

JUNIOR SEMINAR (RELIGIOUS STUDIES METHOD AND THEORY)

Rel 3931 (6859), Spring 2015

Prof. Mario Poceski (Religion Dept., University of Florida)



Class Time & Location

Tue, periods 8-10 (3:00–6:00 pm), AND 101.

Office Hours & Contact Information

Fri, 1:00–2:40 pm, and by appointment (1/9–4/17); 132 Anderson Hall; tel: (352) 273-2937; email: mpoceski@ufl.edu (to be used for all written communications); webpage: www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/.

Course Description

The seminar presents a comprehensive overview of classical approaches to the study of religion and the development of religious studies as an academic discipline. The main focus is on seminal theories and methods formulated by leading theorists such as Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Eliade, and Geertz, which reflect the perspectives of diverse academic disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and anthropology.

Prerequisites

Usually enrolment in the course is restricted to majors in the Religion Department. It is required of all majors during their junior year.

Requirements

- Reading of assigned materials, class attendance, and participation in discussions (10% of the final grade; see below for additional info about attendance).
- Two quizzes (10%).
- Two examinations (60%).
- Film review (10%), due by March 24 (1 pm).
- Interview report (10%), due by April 7 (1 pm).

Required Texts

- Pals, Daniel L. *Nine Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Pals, Daniel L. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Students need to have their own copies of the two books and bring them to class.

Objectives

- Enable students to become acquainted with the major theories and methodologies used in the academic study of religion, especially those formulated by central figures that shaped the development of the discipline of religious studies.

- Facilitate each student’s development of an analytical capacity to ascertain, articulate, and evaluate the explicit arguments and underlying assumptions that inform various theories about religion, and to reflect critically on the academic study of religion.
- Help sharpen a range of essential academic skills, including critical thinking, rigorous reading, clear writing, articulate discussion, and nuanced engagement with multiple perspectives.



Course Schedule and Discussion Topics

Jan	W 1	Introduction to the Course
	W 2	Imagining and Theorizing Religion <i>Nine Theories</i> , Intro; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , Intro & ch. 1
	W 3	Edward Tylor and James Frazer <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 1; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 2
	W 4	Sigmund Freud <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 2; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 3 Quiz 1
Feb	W 5	Emile Durkheim <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 3; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 4
	W 6	Karl Marx <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 4; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 5
	W 7	Exam 1
	W 8	William James <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 6; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 6
Mar	W 9	Spring Break
	W 10	Max Weber <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 5; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 8
	W 11	Film: Agora (2010)
	W 12	Mircea Eliade <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 7; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 9
	W 13	E. E. Evans-Pritchard <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 8; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 10 Quiz 2
Apr	W 14	Clifford Geertz <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 9; <i>Introducing Religion</i> , ch. 11
	W 15	Concluding Discussion <i>Nine Theories</i> , ch. 10
	W 16	Exam 2



Grading

- The final grade will be based on each student’s individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including student’s personal desires or expectations about grades, will not be taken into account. Students should also not expect retroactive changes or other dubious forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There will be no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- No incomplete grades will be given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the students should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades will be computed on this scale: A = 100–93%; A- = 92.9–90%; B+ = 89.9–87%; B = 86.9–83%; B- = 82.9–80% ; C+ = 79.9–77%; C = 76.9–73%; C- = 72.9–70%; D+ = 69.9–67%; D = 66.9–63%; D- = 62.9–60%; E = 59.9% or less.

Online e-Learning System

- The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF's e-Learning system [lss.at.ufl.edu], using Sakai.
- Students should not write to the instructor by using the email feature in e-Learning; instead, they should send written communications directly on the email address given above.

Attendance and Participation

- **Attendance** is **mandatory** for all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in this course.
- Active and informed **participation** in classroom discussions is expected from all students. In order to facilitate that, students are expected to read carefully all assigned readings before coming to class.
- **Absences** from class will have adverse effect on the final grade. After missing three (3) hours of instruction (unexcused)—comparable to missing one (1) of the weekly classes—each subsequent unexcused hour will lead to an automatic 1% **reduction** of the final grade.
- Students who miss nine (9) hours of instruction (unexcused)—comparable to missing three of the weekly classes—will automatically receive a failing grade.
- Valid excuses for missed classes must be submitted *in writing* and in a timely manner, along with pertinent documentation (such as note from a doctor). Written excuses for planned absences—participation in athletic meetings or religious observances, for example—must be submitted in advance.
- Coming late, leaving early, being inattentive, and other forms of disruptive behavior can be counted as unexcused absences. For more on the university's attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog.

Quizzes

- The quizzes will include the readings for that and the previous week, so students should come to class prepared to be examined on them. Remember, the readings are not optional and they should be done in advance.
- Students who are late will not be able to take the quiz and will have to wait outside until it has ended. Be considerate of your fellow students and the professor.
- In most circumstances, there will be no make-ups on any of the quizzes.

Exams

- No make-up exams will be given, except in documented instances of illness or other emergency, in which case the student must contact the instructor directly before the exam, if feasible, or as soon as possible.
- If any student has a valid reason to request rescheduling of an exam—such as observance of a religious holiday—he/she must contact the instructor in person and make suitable arrangements one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions will lead to a failing grade.

Written Assignment

- The **interview report** should be based on two interviews with UF faculty, with focus on the use of various methodologies and theories about religion in their research. Students can choose any faculty (excluding Prof. Poceski), but one must be from the Religion Dept. and the other from another department, and their area(s) of specialization should include substantial focus on religion.

- Students need to write an informative, thoughtful, and nuanced **review** of the film shown in class. The review should describe the film as well as offer a critical assessment and analysis of it, especially as it pertains to its depiction or treatment of religion.
- The length of each written assignment should be 750-850 words, inclusive of notes and citations (if any).
- The written assignments must be submitted in **MS Word** and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor name, date, and page numbers.
- The written assignments must be **submitted digitally**, via e-Learning, before the final deadline.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, at least a week before the final deadline.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their paper and ask for feedback/advice, but they have to do that in person during the office hours.

Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to come to class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are very disruptive.
- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful, and abstain from disruptive behavior in the classroom that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g. sleeping or inappropriate computer use), or putting down others. Phones should also be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.
- It is hoped that there will be lively debates and informed discussions. While there is room for individual opinions and disagreements, they have to be expressed in ways that are appropriate for an academic setting.

Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to come to office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials.
- The instructor will also be glad to discuss all relevant topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in class in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly and in person, preferably during office hours. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties.
- For more information, see the "Academic Honesty—Student Guide" brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).

Disability

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made.
- The student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to the quizzes and the exams must be made at least one week in advance.

Other Notices

- Registration in the course implies that each student enters a contractual agreement with the instructor, whereas he/she is accountable for fulfilling all course requirements and adhering to the course policies.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following all schedules and instructions contained in this syllabus, as well as any other instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).

