

# RLGN 1001: Theories of Religion

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## Instructor

Madison Tarleton

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## Office Hours

Monday 1-2, & by  
appointment

## Course Overview

This course is intended to introduce students to the academic study of religion. This course will survey influential theorists to the ever-growing field of religious studies. This survey course will read early theorists and anthropologists as well as examine how these theories evolved over time. At the end of this course, students are expected to understand how to evaluate religious theory or religious studies based theory.

## Course Objectives

- Introduce students to Religious Studies core theories— past and present.
- Situate each theorist in his (or her) cultural context: time-period, trained discipline, culture observed, etc.
- Teach students how to compare (and contrast) theories from differing schools of thought, discipline, culture, positionality, and time-period
- Learn to study religion through an objective lens that does not assume Christian or Abrahamic similarities
- Perform a thoughtful analysis of the role of r(R)eligion(s) in a contemporary context

## Course Questions

What is religion? What is religious? What role does a supernatural being/god figure have in our understanding of religion? **Do faith and belief necessitate religion/religious experiences?** What is the role of religion in the academy? What are the origins of religious theory? **What is the value of studying religion and understanding religious experiences?**

## Required Text

*Nine Theories of Religion*, Daniel Pals

*Queer: A Graphic History*, Meg-John Barker

## Recommended Reference Texts:

Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion*

John Hinnells, ed., *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*

All other course materials will be accessible via university LMS

## Technology in the Classroom

I accept and acknowledge that each student has his/her/their own established method for note-taking. However, technology in the classroom does not include web-surfing. Please use the technology you have provided for yourself for note-taking exclusively. Although many of our readings will be available online through our LMS, I prefer that students bring in physical copies of the readings. Cellphones should remain off during class time and should not make an appearance. I understand that emergencies happen, and in an instance that a taking a phone-call is necessary, please do so and inform me after class. If the use of your electronic devices begins to disturb your classmates, me, or become a distraction, I reserve the right to ask that you leave technology at home. Do not lose your privilege!

## Assignments

### Participation – 20%

- This includes actively engaging in class, active learning, and attendance.

### Quizzes – 20%

- Five quizzes will be given at “random.” You will know the class period prior to the quiz. These will cover the readings for the **week** they are given.
- The quizzes will be a one-page brief reflection of at least two theorists covered that week and their contribution to Religious Studies. I expect to recognize competency with the material, and see that you either understood or wrestled with the material. Some days, you may have more questions than answers and that’s okay.
- The lowest quiz grade will be dropped

### Mid-Term – 30%

- The mid-term exam will cover the material up to the exam and nothing past it.
- This will include multiple choice questions, fill in the blank questions, 1-3 short answers, and one essay question of three given to you ahead of time to prepare

### Final Exam – 30%

- The final exam will **not** be cumulative. It will cover everything from the mid-term to the end of the course. The format of the final will look the same as the mid-term.
- This will include multiple choice questions, fill in the blank questions, 1-3 short answers, and one essay question of three given to you ahead of time to prepare
- What makes for a good essay response? Do you take class time to do that?

## Attendance and Late Policies

- 20% of your grade rests on active engagement, participation, and attendance. You will be allowed **3 absences without penalty**. I do not need to know where you are for these first three. After 3, I need to see **documented proof** that you could not be in class. I will need to know

ahead of time what any absences after three are if not for an illness. You will not be penalized for an absence for religious reasons. After 5 absences, I will ask that you withdraw from the course.

- If you miss a quiz because you were absent, you will not be allowed to make that quiz up unless you can produce a doctor's note. Late arrivals will not be allowed to make-up quizzes. Points will be deducted from your participation grade if you leave early or before class is slated to end.
- All policies have exceptions. Please visit my office hours if you feel that these policies are unfair to you.

#### Disability Accommodation

If you have, or think you may have, a documented disability (physical, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, etc.) please visit the Center for Disability Services. The Center can provide you with the information and documentation necessary to arrange accommodations you may require. If you have a disability accommodation, please discuss this with me after class or during office hours for us to make arrangements.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Making the Familiar Strange and the Strange Familiar

**Monday: Horace Miner**, “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema” & **Daniel Pals**, “Preface” & “Introduction” from *Nine Theories of Religion*

**Wednesday: J.Z. Smith**, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” **Donald S. Lopez**, “Belief,” & **Gabe Bullard**, “The World’s Newest Major Religion: No Religion”

### Week 2: Religion and Magic

**Monday: James Frazer**, “Sympathetic Magic,” “Magic and Religion,” **Robert Ackerman**, “Frazer, James G,” **Edward Tylor**, selected readings from *Primitive Culture*

**Wednesday: Daniel Pals**, “Animism and Magic,” E. B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer, from *Nine Theories of Religion*

### Week 3: Psychology and Religion

**Monday: William James**, Lectures 1, 2, 4, from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, & **Sigmund Freud**, *The Future of an Illusion*, selected readings

**Wednesday: J. Samuel Preuss**, “Psychogenic Theory: Sigmund Freud,” & **Daniel Pals**, Ch. 2 & 6, “Religion and Personality, Sigmund Freud,” “The Verdict of Religious Experience, William James” from *Nine Theories of Religion*

### Week 4: Sociology and Religion

**Monday: Emile Durkheim**, selected readings from *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* & “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time,” & **Ivan Strenski**, “Durkheim, Emile”

**Wednesday: Daniel Pals**, *Nine Theories of Religion*, Ch. 3 “Society as Sacred, Emile Durkheim”

### Week 5: Anthropology and Religion

**Monday: Clifford Geertz**, “Thick Description,” from *Interpretation of Cultures*

**Wednesday: Pals**, *Nine Theories of Religion*, Ch. 9 “Religion as Cultural System, Clifford Geertz”

## Week 6: Society and Religion

**Monday:** **Karl Marx** selected readings from *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* & **Immanuel Kant**, selected readings from *Religion within the Boundaries of Pure Reason*

**Wednesday:** **Daniel Pals**, *Nine Theories of Religion*, Ch. 4 & 5 "Religion as Alienation, Karl Marx," "A Source of Social Action, Max Weber"

## Week 7: Religion and the Sacred

**Monday:** **Mircea Eliade**, "Introduction," "Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred," from *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, & "Myths=Paradigmatic Model"

**Wednesday:** **MID-TERM EXAM**

## Week 8: Material Religion

**Monday:** Movie: *Kumaré* (find the trailer [here](#))

**Wednesday:** **Robert Orsi**, Introduction and Ch. 1 from *History and Presence*

## Week 9: Religion & Media

**Monday:** **Kathryn Lofton**, "Can't Help Lovin': David Chidester's Pop Culture Colonialism," from *Journal for the Study of Religion* & "Sacrificing Britney: Celebrity and Religion in America" & "The Celebration of Religion in the Age of Infotainment" from *Consuming Religion*

**Wednesday:** **David Morgan**, "Image" from *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*

## Week 10: Queering Religion/Queer Theory

**Monday:** **Kent L. Brintall**, "Queer Studies and Religion" & **Meg-John Barker**, *Queer: A Graphic History* (first half)

**Wednesday:** **Afdhere Jama**, selected readings from *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on Coming Out, Activism, and Faith* & **Meg-John Barker**, *Queer: A Graphic History* (second half)

### **Week 11: Feminist and Womanist Theory/ and Religion**

**Monday: Judith Butler**, selected readings from *Bodies that Matter*, and **Teresa J. Hornsby**, “The Annoying Woman: Biblical Scholarship After Judith Butler” from *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*

**Wednesday: Nikki Young**, selected readings from *Black Queer Ethics, Family, and Philosophical Imagination*

### **Week 12: Embodied and Performative Religion/Experiences**

**Monday: Karen Trimble Alliaume**, “Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body” from *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*”

**Wednesday: Saba Mahmood**, “Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject” from *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*

### **Week 13: Decolonizing Religious Studies**

**Monday: Tink Tinker**, “Redskin, Tanned Hide: A Book of Christian History Bound in the Flayed Skin of an American India: The Colonial Romance, christian Denial, and the Cleansing of a christian School of Theology”

**Wednesday: Anne McClintock**, selected readings from *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*

### **Week 14: What do we think now?**

**Monday: Review:** What have we learned?

*Please bring questions to class or comments about things that you have learned, or notions about religion that have changed over the course of the semester*

**Wednesday:** Final Exam

