

SENIOR SEMINAR  
REL 4933  
TUES 3:00-4:55/THURS 4:05-4:55  
FLI 0119

Prof. Rachel Gordan  
Dept. of Religion  
Office: Anderson Hall, Room 130  
e-mail: rgordan@ufl.edu  
Office Hours: Thursdays: 10-12 and by appointment

Description: This course is a capstone seminar for religion majors. Our aim is to engage in both the field of religious studies and important religious issues in the larger society. This semester our course will compare and contrast how different scholars of American religion have recently conceived of “religious experience” (defined with terms such as spirituality, mysticism, and fanaticism) and its relationship to history and contemporary society.

Required Texts:

Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*  
Lincoln Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America*  
Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*  
David Watt, *Anti-Fundamentalism*

Grading:

Attendance and participation: 20%  
Leading class discussion 15%  
In-class essays 30%  
Midterm 15%  
Take-home final 20%

**Attendance & Participation:** This grade is meant to encourage you to be a thoughtful and engaged seminar participant. Staying focused on discussion, taking notes, and following-up on classmates’ comments, are excellent ways to earn a high A&P grade. Before the midterm, you will receive a provisional A&P grade to give you an idea of your standing, with time to improve. Occasionally, class will begin with a very short writing exercise based on the reading – this is part of your P&A grade and it will not be a problem if you’ve done the reading.

For the **in-class essays**, you will be given the question(s) in advance, and you are allowed to bring one notecard of notes to class to write your essays. A higher level of clarity of ideas and writing is expected than if this were a typical in-class essay. Length of essays is not as important to your grade as the quality of the content.

**Leading class discussion:** At the beginning of the semester, you will choose a reading for which you will be responsible. You are free to organize your presentation as you like: you may choose to take the class through some main points and/or provide a handout, and/or raise discussion questions. Keep in mind that you want to keep discussion flowing, so if you do provide us with questions, have some of your own answers on-hand, in case you encounter silence from the group ☺. 12-15 minutes.

**The midterm and final** are based on both the readings and our class discussions.

### **Caveats and additional information**

**Syllabus:** Depending on time constraints and other factors, the instructor may alter the syllabus during the semester. Students will be given notice of such alterations.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance>.

For grading policies, please see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

<http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu>

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio>

Students are invited to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open.

### Schedule:

1) Thursday, August 23

Introductions

---Leigh E. Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism,'" *Journal of American Academy of Religion*.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2f5f/6c2156ee45d7e5157c585f23b096cdb18411.pdf>

2) Tuesday August 28

---Leigh E. Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism,'" *Journal of American Academy of Religion*.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2f5f/6c2156ee45d7e5157c585f23b096cdb18411.pdf>

3) Thursday, August 30

---Leigh E. Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism,'" *Journal of American Academy of Religion*.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2f5f/6c2156ee45d7e5157c585f23b096cdb18411.pdf>

---"Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-116. On Canvas

---Stephen Bush, *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power* (2014), chapter 1 On Canvas

4) Tuesday, September 4

---William James, *On the Variety of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature*

<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/james.html#varieties>

Lecture 1: Religion and Neurology

---William James, *On the Variety of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature*

<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/james.html#varieties>

Lecture 2

5) Thursday, September 6

---William James, *On the Variety of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature*

<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/james.html#varieties>

Lecture 2

6) Tuesday, September 11

**Rosh Hashanah – no class**

7) Thursday, September 13

---Lincoln Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (Harvard, 2017), Introduction

8) Tuesday, September 18

---Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America*, Chapters 2-4

---William James, *VRE*, Lectures 9 “Conversion”

9) Thursday, September 20

---William James, *VRE*, Lectures 9 & 10 “Conversion”

10) Tuesday, September 25

---William James, *VRE* Lectures 11-13 “Saintliness”

---Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America*, Chapter 5

11) Thursday, September 27

**In-class essay #1**

12) Tuesday, October 2

---William James, *VRE*, Lecture 8, “The Divided Self”

---Mullen, Epilogue

13) Thursday October 4

---Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*, “ Introduction

14) Tuesday, October 9

---Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*, Chapter 1

15) Thursday, October 11

---Robert Orsi, Chapter 2

16) Tuesday, October 16

---Robert Orsi, Chapter 2&3

17) Thursday, October 18

**In-Class Essay #2**

18) Tuesday, October 23

---Robert Orsi, Chapter 5

19) Thursday, October 25

---Robert Orsi, Epilogue

20) Tuesday, October 30

---Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, Introduction and Chapter 1

21) Thursday, Nov 1

---Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, Chapter 2

22) Tuesday, November 6

---Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, Chapter 4

23) Thursday, November 8

**In-class essay #3**

24) Tuesday, November 13

---Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, Chapter 5 & Conclusion

25) Thursday, November 15

---David Watt, *Anti-Fundamentalism*, Preface & Introduction

Thanksgiving week: American Academy of Religion conference: no class

26) Tuesday, November 27

---David Watt, *Anti-Fundamentalism*, Chapter 4

27) Thursday, November 29

---David Watt, *Anti-Fundamentalism*, Chapter 5

28) Tuesday, December 4

---David Watt, *Anti-Fundamentalism*, Conclusion

Finals review

Take-home final due to rgordan@ufl.edu: Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 5:00 pm