Meeting Time & Location:
W | Period 10 – E1 (5:10 PM - 8:10 PM) | Anderson 117

Instructor: Benjamin Soares
Office: 107B Anderson Hall
Telephone: 352/273-2945
Email: benjaminsoares@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Mon. 2-3 PM, Wed., 4-5 PM, & by appointment

Course Description
This course is the companion course to Method & Theory I and provides an overview of the contemporary landscape in the study of religion. Following various critiques of the essentialist, foundationalist, teleological, and totalizing pretensions of classical methods and theories, considerable fragmentation, contestation, fluidity, and cross-fertilization characterize this landscape. This polycentric topography both accompanies and is a response to postcoloniality, globalization, and the emergence of new information and communication technologies, which have decentered taken-for-granted cartographies of religion, generating increased 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 until the mid-1980s. We will devote particular attention to debates around the viability of category of religion, as well as its implications in power dynamics ranging from colonialism and imperialism to nationalism and capitalism through the close reading of key theorists. The second part of the course will center around the close reading of a series of monographs that highlight emerging directions, themes, tropes, and methods that are likely to help to define the field of religious studies in the coming years.

Course Objectives:
1. To map out some of the contours and main lines of debate on the contemporary theoretical landscape in the academic study of religion;
2. To sharpen students’ capacity to identify and critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind current debates about the “nature” of religion and its place in context;
3. To offer students some hands-on experience in the use of methods and theories in the preparation of syllabi and written work that might eventually be publishable in some format.

Requirements and Format:
The seminar is organized around class discussions based on the weekly assigned readings. We will usually read a monograph or several articles per week. Since this is a small advanced seminar, active and engaged participation is required. Students will make presentations and help to lead discussions.

Students will write 8 critical commentary papers (500-600 words) on the readings and in consultation with the instructor will develop a specific program of writing related to their particular interests and needs. One option is to write a research paper around a theme related to the course. Another option is
to negotiate with the instructor a plan of work that gets one closer to preliminary examination preparation.

**Practicum: 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 select 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 Nature/Ecology, 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 one to 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.).

In addition to the critical commentary papers, the syllabi, and participation in the seminar discussions, students will meet at least once with the instructor, make oral presentations, write a final paper/writing assignment proposal, and workshop the paper/writing assignment during the seminar.

**Method of Evaluation:**
- Regular, active participation in seminar discussions (15% of the final grade)
- Critical commentary papers on readings: 8 papers (500-600 words each) (25%)
- Practicum (syllabi) (10%)
- Class presentations (10%)
- Research paper (6,000 to 7,500 words) or other agreed-upon written work (40%)

Final grades will be computed on this scale:
A = 94-100%; A- = 90-93%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 84-86%; B- = 80-83%; C+ = 77-79%;
C = 74-76%; C- =70-73%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 64-66%; D- = 60-63%; F = <=60%

**Required Texts:**

Additional readings will be made available through e-Learning: http://elearning.ufl.edu

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 (1/8):** Introduction & Orientation
Week 2 (1/15): World Religions as Colonial Constructs

Week 3 (1/22): Anti-Essentialism and the Struggle over the Category of Religion

Supplementary reading:


Supplementary reading:

**Week 5 (2/5): Michel Foucault, Subjectivation, Ethics**


**Week 6 (2/12): Talal Asad**


**Supplementary reading:**


**Week 7 (2/19): Reading Week**

**Week 8 (2/26): Lived Religion**

Supplementary reading:

Week 9 (3/5): Spring Break

Week 10 (3/11): Gender

Week 11 (3/18): Reading Week
**Practicum due by Friday, March 20, 2019, 5 pm**

Week 12 (3/25): Consumption

Week 13 (4/1): The State

Week 14 (4/8): Migration/Affect

Week 15 (4/15): Constructivism/Non-objectivism

Week 16 (4/22): Student Presentations & Final Wrap Up
**Final paper/written work due by Wednesday, April 24, 2019, 5 pm**

Policies, Rules, Expectations, and Resources:

1. Attendance is mandatory
2. Active discussion of the readings by each student during every meeting.
3. Handing in Assignments: Critical commentary papers and final writing assignments should be uploaded to elearning.
4. Late Assignments: You may receive an extension only in extraordinary circumstances.
5. Completion of All Assignments: You must complete all written and oral work and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course.
6. **Honor Code**: UF students are bound by the Honor Code (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/), and all students have agreed to follow this Code, meaning they will not give or receive unauthorized assistance in completing assignments.

7. **Course Evaluation**: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu.

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