

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION
RELI 3310/ SOCI 3320
Southern Methodist University
Spring 2018

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OBJECTIVES

This is an intermediate course designed for students with some background in the academic study of religion, anthropology, sociology and/or psychology. It has three primary objectives:

First, the course seeks to introduce you to several social scientific approaches to the academic study of religion. We will investigate the history and use of anthropological, sociological, and psychological theory and method in relation to the study of religion, especially as these fields relate religion to broader cultural, societal, and physiological fields of knowledge. We will also consider the strengths and weaknesses of each of these social sciences in relation to religion as we read examples of work from each field. This consideration will include a critical assessment of the ways each of these fields rests on presumptions about culture, society, the mind, and religion itself. Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate a familiarity with the ways anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists approach the study of religion, as well as how they understand the relationship of religion to culture, society and the mind, through exams, papers, and class discussions. Demonstrating these skills fulfills the SMU UC Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics depth objective that students be able to demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on or apply the theoretical methods of religious studies via a focus on a specific area or set of issues. Demonstrating these skills also fulfills the SMU UC Individuals, Institutions and Cultures depth objective that students be able to analyze different theoretical or interpretive perspectives in the study of individual, social, cultural, political, or economic experiences and that students will be able to evaluate critically the research outcomes and theoretical applications in the study of individual, social, cultural, political, or economic experiences.

Second, this course is designed to build your skills in the analysis of complex argumentation and your abilities to discuss matters critically, curiously, and

civically. We will work to develop your proficiency in the analysis of texts, and your skills in speaking, writing and engaged listening. You will also gain experience in anthropological, sociological and psychological project design and implementation. Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the ability to understand oral and written arguments through exams and papers. Exhibiting these skills fulfills the religious studies department's objective that students will demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills.

Third, this course will interrogate the claims made by the social sciences about religion, especially in regard to representation. Questions we will ask include: Can an ethnographer accurately represent the religious experience of another person or culture? Is claiming a biological basis for religion too reductionist? Can statistics tell us something accurate about faith? Is science itself a form of religion or culture? Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate an ability to analyze academic discourse in the context of culture through papers, exams and discussions.

Finally, students who successfully complete this course will:

- demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills through written assignments.
- demonstrate basic facility with anthropology, sociology and psychology as methods of inquiry about religious beliefs and practices through papers and exams. .
- develop a basic familiarity with important topics in the history of the social scientific study of religion, including a familiarity with the major positions and their supporting arguments.
- develop techniques of formal reasoning

PROCEDURE

The course is scheduled to meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 -1:50 in Hyer 107. The course will combine presentations from Dr. DeTemple with class discussions.

In addition, Dr. DeTemple will be available for conference and consultations outside of class. Dr. DeTemple will hold office/discussion hours on Wednesdays from 1:30-2:30 at Starbucks in Fondren Library and is also available by appointment.

GRADING

Class Participation.....20%

Attendance, participation in class discussions, daily reading and critical reflection are essential components of this course, and will count for 20% of your final grade. All of the assigned readings are to be completed on schedule. Because of the nature of the readings, each day's reading assignment is relatively brief, but it is absolutely essential that you come to class with the reading complete and prepared to engage actively in class discussion (9% of your final grade).

As a component of the classroom participation requirement for this course, all students are required to submit to the weekly discussion section on Canvas. An assignment sheet explaining this requirement is attached to the syllabus (9% of your final grade). In addition, all students will complete the Viewpoint Diversity app available to them on Canvas by February 1 (2% of your final grade).

Mid-Term Exam.....25%

This will be given in-class, and will cover terminology and concepts from readings and discussions in the first half of the course.

Field Papers(3 X 10%) 30%

For each major division of the class, students will write a 3-5 page "field paper." Each of these field papers will be based on data collected outside of the classroom using social science techniques.

Final Exam.....25%

This will be given in-class on the scheduled final day, and will cover terminology and concepts from the second half of the course.

Please keep in mind that you as a student, and I as your instructor, are bound by the SMU Honor Code. Always cite your sources in papers (even drafts!), and be sure that work on quizzes, exams, presentations, and other class work is your own, without unauthorized assistance. If I suspect that you have plagiarized or received unauthorized assistance on a paper, project, or other work, I must give you the choice of appearing before SMU's Judicial Board, or accepting a Faculty Disposition, usually failure in the class.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Elizabeth Drescher. *Choosing our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Su'ad Khabeer. *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

Daniel Pals. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

D. Jason Slone. *Theological Incorrectness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Additional readings are available on Canvas
<https://www.smu.edu/OIT/Services/Canvas>

Your user ID and your password are your SMU ID number and your usual SMU password. If you can't get into Canvas, let Dr. DeTemple know immediately.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Unit One - Introductions: Religion and Social Science as Constructions of Reality

January 23 - Introductions and Orientation

January 25 - Constructing Reality

Thomas Tweed "Itineraries: Locating Theories and Theorists" from *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Canvas)

January 30 - Is Religious Studies a (Social) Science?

Sam Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion" (Canvas)

JZ Smith, "Religion and Religious Studies: No Difference at All" (Canvas)

February 1 - Defining Others Scientifically: origins of religion

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, 1-24,37-58;

***Complete Viewpoint Diversity app (Canvas)**

February 6 - Origins, cont. Lévy-Bruhl "How Natives Think";

JZ Smith "I am a Parrot Red" (Canvas)

Dialogue in Class - Polygamy

February 8- A Question of Method: Phenomenology/History of Religions

Pals, 205-222; 271-286; Wendy Doniger, "Post-modern and -colonial - structural Comparisons" (Canvas)

Unit Two - Religion and Society: Sociology

February 13 - Foundations: Durkheim

Pals, 99-116.

February 15 - Weber

Pals, 237-266.

February 20 - Quantifying the Spiritual

Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, 1-88.

February 22- Finding the Religious in Institutions: Marx and Baseball

Pals, 143-148; Christopher Evans "Baseball as Civil Religion: The Genesis of an American Creation Story" (Canvas)

Field Paper Assigned in class

February 27 - Beyond Religious Institutions

Drescher, 89-156

March 1- Examining Personal Practice

Drescher, 157-181

Dialogue in Class - Prayer in Public School

***Sociology Field Paper Due**

March 6- Negotiations and Love Songs: Charity, Children, and Religious Affiliation

Drescher, 182-252

March 8 - Midterm Exam in class

Spring Break

Unit Three - Religion and Culture: Anthropology

March 20- Introductions: Thinking of Culture and Religion as Functional Structure

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, selections from *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* ;
Victor Turner "The Ritual Process" (Canvas)

March 22- Reading Culture, Reading Religion

Pals, 347-372.

***Field Paper Assigned in Class**

March 27 - Locating Culture, Finding Religion

Su'ad Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 1-77.

March 29 - Writing/Singing/Rapping Culture

Khabeer, 78-138.

Dialogue in Class - Race on campus

April 3- Representing Culture: in the Museum

Khabeer, 139-177.

Field Trip to Museum

April 5- Crossing Boundaries: Ethnographer as Performer

Khabeer, 178-232.

***Anthropology Field Paper Due**

April 10 - Conclusions, Ethnographers as Tourists/Tourists as Ethnographers

Film (in class) *Cannibal Tours*

Unit Four - Religion and the Mind: Psychology

April 12 - Introductions: Nature vs Culture

Pals, 71-98.

Dialogue in Class - Homosexuality and Abrahamic Traditions

April 17 - Archetypes

Carl Jung - Selections from *Psychology and Religion: East and West* (Canvas)

April 19- Stages and Experience: Erikson and James

Pals, 171-204; Erik Erikson, selections from *Young Man Luther* (Canvas)

April 24- Violence, Mimesis and the Religious Mind

Rene Girard, selections from *Violence and the Sacred* (Canvas)

Psychology field paper assigned

April 26 - It's All in Your Mind

Jason Slone *Theological Incorrectness* 3-67

May 1- It's All in Your Mind, cont. Conclusions

Theological Incorrectness 68 - 126

***Psychology Field Paper Due**

May 3 - Last Things

DISCUSSION POST GUIDELINES

Social Scientific Approaches to the Study of Religion
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As a component of the classroom participation requirement, all students are required to submit a weekly entry on the Discussion Board portion of our Canvas site. While I expect you to post weekly (between the end of class Thursday and the beginning of class the following Thursday) I will drop the lowest two grades, and do not expect you to post until the end of the first week of class (beginning after class Thursday, January 25th).

Each entry should be about 300-500 words in length, and should deal directly with issues raised by the course, either in the readings or classroom discussions. Your writing should be well organized, have a clear topic, and use evidence from the reading or discussion to support your opinions about the topic you choose. Rather than simply summarizing the readings or discussions, good entries will engage the materials, asking new questions or making connections between readings and/or ideas (this is the heart of critical reflection as a practice). Your writing will be available for your peers in the class to see, and you are welcome and encouraged to comment on what they say.

All discussion entries will be graded as superior (4 points), entirely satisfactory (3 points), adequate (1 or 2 points), or unsatisfactory (no credit). You can see your grade in the online grade book section of the Canvas site.

This is not meant to torture you, but is designed to give you a forum for working out your own thoughts on the materials as you come into contact with them. It is also intended to give you a place to practice thinking and writing about the issues the course raises before coming to class discussions or writing exams.

How to Read Theory

(based in part on information from <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~jklumpp/comm652>)

The Theory on Reading Theory:

1. Read theory in 2 different modes

Read theoretical systems. Theories assume a perspective and elaborate that perspective. Try to understand that perspective comprehensively. Think of theory as a system that allows you to see things a certain way once you understand it enough to use it as a kind of intellectual platform. Try to see and describe the world the way the theoretical system does.

Read lines of inquiry. [Good] Theoretical work proceeds one problem at a time. Theorists consider problems they see in their theory and work to address those problems. Learn to follow this work. Learn to see the reason why the problem is significant, and to understand what happens when the problem is successfully addressed.

2. Techniques when reading theory

Get beneath the reading to see:

the mind that generates it. Theory is written by an author. Often this author is writing because she or he is angry about something. Try to understand what the author is angry/concerned about, and the strategies that the author is using to construct the theory.

the action performed with it. Theories allow us to do things. Try to understand what the power of a theory is. Also try to see the limits of that power, the things we cannot do with a theory.

Read abstractly and concretely simultaneously

You must read abstractly. Theory involves concepts that must be related to each other. You must be able to work with concepts as abstract.

But make your reading empirical, too. Keep working your abstract understanding against the events of the world around you.

3. Make notes of the building blocks of theory

- **Vocabulary.** What are the key terms? The key concepts?
- **How are the concepts related to each other?** How does the theory construct accounts of the things it uses as examples?
- **To what does the theory attend?** All theories emphasize some things and ignore other things. What are those choices?
- **What does the theory do?** All theories have problems they seek to solve or powers that they permit us to exercise. What are these?
- **What are the key strategies the author uses to bring the theory to life?** How does he or she perceive the world in terms of the theory? How does she or he write about the world using the theory?

Other Practical Advice:

Orient yourself:

Read the introductory paragraph, the section headings, and then the last four sentences. This should give you an overview of the argument, or at least some key words the author uses to make his or her argument. If you know what's important, you know what to look for later.

Go back and fill in the blanks:

Figure out what problem each section addresses (probably related to the section heading) and how this relates to the conclusion.

Don't let the big words get you down.

Theorists love to use gigantic words to convey their thoughts. Sometimes, you can read around them. Other times, you'll need to look them up. Often you can correctly guess the meaning of the word from its context.

University Policies of which You Should Be Aware

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

I am happy to work with you if you have a disability, but you need to let me know so we can find the best way for you to succeed in this class. Please do not suffer in silence!

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. **It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.** (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

Weapons: In accordance with Texas Senate Bill 11, also known as the “campus carry” law, following consultation with the entire University community SMU determined to remain a weapons-free campus. Specifically, SMU prohibits possession of weapons (either openly or in a concealed manner) on campus. For more information, please see: http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons_Policy.