RLG 6036: Method and Theory II
Spring 2014
Mondays 7-9th Periods
AND 34

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:30PM – 2:30PM, Thursdays 2PM – 4 PM, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds on Method and Theory I, offering 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, contestation, fluidity, and cross-fertilization. This craggy and polycentric topography both accompanies and is a response 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, trends, 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 the religion scholar, such as constructing course syllabi and writing and submitting journal articles, applications for 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 and main “fault lines” 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 “function” 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 these exams 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 analytically substantive, making explicit references to the readings. Each exam will worth be 20% of your final grade, for a total of 40%.

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 Grant/Fellowship Proposal or a Draft of a Thesis/Dissertation Proposal. Following the guidelines of major funding agencies, such as the ACLS, SSRC, NEH, Mellon, Ford, Templeton, MacArthur, and Carnegie, students will elaborate a grant or fellowship proposal to support research for the MA thesis or doctoral dissertation. Alternatively, they will write a draft of their thesis or dissertation proposal, following the guidelines in the Graduate Studies Handbook (see: http://sites.clas.ufl.edu/religion/files/Graduate-Student-Handbook-2013-14.pdf). We will discuss this assignment during the course. This assignment will be worth 15% of your final grade.

4. Practicum III: A Publishable Review Essay or Journal Article. 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 culture, 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. This assignment will be worth 20% of your final grade.

5. 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 will post a substantive but brief query or comment connected with the readings assigned for Monday by the preceding Sunday at 10 PM. The aim of these queries/comments is not only to show that the students have done the readings, but also to shape the lectures and conversations on Monday. The instructor reserves the right to give quizzes at any time (in case students are not doing the readings). Attendance and participation represent 5% 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. Grading Scale:  A: 100-95; A-: 94-90; B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80; C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70; D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; D-: 63-60; E: <60.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Please make sure to arrive to class on time, since interruptions break the flow of the lecture and conversation.

9. 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:


Additional 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 ASSIGNMENTS

I. Contesting and Defending the Foundations of Religious Studies

01/06: The Struggle over the History of Religions Research Programme

Readings:

01/17: The Struggle over the Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Research Programme
(Class moved to Friday)

Readings:

-- Vásquez, Manuel, More than Belief, pp. 87-121, 211-229.

01/20: MLK Day. No Class

01/27: Entry into Postmodernity: Anti-Essentialism and the Struggle over the Category of Religion

Readings:


Methodological Interlude I: Constructing a Course Syllabus

02/03: Genealogy and 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. (*)

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02/10: World Religions as Colonial Constructs

Readings:

-- 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. (*)
-- Reid Locklin, Tracy Tiemeier, and Johann Vento, “Teaching World Religions without Teaching ‘World Religions.’” Teaching Theology and Religion 15/2 (2012): 159-181. (**)

*** Practicum I Due on Friday, February 14th at Noon ***

*** Delton Scudder Lecture: David Carrasco, Harvard University (02/14) ***

02/17: Assessing Post-Modern and Post-Colonial Approaches: Is Comparison still Possible?

Readings:

Methodological Interlude II: Submitting a Grant/ Fellowship Proposal

II. Promising New Directions

02/24: Practice, Performance, and Lived Religion

Readings:

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

Methodological Interlude III: Crafting Thesis and Dissertation Proposals

*** First Take-Home Exam (Section I) due on Friday, February 28th at 4PM ***

03/03: Spring Break. No Class

03/10: Power: Domination and Resistance

Readings:

-- Vásquez, Manuel, More than Belief, pp. 231-257.

03/17: Religion, Popular Culture, and Materiality: The End of the Text?

Readings:

-- Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, read all.

*** Delton Scudder Lecture: Jacob Olupona, Harvard University (03/19) ***

*** Practicum II Due on Friday, March 21st at 4PM ***

03/24: Old and New Media: Religion, (Hyper)Reality, and Virtuality

Readings:


Methodological Interlude IV: Publishing a Review Essay

03/31: Religion and Embodiment I: Sexuality and Gender

Readings:

-- The Exchange between Miriam Peskowitz and Carol Christ, in Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader, ed. Elizabeth Castelli (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 29-48. (*)

Methodological Interlude V: Publishing a Journal Article

04/07: Religion and Embodiment II: Conversations with Cognitive Psychology, Evolution, the Neurosciences, and “Performance Studies.”

Readings:

-- Justin Barrett, Why Would Anyone Believe in God? Read all.
-- Sam Gill, “I Don’t Want to be a Mystic.” Unpublished Manuscript. (*)

*** Visiting our Class: Prof. Sam Gill, University of Colorado, Boulder ***

04/14: Can Social Constructionist Theories of Religion be Reconciled with the Natural Sciences?

Readings:

-- Vásquez, More than Belief, pp. 173-208.

Methodological Interlude VI: Applying for Jobs in Academia

*** Practicum III due on Friday, April 18th at 4 PM ***

04/21: Religion, Space, Mobility, and Relationality

Readings:


*** Final Exam (Section II) due Thursday, May 1st at 5PM ***