REL 6036: Method and Theory II
Spring 2012
Mondays 7-9th Periods
FLI 121

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30 AM to 2:30PM and Wednesdays 1:00PM – 3:00PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a survey of the contemporary theoretical landscape in the study of religion. Following post-modernist and post-structuralist critiques of the essentialist, foundationalist, teleological, and totalizing pretensions of classical methods and theories, this landscape is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation, fluidity, contestation, and cross-fertilization. This fragmentation and fluidity both accompany and are responses to post-colonialism, globalization, and the emergence of new transportation and communication media, which are decentering the taken-for-granted cartographies of religion, generating increasing religious hybridity, innovation, diversity, and conflicts over orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

The course begins with an examination of the struggles around the legacy of the history of religions approach and the Geertzian phenomenological-hermeneutics synthesis which dominated the study of religion up until the mid-1980s. We will give particular attention to the debate around the viability of category of religion, as well as its implication in power dynamics ranging from colonialism and imperialism to nationalism and capitalism. The second part of the course focuses on emerging directions, themes, tropes, and methods that are likely to define the field of religious studies in the coming years.

Throughout the course, we will discuss various practices associated with the métier of a religion scholar, such as constructing course syllabi and writing and submitting journal articles, grants, and thesis/dissertation proposals. In these discussions, we will place emphasis on the clear and coherent articulation of theoretical assumptions and methodological procedures.

OBJECTIVES

1. To map out the contours of the contemporary theoretical landscape in the academic study of religion
2. To sharpen the students’ capacity to identify and critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind current debates about the “nature” and place of religion.
3. To offer students some hands-on experience in the use of methods and theories in the creation of syllabi, the writing of grant and/or dissertation proposals, and the preparation of articles publishable in scholarly journals.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Two-Take Home Exams: These exams will contain a choice of essay questions addressing key issues raised in the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The goal of this exam is to test how well students
handle concepts, theories, and methods at hand. Since students will have at least a week to complete the assignments, I expect essays to be not only well-developed, with good grammar, spelling, and syntax, but also analytical substantive, making explicit references to the readings. Each exam will worth be 25% of your final grade, for a total of 50%.

2. Practicum I: Two Annotated Syllabi (at the undergraduate level): Students will create two full-fledged syllabi, one for an introductory course and another for an advanced course of their choice. For the introductory course students may selected from the following: Introduction to World Religions, Religions of Asia, Introduction to Islam, Introduction to Christianity, New Testament, Hebrew Scriptures, American Religious History, Religions of Latin America, Religion and Science, Environmental Ethics, Religion and Society, and Anthropology of Religion. In addition to the syllabi (each with its course description, objectives, required readings, assignments, etc), students will offer a two-page précis for each class, presenting the theoretical and methodological reasoning behind the choices made (e.g., the textbooks selected, the thematic organization of the course, the type of assignments, etc.). Each syllabus is worth 10% of the final grade, for a total of 20%.

3. Practicum II: A Publishable Review Essay or Journal Article; a Grant/Fellowship Proposal; or a Draft of a Thesis/Dissertation Proposal. For the review essay, in consultation with the instructor, students will review at least three influential books on a particular topic, debate, and sub-field in the contemporary study of religion. Topics, debates, or sub-fields may include: religion and gender, religion and material cultural, religion and popular culture, religion and visual media, religion and post-colonialism, religion and the cognitive sciences, religion and globalization, new approaches to textual and historical analysis, etc. The review, which will be 10-12 pages in length, will follow all the specifications required by scholarly journals such as JAAR or Religious Studies Review. It will place special emphasis on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the works under evaluation. I will provide more detailed instructions later in the course. Students may choose to submit a publishable article in a scholarly journal in lieu of the review essay. For the grant proposal or thesis proposal option, I will also provide more detailed instructions later in the course. This assignment will be worth 20% of your final grade.

4. Attendance and Active Participation. Since this course is a small advanced seminar, attendance is mandatory. Absences will be allowed only under very special circumstances, such as a medical emergency, which will need to be properly documented. Students are expected to read all the assigned material carefully before coming to class and to participate actively in group discussions. As part of the participation grade, students are to e-mail the instructor and peers one short query connected with the readings assigned for Monday by the preceding Sunday at 10 PM. These queries will count as a part of your participation grade. The instructor reserves the right to give quizzes at any time (in case students are not doing the readings). Attendance and participation represent 10% of your final grade.

RULES

1. Plagiarism or cheating: Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. On the issue of plagiarism and cheating, I operate under a zero tolerance policy. Students caught or suspected of plagiarizing or cheating will automatically be reported to Student Conduct Committee at Dean of Students’ Office, where I will seek the stiffest penalty applicable, which may include receiving a grade of zero on the assignment in question and even failing the course. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according
him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). The Honor Code is clear in forbidding the submission of “a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.” This rule applies to published and unpublished material downloaded from the Internet or obtained through any other means. See http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php & http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php for more information on UF policies.

2. **Incompletes are strongly discouraged** and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.

3. **Make-up exams** will only be given to students who can present proper, legitimate written documentation (in the form of a medical excuse or a funeral notice, for example) to justify their inability to take a quiz or an exam during the scheduled time.

4. **Late assignments** will be marked down half a grade (from A to A-, for example) for each day they are late, unless the student can present proper, legitimate written documentation to justify the tardiness. Late assignments will not be accepted a week after the deadline. In that case, the student will receive a 0 (zero) in the assignment.

5. Given that religion is often a very personal and potentially contentious topic, I expect students to treat each other with civility and respect. I hope that our debates will be lively and that people will feel free to express their opinions and disagree with each other. However, these opinions and disagreements have to be presented in a manner that is appropriate to an academic setting.

6. Students engaging in any sort of disruptive behavior, including passing notes, reading a newspaper, playing computers games, checking their e-mail, or chatting while lectures and class discussions are taking place, will be asked to leave the classroom. They will be counted as absent for that particular day. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.

7. **Please make sure to arrive to class on time.** I dislike being interrupted once class has started.

8. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then give this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

**READINGS**

**Required Books:**


**Required Articles, Books Chapters, and Other Readings:**

They are available on line through the Sakai (marked with one asterisk in the schedule) or through the online databases at Smathers Library (marked with two asterisks).

**SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**I. Contesting and Defending the Foundations of Religious Studies**

**01/09:** The Struggle over the History of Religions Research Programme


**01/16:** MLK Day. No Class

**01/23:** The Struggle over the Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Research Programme

Methodological Interlude I: Constructing a Course Syllabus

01/30: Entry into Postmodernity: Anti-Essentialism and the Struggle over the Category of Religion


02/06: Genealogies of the Category of Religion

Readings:  -- McCutcheon, Manufacturing Religion, read all remaining chapters (Intro, 1-2, 4-7).
  -- Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-164. (*)

Methodological Interlude II: Submitting a Scholarly Article

02/13: Religion and World Religions as Colonial Constructs

  -- Tomoko Masuzawa, “Preface” and “Introduction,” in The Invention of World Religions or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. ix-36. (*)
  -- Laurie Patton, Vernon Robbins, and Gordon Newby, “Comparative Sacred Texts and Interactive Interpretation: Another Alternative to the ‘World Religions’ Class.” Teaching
**Theology & Religion 12/1 (2009): 37-49. (**)  

*** Practicum I due on Friday, February 17th at 4PM ***

02/20: Assessing Post-Colonial Approaches: Is Comparison still Possible?


II. Promising New Directions

02/27: Practice, Performance, and Lived Religion

Readings:  -- Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, read Introduction and Chapters 1, 3, and 5-6.  

*** First Take-Home Exam (Section I) due on Friday, March 2nd at 4PM ***

03/05: Spring Break. No Class

03/12: Power: Domination, and Resistance


Methodological Interlude III: Submitting Grant Proposals

03/19: Religion, Materiality, and Popular Culture: The End of the Text?

Readings: -- Lynch, Understanding Theology and Popular Culture, Chapters 1-5
-- Vásquez, More than Belief, pp. 1-17, 321-328.

Methodological Interlude IV: Constructing a Thesis/Dissertation Proposal

03/26: Old and New Media: Religion, (Hyper)Reality, and Virtuality


04/02: Religion and Embodiment I: Gender
Readings: Flueckiger, *Amma’s Healing Room*, read all.

04/09: Religion and Embodiment II: The Dialogue with Cognitive Psychology, Evolution, and the Neurosciences


*** Practicum II due Friday, April 13th at 4 PM ***

04/16: Can Social Constructionist Theories of Religion be Reconciled with the Natural Sciences?


Methodological Interlude V: Applying for Jobs in Academia

04/23: Religion, Space, and Mobility

Readings: -- Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, Chapters 3-5. (*)

*** Final Exam due: TBA ***