

# Course Syllabus

RLG 6035: Method and Theory I  
Sect. 24DB AND19

T 4-6 (10:40 - 1:40)

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Office Hours: T 2-5

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an overview of the main sociological, anthropological, historical, psychological, philosophical, and textual approaches that have defined the academic study of religion. Focusing on the writings of foundational figures such as Durkheim, Marx, Freud, Weber, and Eliade, as well as their detractors and those who have been influenced by them, the course will trace the origins and evolution of the discipline of religion, highlighting continuities and discontinuities in the process of theory-building. In order to make sense of this evolution, we will borrow the concepts of paradigm and research programme from the philosophy of science. To ground theoretical approaches, students will also be introduced to various methods to research religious symbols, beliefs, practices, and institutions.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To map out the main theoretical lineages in the genealogy of the academic study of religion
2. To sharpen the students' capacity to identify and critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind various theoretical approaches, with the aim of developing a reflexive stand when studying religion.
3. To offer students some hands-on experience with methodological design and theory building as they prepare to undertake their own research projects.

## REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Presentations. Each student will be responsible for presenting in class **two** of the Required Readings for the dates scheduled. Presentations must cover (1) the key ideas and presuppositions of the theories and methods under discussion; (2) an historical contextualization of the theories, and/or an evaluation of the utility of the methods. Presentations should be accompanied by an outline of the main points (with printed copies to be distributed on the day of presentation). The assignment is worth 30.0% of the final grade.
2. Annotated Bibliography of Additional Theoretical Works: At the beginning of the semester, the instructor will distribute a bibliography containing significant works in the various research programs in the study of religion. Students will select **one** work and will produce an annotated

bibliography that will be circulated among the class. The objective here is to build a data base of outlines of classic works that can be useful later in your career, when you have to take your qualifying exams or teach a course on related topics. The two outlines are due at the last day of classes and will be 20.0% of your grade.

3. A Field Research Practicum: In consultation with the instructor, students will select a religious group and conduct participant observation with the aim of producing a detailed ethnographic account of a key event in the group's life. In addition, students will be required to use another research method (i.e., in-depth interviewing, oral histories, focus groups, textual analysis, or analysis of space and material culture) to explore how religion is experienced by leaders or particular members of the group. We will discuss various field and textual methods throughout the course. Students are encouraged to select groups and individuals related to their research interests and dissertation topics. The end product of this assignment will be a report integrating the ethnographic account and the information collected through the other research method. The length of the report will vary according to the additional research method used. However, aim for between 15 to 20 pages. NOTE: Part of the goal of this assignment is to familiarize students with IRB protocols, which must be completed before any research involving human subject can begin. IRB's procedures will be discussed at the beginning of the class but please refer to: <http://irb.ufl.edu/> for an advance preview. The assignment is due during exam week and is worth 35% of the 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 or two short queries connected with the readings assigned for Monday by the preceding Saturday night. These queries will count as participation, since they will inform our conversations. The instructor reserves the right to give quizzes at any time (in case students are not doing the readings). Attendance and participation represent 15.0% 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 plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. 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). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm><http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> 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. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.

4. 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 provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

## READINGS

### Required Books:

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [available as Kindle e-book][http://projektintegracija.pravo.hr/\\_download/repository/Kuhn\\_Structure\\_of\\_Scientific\\_Revolutions.pdf](http://projektintegracija.pravo.hr/_download/repository/Kuhn_Structure_of_Scientific_Revolutions.pdf) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

Durkheim, Emile. 1965. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press. (pdf on Canvas course website)

Gerth, Hans. 1998. *From Max Weber*. Routledge. [pdf format on website]

Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, ed. 1988. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. Continuum. (pdf format on course website)

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*. Harvest (pdf on course website)

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Moses and Monotheism*. NY: Vintage. 1939.

Marx, Karl and F. Engels. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton. (pdf on course website)

### Recommended Books:

Bernard, Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press. [in pdf format on course website]

Most reading material is uploaded to the course website. All required books will be on reserve at Smathers Library 2 hr. /overnight loan. It is recommended that students make their own copies before the first class. Used copies of most of the readings may easily be found through online used bookstores.

## **I. Introduction**

### **Class 1(08/22): Introduction to syllabus and bibliography**

#### **Class 2 (08/29): Paradigms and Research Programmes**

Readings [pdfs on course website]:

Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*;

Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91-138, 173-180.

### **Class 3 (09/05): The Pioneers**

Readings [all in pdf format on course website]

F. Max Muller, *The Essential Max Muller*, chs. 3, 6, 9, 13;

Ackerman, "Frazer on Myth and Ritual";

E.B. Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture* (1871);

James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* Ch. 3 & 4.

## **II. The Structural-Functionalist Research Programme**

### **Class 4(09/12): Durkheim I: General Theory of Society.**

Readings [pdf on website]:

Chapters 2, 5, 6, and 8 from *Durkheim: Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

### **Class 5 (09/19): Durkheim 2: What Religion Does.**

Readings [pdf on website]:

*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Introduction, Book I (Chs. 1, 2, 4), Book II (Chs. 6 & 7), Conclusion. (any online or library edition, as long as you read indicated chapters).

## **Class 6 (09/26): L'Année Sociologique**

Readings:

Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand* [pdf on website];

M. Mauss, *Essay on The Gift* [pdf on website];

A. von Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* [available on google.books];

H. Hubert, *Sacrifice* [available on google.books]

Methodological Interlude I: IRB's and Participant Observation

Reading: Bernard, Chapter 7 [pdf format on course website]

## **Class 7 (10/03): The Successors**

Readings [all readings in pdf format on course website]:

Bronislaw Malinowski, from *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1948, pp. 66-92);

Mary Douglas from *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, pp. 27-59;

Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," from *The Ritual Process* (Cornell, 1969, pp. 94-130).

III. The Historical Materialist Research Programme

## **Class 8 (10/10): Feuerbach & Early Marx**

Readings:

Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future* 19-30  
(<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/future/>),

Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Christianity*, Lectures 3-5, 20-21  
(<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/>

also available as Kindle ebook);

Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Theses on Feuerbach; The German Ideology.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf.htm>

Methodological Interlude II: Survey Instruments

Recommended Readings: Bernard, Chapter 12 [pdf format on course website]

## **Class 9 (10/17): Late Marx and Successors**

Readings:

Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, The Grundrisse

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf.htm>

<https://genius.com/Robert-c-tucker-the-marx-engels-reader-chap-24-the-grundrisse-annotated>

Antonio Gramsci, from "The Study of Philosophy," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. [pdf on website]

Georg Lukacs, from "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 83-110.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcco5.htm>

#### **IV. The Psychological and Psychoanalytical Research Programme**

##### **Class 10 (10/24): Freud**

Readings:

*Moses and Monotheism*. [pdf on website]

Methodological Interlude III: In-depth Interviewing and Oral Histories

Recommended Readings: Bernard, Chapter 10

##### **Class 11 (10/31): Successors and Counter-Currents: Jung, Cognition theorists**

Readings:

"Approaching the Unconscious," in Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, New York: Laurel, 1968. [pdf on website; also, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlz5P3zketE> ]

Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality* [pdf on website];

Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* [pdf on website];

Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963, pp. 206-231 [pdf on website];

E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Problem of Symbols" [pdf on website].

#### **V. The Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Research Programme**

##### **Class 12 (11/07): The Philosophical Foundations**

Readings:

*The Hermeneutics Reader*, Introduction and Chapters 2, 5, 7-9. [pdf format on course website]

**Class 13 (11/14): Verstehende Sociology**

Readings:

Hans Gerth, *From Max Weber*, Part 3. Religion

Methodological Interlude IV: Focus Groups

Recommended Readings: Morgan's Focus Groups

**Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (11/18-21). Class Cancelled**

**Class 14 (11/28): History of Religions**

Readings:

*The Sacred and the Profane*, Introduction, Chapters I, II & III [in pdf on course website]

**Class 15 (12/05): History of Religions vs. Thick Description**

Readings:

*The Sacred and the Profane*, Chapter IV [idem]

Clifford Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System" and "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight" in *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 87-125 and 412-454. [pdf format on course website]

**Review of History and Transition to M&T 2**