

## Comparative Religion: Seniors Seminar

Instructor: Yaniv Feller

Meeting Times: 12:50-13:40 Room: Matherly 0118

Office Hours: Tuesday 16:00-17:00 or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>

**Course Description:** This seniors seminar for majors in religion provides a space to critically reflect upon contemporary debates in the academic study of religion. To achieve this aim, we will read some important recent studies and examine the different methods they offer for conceptualizing religion, including law, philosophy, material culture, and gender. We will pay special attention to the authors' argumentation, the evidence they present, as well as to the writing and its structure. Throughout the class, students will have opportunities to apply the theories and methods to case studies of their choice.

**Course Outcomes:** By the end of this course, you will be to:

- Explain current debates in the academic study of religion.
- Analyze the use of theories and methods.
- Apply scholarship to contemporary case studies.

### Required Texts:

- Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (9780691130583)
- Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (9780691149806)
- Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race* (9780226821122)
- David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (9780520243064)

## Methods of Evaluation

**Active Participation (11%):** This class is based on your active participation. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the texts and thought of at least one or two topics you wish to discuss. In particular, for each class you are required to bring one passage from the reading that you found important, and one claim/passage/statement that you did not understand. These will often serve as the basis for discussion.

**Responses (7x2%: 14%):** 12-font, double-space, one or two pages. The main structure of the class is composed of seven units (I-VII). You are required to submit **seven responses**, but only one per unit. As we are all responsible adults, this allows for plenty of flexibility in your schedule :). Each response should include the following information: a) a summary of what you take to be the key argument of the chapter/article; b) a few lines/paragraph on what source/method/theory the author uses; c) one question on a topic or passage that was not clear to you. You are welcome to make connections to other readings in the study of religion.

Date: You are required to submit the response **by 9am the day of the class**. This would allow me to understand what you found interesting or difficult and adjust the class accordingly. Since there is great flexibility in terms of the deadlines, no late responses will be accepted.

**Secularism (20%):** 3-5 pages. In this assignment, you will analyze a contemporary case study by drawing on the discussion of either Sullivan, Asad, or Smith (or a combination of more than one). You will also have the option to find a recent newspaper article on your own and analyze it using the above theorists. Deadline: Sep. 29, 12:50pm

**Urban Religion Paper Proposal (5%):** 3 pages. You will provide your choice of research site, briefly explain why it is religious in case it is not obvious, develop a research question, tentative answer, and a bibliography of five scholarly items (up to two can be from the syllabus). Creative projects would be considered but be sure to talk to me about it in advance before submitting the proposal. Date: Oct. 20, 12:50pm

**Urban Religion Paper (20%):** 5-7 pages. For this paper, you would attend a religious site of your choice (caveat: it cannot be of your own religious denomination) and analyze it using some of the materials discussed in class. Date: Nov. 3, 12:50pm

**Religion and the Museum Paper Proposal (5%):** 3 pages. You will choose an object or a section at one of UF's museums, either the Harn or the Florida Museum of Natural History. Present the object in question, explain what aspects convey religion and develop a research question, tentative answer, and a bibliography of five scholarly items (up to two can be from the syllabus). Date: Dec. 1, 12:50pm

**Religion and the Museum Final Paper (25%):** 5-7 pages. This is your opportunity to explore the question you had in mind in the proposal. Most papers will begin with an introduction, followed by a description of the historical circumstances, the theory you use and/or the comparison (when applicable), the analysis of the issue at hand, and the conclusion you reach. Detailed instructions will be provided. Date: Based on the exam schedule

**Bonus Events (1% each, up to three times):** Throughout the semester, a Google document will be updated with events of interest happening around campus. To get the bonus you have to attend the event and submit a one or two pages response summarizing the key argument/plot, raise an observation, for example by connecting it to the class materials, and a question you were left with after the event.

**Late Submission Policy:** A penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. If you have a valid, documented reason for late submission, please let me know as soon as possible.

## Course Policies

### Numerical Grading Scale:

A	93-100	A-	90-92		
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	68-69	D	63-67	D-	60-62
E	<60				

### Grading Criteria is as follows:

- A-range – 90s – Excellent – Full command and facility with material with the ability to place it within larger historical/literary context and to make arguments based upon it.
- B-range – 80s – Very Good and Good – Solid understanding of material but without complete facility or ability to make arguments based on it.
- C-range – 70s -- Fair – Some understanding of major themes, lack of command with detail, or some understanding of detail but lack of contextual understanding.
- D-range – 60s -- Poor – Enough factual understanding to pass, but little to no contextual clarity.
- F-range – Fails – Lack of university level quality.

For the grading policies of the University of Florida in general, follow this link:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/> (Links to an external site.)

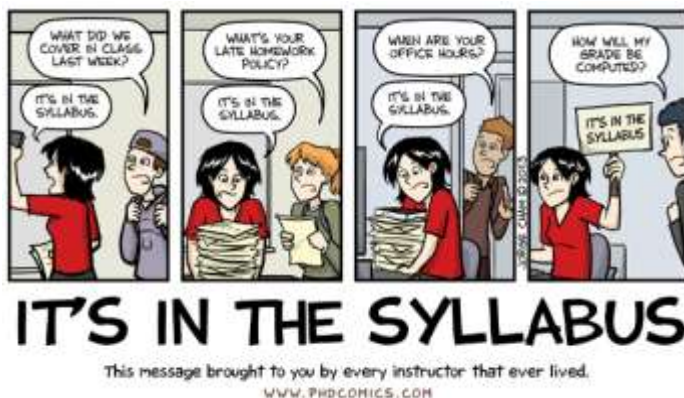
**Late Submission Policy:** No late submissions will be accepted for response papers or bonus events. There is enough flexibility built into the assignment. For all other assignments, a penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. Please do reach out if you have any medical or other concerns and we will find a solution!

## Course Policies

**Academic Integrity:** The University of Florida Student Honor Code is located at this link: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php> (Links to an external site.). 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. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

**Accessibility:** All students are welcome in this course. 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 which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**Office Hours and E-Mail:** Please feel free to talk to me about the class materials and any other concerns you might have. Meetings, either in-person or via Zoom, are preferable to email. If you cannot make it to the office hours, you can schedule a meeting using this link: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>



In the case of email, please use your university email account (other accounts may land in the spam folder) and include a topic-line, your name, and the question(s) you have. I try to respond quickly, but note that emails will receive a reply within two working days. This means that if you send me an email on the weekend, or if you send a request for extension in the last minute, they might be answered only later, and the penalty incurred will be implemented.

## Academic Resources:

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learningsupport@ufl.edu](mailto:Learningsupport@ufl.edu). <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.)

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

## **Schedule**

### **Preliminaries**

Aug. 23: What Is Religion and Why Should We Care? \*Syllabus  
Aug. 25: J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religion, Religious."  
Aug. 28: 1. Talal Asad, "Thinking about Secularism." 2. [Listen](#): The Daily, Feb. 12, 2021:  
France, Islam, and "Laïcité."  
Aug. 30: Guest lecture (in-class): Research librarian Megan Daly  
Sep. 1: No class

### **I. Legal and Illegal Religion**

Sep. 4: Labor Day  
Sep. 6: Sullivan, chapter 1  
  
Sep. 8: Sullivan, chapters 2 & 3  
Sep. 11: No class  
Sep. 13: Sullivan, chapter 4  
Sep. 15: Sullivan, chapter 5

### **II. The Corporate Space Race**

Sep. 18: Rubenstein, Intro and chapter 1  
Sep. 20: Rubenstein, chapter 2  
Sep. 22: Rubenstein, chapter 3  
Sep. 25: Yom Kippur (No Class)  
Sep. 27: Rubenstein, chapter 5  
Sep. 29: Rubenstein, chapter 6 Secularism assignment deadline  
Oct. 2: Rubenstein, 7 and conclusion  
**Oct. 2, 16:30 Pugh Hall: GUEST LECTURE:** Mary-Jane Rubenstein (Wesleyan), "Infinite  
Canaan: The Corporate Space Race in Colonial Perspective"

### **III. Gendered Religious Bodies**

Oct. 4: Mahmood, chapter 1  
Oct. 6: Mahmood, chapter 2  
Oct. 9: Mahmood, chapter 3

Oct. 11: Mahmood, chapter 4  
Oct. 13: Mahmood, chapter 5

#### **IV. Migrant Religion**

Oct. 16: Thomas Tweed, "Nationalism, Religion, and Diasporic Identity"  
Oct. 18: Wallace Best, "The South in the City"  
**Oct. 19: GUEST LECTURE, 1:30 Pugh Hall:** Wallace Best (Princeton), "The Meanings of Movement and Migration in African American History, Life, and Literature"  
Oct. 20: Elizabeth Perez, "Engendering Knowledge" Urban Religion Proposal  
Oct. 23: Erin K Wilson and Luca Mavelli, "The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries"

#### **V. What Color is the Divine?**

Oct. 25: Morgan, chapter 1  
Oct. 27: Independent research/site visit (No class)  
Oct. 30: Morgan, chapter 2  
Nov. 1: Morgan, chapter 4  
Nov. 3: Morgan, chapter 5 Urban Religion Assignment  
Nov. 6: Morgan, chapter 7

#### **VI. Religion in the Museum**

Nov. 8: Pamela Klassen, "Narrating Religion through Museums"  
Nov. 10: Oren Baruch-Stier, "Torah and Taboo"  
Nov. 13: Laura Levitt, *The Objects That Remain* (selections)  
Nov. 15: Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual"  
Nov. 17: Neil MacGregor, "The Work of Art in Times of Spiritual Reproduction"  
Nov. 20: Chip Colwell, "A Palimpsest Theory of Objects."  
Nov. 22: Thanksgiving (No class)  
Nov. 24: Thanksgiving (No class)  
Nov. 27: Jane Henderson, "Beyond Lifetimes"

#### **VII. Non-Western Study of Religion?**

Nov. 29: United Nations, "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 2007

Dec. 1: Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native Perspective on Religion* (selections) Museums Proposal

Dec. 4: Watch: *In Light of Reverence* (all three parts are available to watch online)

Dec. 6: Concluding Discussion

Final Paper based on registrar's schedule