per day late, while the shorter assignments listed in the schedule below (e.g., the discussion board comments; the film essay sample paragraph) will receive a grade of zero once the deadline has passed. **No extensions for any assignments will be given before the due dates**, although reasonable allowances will be provided after for acceptable circumstances such as illness or crisis.

If your work is late and you believe that you should not be penalized, send the instructor a written explanation along with appropriate supporting documentation.³ You must do this **within a week** of either the missed deadline (for the smaller assignments) or submitting the completed assignment (for late essays). Based on your explanation and documentation we will overlook the late penalty, in whole or in part, as seems justified.

3. Communicating with the course instructor/TAs

Aside from lectures and tutorials, the primary way in which the instructor and TAs will communicate course information to you will be through emails sent through the course Blackboard site. **All students are therefore responsible for checking their UofT (utoronto) email address on a regular and frequent basis.**

When you send an email to the course instructor, you must do so ONLY through the course Blackboard site. Adhering to this requirement will: help protect your messages; clearly identify the message as course-related; and also clearly identify you as the sender (and not as “bananamons119@hotmail.com”).

Emails to your instructor or TA can be used to send along information and opinions and to ask **simple, quick questions**. Please do NOT email questions whose answers can easily be found by reading the syllabus (“When is the essay due?” “What’s the instructor’s name?” Etc.). Although if you are not reading the syllabus then you probably won’t see this request to read the syllabus. (Tricky problem, that.) Generally speaking, you can expect a reply to your email from the instructor or TA within **two business days**; we may check email on weekends occasionally, but we also reserve the right not to do so. Once in a while, we try to have a life too. ☺

If you have a more complicated question, or you want to discuss any of the course materials or assignments in some detail, please talk to the instructor or your TA **in person**. You may speak with your TA during, before, or after tutorials. You may speak with the instructor after class or during office hours, or if you see him on campus walking, sitting, eating lunch, muttering to himself, waiting for a bus, etc. You are also always welcome to make an appointment with the instructor (by email through Blackboard).

³ Acceptable documentation may include a UofT illness form, and/or a letter from a counsellor, police officer, religious leader, etc. Students who wish to receive consideration due to illness must provide a **UofT Verification of Student Illness or Injury form**, available here: <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. (Notice of Collection: The University of Toronto respects your privacy. The information on this form is collected pursuant to section 2(14) of the University of Toronto Act, 1971. It is collected for the purpose of administering accommodations for academic purposes based on medical grounds. The department will maintain a record of all medical certificates received. At all times your information will be protected in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.)

If you have comments about the course that you would like to send the instructor **anonymously**, please visit this site: https://cslinux.utm.utoronto.ca/~peters43/anon_feedback/rlg101h5.html. Type your message, click “submit feedback,” and the message will be emailed to Ken Derry. Remember that the message is anonymous and therefore **it is not possible for you to receive a direct reply**. Instead, responses will be addressed to the entire class, either during the lecture or by email.

4. Course and classroom expectations⁴

We believe that everyone involved in a course—students, instructors, and TAs—have the right to certain expectations in a university classroom. Usually the most successful classes are those in which **we respect each other, and understand our mutual responsibilities**. With that in mind, please consider the following “manifesto” for **all of us** in this course (including students, TAs, and instructor):

- We have the responsibility for sharing in and contributing to the learning process;
- We have the right to voice an opinion that is based on a self-chosen value system;
- We have the right to dissent or differ from the instructor, TAs, and from others in class;
- We have a right to a curriculum that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and sexual identity.

Assumptions we make about you:

- You have made a conscious, informed choice to be a member of this class. **This means that you have read the syllabus thoroughly**, and know the workload required.
- You will give the basic respect that is due to all members of this class.
- You will observe basic classroom decorum. In this class that means (but is not limited to) the following: 1) You will turn off (or silence) any noise-making devices such as mobile phones; 2) You will attend every lecture and tutorial, **arriving on time and staying until the end of the session**; 3) If for reasons beyond your control you arrive late to the lecture or tutorial, or leave early, you will do so with a minimum of disruption; 4) You will not cause a disruption when someone else is speaking.
- You will do all of the required reading on time. This means that you will most likely have to read something more than once in order to understand it, or at least figure out why you *don't* understand it.
- You will be responsible for all of the material that we cover in this course, including readings, lectures, and tutorials. If you miss a lecture or tutorial, you may contact another student (*not* the instructor or a TA) to find out what you missed, keeping in mind that other students are not obligated to provide you with this material.
- You will read all announcements and email messages sent to you by the instructor and your TA.
- If you have a question, any question, you will ask it. **If you are having difficulty with any aspect of the course, it is important that you mention this promptly**; don't wait until it is too late!
- You will share your personality, knowledge, skills, sense of humour, and expertise with the rest of us.

Assumptions you can make about the instructor and TAs:

- We will give you the respect that we ask you to give us and the other members of this class.
- We will be available within reason to help you if you need, and ask for, assistance.
- We will grade fairly and responsibly, returning your assignments to you in a timely manner. We do not grade on a curve, and will assess each assignment on its own merit.
- We will follow and enforce the university policy on academic integrity, particularly with regards to cheating and plagiarism.
- We will be receptive to and encourage constructive comments about our teaching and grading.
- In all respects, we will do our best to help you learn the course material. That said, please remember that the final responsibility to learn this material is yours.

⁴ The material in this section was borrowed and adapted from Amir Hussain, “Responsibilities and Respect,” 31 August 2010 <<http://myweb.lmu.edu/ahussain/assumptions.html>>.

SCHEDULE

Tutorial Dates	Lecture Dates	Topics	Main Readings ⁵ + Sample Questions ⁶	Assignments ⁷
	Jan 5	Introduction	MR: Course Syllabus SQ: How does the study of religion provide training in how to see and think in general?	
Jan 8	Jan 12	Belief	MR: Nye, Chapter 5; <i>The Lion King</i> (film) SQ: How are Protestant traditions linked to the over-emphasis on belief in the study of religion?	
Jan 15	Jan 19	Ritual	MR: Nye, Chapter 6, p. 129-144 SQ: What do you think was being communicated by a specific repeated ritual you have been part of?	
Jan 22	Jan 26	Rites of passage	MR: Nye, Chapter 6, p. 144-151; Grimes, <i>Deeply into the Bone</i> , p. 2-13 (posted on Blackboard) SQ: According to Grimes, what is the difference between a “life passage” and a “rite of passage”?	First online comment due Jan 26
Jan 29	Feb 2	“Texts”	MR: Nye, Chapter 7 SQ: What is “logocentrism”? How does this concept relate to Derrida’s view of language?	Film essay paragraph due Feb 2
Feb 5	Feb 9	Essay writing	MR: Various (on Blackboard) SQ: Explain why the following is, or is not, a good essay thesis statement: “Throughout the history of mankind, people have eaten food.”	Second online comment due Feb 9
Feb 12	Feb 23	Definitions	MR: Nye, Chapter 1 SQ: What does Nye mean when he states that nothing is “intrinsically religious”? [Feb 16-19: Reading Week]	Film essay due Feb 12 Third online comment due Feb 23
Feb 26	Mar 1	Culture	MR: Nye, Chapter 2 SQ: What example can you think of that fits Geertz’s understanding of religion?	Field research essay contract due Mar 1
Mar 4	Mar 8	Power	MR: Nye, Chapter 3 SQ: What example from your own experience fits Gramsci’s notion of hegemony? [Mar 6: academic drop date for S courses]	Fourth online comment due Mar 8
Mar 11	Mar 15	Gender	MR: Nye, Chapter 4 SQ: What is Daly’s main critique of religion? Does Nye agree or disagree with her critique?	Field research essay observations due Mar 15
Mar 18	Mar 22	Visual culture	MR: S. Brent Plate, Introduction to <i>Religion, Art, and Visual Culture</i> (posted on Blackboard) SQ: How would you use Plate’s “field of vision” to explain the meaning of a particular piece of visual culture from your own life?	Fifth online comment due Mar 22
Apr 1	Mar 29	Contemporary religions + course review	MR: Nye, Chapter 8 SQ: In Nye’s view, is religion “‘naturally’ disposed to violence”? Why or why not?	Field research essay due Apr 4

⁵ Most weeks there will usually be at least one **additional** required reading posted on Blackboard.

⁶ These are examples of the kinds of questions you should be able to answer once you complete the readings each week. We will discuss your responses to these particular questions in class.

⁷ In addition to these assignments, you will also be required to do a small amount of homework for almost every tutorial (to be handed in at the start of the tutorial session). The tutorial homework assignments will be announced each week in the lecture and sent out to the class by email.