

SENIOR SEMINAR
REL 4933
TUES 11:45-1:40/THURS 12:50-1:40

Prof. Rachel Gordan, Dept. of Religion
Office: Anderson Hall, Room 130
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Office Hours: Thursdays: 2:30-4:00 and 5:00-6:00, 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 become a more thoughtful and engaged seminar participant. If you attend every class and participate in discussion throughout the class period – answering questions, responding to the comments of your classmates, and contributing your own insights and questions to our conversation – you will receive the full 20/20 points, plus extra credit for maintaining perfect attendance. If you attend every class, but speak only occasionally and/or are clearly focused on things besides discussion, such as the Internet or your cellphone, you will likely receive a grade closer to a 13/20. Staying focused on discussion, taking notes, and following-up on classmates’ comments, are excellent ways to improve this grade. Before the midterm, you will receive a provisional A&P grade to give you an idea of your standing, with time to improve. (Think of this as training for every work “team” in which you will take part – employers and colleagues will hold you in higher regard if you are an energetic contributor. Learning *not* to be a passive member of a group conversation is an important skill for your career and your relationships.)

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 ☺.

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/) 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) Tuesday, August 22

Introductions

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

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

2) Thursday August 24

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

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

3) Tuesday, August 29

---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) Thursday, August 31

---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

5) Tuesday, September 5

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

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

Lecture 2

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

6) Thursday, September 7

In Class Essay #1

7) Tuesday, September 12

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

8) Thursday, September 14

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

---Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America*, Chapter 1

9) Tuesday, September 19

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

Thursday, September 21 Rosh Hashanah – no class

10) Tuesday, September 26

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

11) Thursday, September 28

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

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

12) Tuesday, October 3rd:

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

---Mullen, Epilogue

13) Thursday October 5 **Midterm**

14) Tuesday, October 10

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

15) Thursday, October 12

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

16) Tuesday, October 17

---Lincoln Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation*, chapter 6 “Repose: Catholic Converts and the Sect System”

17) Thursday, October 19

In-Class Essay #2

18) Tuesday, October 24

---Robert Orsi, Chapter 2 & 3

19) Thursday, October 26

---Robert Orsi, Chapter 5 and Epilogue

20) Tuesday, October 31

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

21) Thursday, Nov 2

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

22) Tuesday, November 7

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

23) Thursday, November 9

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

24) Tuesday, November 14

In-class essay #3

25) Thursday, November 16

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

Tuesday Nov 21st American Academy of Religion no class

Thursday Nov 23rd Thanksgiving

26) Tuesday, November 28

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

27) Thursday, November 30

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

28) Tuesday, December 5th

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

Finals review

Take-home final due to rgordan@ufl.edu: Wednesday, December 13th, 5:00 pm