

REL 4933—Comparative Study (Senior Seminar)

Wednesday 4:05-7:05 PM

AND 0019

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 10:35-11:25 AM or by appointment

Course Synopsis

This seminar surveys recent scholarship on certain key themes in the study of religion. It does so by examining key debates about monotheism, covenant and community, revolution and revelation, faith and ritual, semiosis, secularism, and the so-called “return of religion.” The readings selected allow students to keenly observe and critically analyze the construction of “religion” and religious texts, practices, actors, and institutions in the disciplinary domains of history, philosophy of religion, anthropology of religion, and theology. The readings also allow us to discuss the following interpretive paradigms: critical theory, close reading, ethnography, and postcolonial theory. Students will work closely with the instructor to prepare final papers that demonstrate their training in religious studies.

Communication and Interaction

Please email me at alimian@ufl.edu or send me a message from your Canvas inbox if you have any questions or concerns about this class. I welcome the opportunity to set up individual zoom meetings with you or meet with you in my Anderson Hall office during office hours.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

This course is based on a 1000-point scale. Here is the breakdown of those 1000 points:

- **Attendance and Participation—250 points**
- **Presentation 1 on a Reading—50 points**
- **Presentation 2 on a Reading—50 points**
- **Final Paper Abstract—50 points**
- **Final Paper Annotated Bibliography—150 points**
- **In-Class Workshop of Final Paper—50 points**
- **Final Paper—400 points**

Grading Scale

Score	Percent	Grade	Grade Points
934-1000	93.4-100	A	4.00
900-933	90.0-93.3	A-	3.67
867-899	86.7-89.9	B+	3.33

834-866	83.4-86.6	B	3.00
800-833	80.0-83.3	B-	2.67
767-799	76.7-79.9	C+	2.33
734-766	73.4-76.6	C	2.00
700-733	70.0-73.3	C-	1.67
667-699	66.7-69.9	D+	1.33
634-666	63.4-66.6	D	1.00
600-633	60.0-63.3	D-	0.67
0-599	0-59.9	E	0.00

More information on grades and grading policies can be found here:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is mandatory, and will be taken at the beginning of each class session. You can miss one session without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will detract 50 points from your grade. Excused absences are consistent with university policies as listed in the undergraduate catalog

(<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require

appropriate documentation. Class will begin and end on time. Five late arrivals (anything over 5 minutes) will be considered one absence.

Resources and Services

Writing Studio

<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

The Writing Studio is committed to helping University of Florida students and faculty meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. We support independent learning and encourage scholarship by providing one-on-one consultations, workshops tailored to specific classes (graduate and undergraduate), and faculty retreats focusing on publishing original research. Students and faculty at all levels and in every discipline are welcome!

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.

University Honesty Policy

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 (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) 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.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<https://counseling.ufl.edu/about/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignment

WEEK ONE

Wednesday August 25—Introduction

WEEK TWO

Wednesday September 1—Jan Assmann, *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*, trans. Robert Savage (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018).

WEEK THREE

Wednesday September 8—Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

WEEK FOUR

Wednesday September 15—Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

WEEK FIVE

Wednesday September 22—Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

WEEK SIX

Wednesday September 29—Jean-Luc Marion, *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

WEEK SEVEN

Wednesday October 6—Devin Singh, *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

WEEK EIGHT

Wednesday October 13—Michael L. Raposa, *Theosemiotic: Religion, Reading, and the Gift of Meaning* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

WEEK NINE

Wednesday October 20—Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

WEEK TEN

Wednesday October 27—Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

WEEK ELEVEN

Wednesday November 3—William Elison, *The Neighborhoods of Gods: The Sacred and the Visible at the Margins of Mumbai* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

WEEK TWELVE

Wednesday November 10—An Yountae, *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

WEEK THIRTEEN

Wednesday November 17—Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

WEEK FOURTEEN

Wednesday November 14—Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

WEEK FIFTEEN

Wednesday December 1—Grant Wacker, *One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019).

WEEK SIXTEEN

Wednesday December 8—Wrap-Up Discussion and In-Class Workshop of Papers