

## JUNIOR SEMINAR (REL 3931) | SPRING 2025

**Prof. Mario Poceski** (Religion Dept., University of Florida)



### Class Time & Location

Tue 10:40–11:30, xx, & Thu 10:40—12:35, xx

### Office Hours

Tue 12:00–1:00, Thu 9:30–10:30, & by appointment (1/16–4/22); 107F Anderson Hall.

### Contact Information

email: [mpoceski@ufl.edu](mailto:mpoceski@ufl.edu); webpage: [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/).

### Course Description

The seminar presents a comprehensive overview of major classical approaches to the study of religion and the development of religious studies as an academic discipline. Essentially, it is a course on **Religious Studies Method and Theory**. The main focus is on seminal theoretical and practical approaches formulated by leading thinkers such as Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Eliade, and Geertz, which reflect the perspectives of diverse academic disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and anthropology.

### Prerequisites

Enrolment in the course is restricted to majors in the Religion Department. It is required of all majors, ideally to be taken during their junior year.

### Requirements

- Reading of assigned materials, class attendance, and participation in discussions.
- Three examinations (75%).
- Written report (15%), due by April 16 (5 pm) at the latest.

### Required Texts

- Pals, Daniel L. *Nine Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015 (abbreviated as NT).
- Pals, Daniel L. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. (abbreviated as IR)

Students need to have their own copies of the two books and bring them to class.

### Course Objectives

- Enable students to become acquainted with the major theories and methodologies used in the academic study of religion, especially those formulated by central figures that shaped the development of the discipline of religious studies.

- Facilitate each student’s development of an analytical capacity to ascertain, articulate, and evaluate the explicit arguments and underlying assumptions that inform various theories about religion, and to reflect critically on the academic study of religion.
- Help sharpen a range of essential academic skills, including critical thinking, careful reading, clear writing, articulate discussion, and nuanced engagement with multiple perspectives.



## Course Schedule and Discussion Topics

Jan	W 1   1/14	<b>Introduction to the Course</b> (NT, Intro; IR, Intro)
	W 2   1/21	<b>Edward Tylor and James Frazer</b> (NT, ch. 1; IR, ch. 2)
	W 3   1/28	<b>Sigmund Freud</b> (NT, ch. 2; IR, ch. 3)
Feb	W 4   2/4	<b>Emile Durkheim</b> (NT, ch. 3; IR, ch. 4)
	W 5   2/11	<b>Discussion</b> (Tue) & <b>Exam 1</b> (Thu)
	W 6   2/18	<b>Karl Marx</b> (NT, ch. 4; IR, ch. 5)
	W 7   2/25	<b>William James</b> (NT, ch. 6; IR, ch. 6)
Mar	W 8   3/4	<b>Max Weber</b> (NT, ch. 5; IR, ch. 8)
	W 9   3/11	<b>Discussion</b> (Tue) & <b>Exam 2</b> (Thu)
	W 10	<b>Spring Break</b>
	W 11   3/25	<b>Mircea Eliade</b> (NT, ch. 7; IR, ch. 9)
Apr	W 12   4/1	<b>E. E. Evans-Pritchard</b> (NT, ch. 8; IR, ch. 10)
	W 13   4/8	<b>Clifford Geertz</b> (NT, ch. 9; IR, ch. 11)
	W 14   4/15	<b>Film</b>   <i>Vision: Life of Hildegard von Bingen</i> (2010)
	W 15   4/22	<b>Exam 3</b>



## Online e-Learning System & email Communication

- The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF’s e-Learning system, using Canvas.
- Students should send all written communications to the instructor directly, using the email address given above.

## Grading

- The final grade will be based on each student’s individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including student’s personal desires or expectations about grades, will not be considered. Students should also not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There will be no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.

- No incomplete grades will be given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the students should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades will be computed according to the standard grading scheme in Canvas.

### Attendance and Participation

- **Attendance** is expected of all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in this course. (For more on the university's attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog).
- **Absences** from class will have adverse effect on the final grade. Students who miss nine (9) hours of instruction (unexcused)—comparable to missing three weeks of classes—will automatically receive a failing grade.
- Students are advised to take extensive notes in class, and to use them prudently in their preparation for the exams. The exams are primarily based on the classroom discussions, along with the readings.
- Coming late, leaving early, being inattentive, and other forms of disruptive behavior can be counted as unexcused absences.
- Students with exceptional participation performance may be awarded up to 3 bonus points (3% of the final grade). This bonus is entirely based on the instructor's discretion, and the final assessment will take into account both the quantity and quality of individual student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

### Quiz

- The quiz will include the readings for that and the previous week, so students should come to class prepared to be examined on them. Remember, the readings are not optional and they should be done in advance.
- Students who are late will not be able to take the quiz and will have to wait outside until it has ended. Be considerate of your fellow students and the professor.
- In most circumstances, there will be no make-up on the quiz.

### Exams

- No make-up exams will be given, except in documented instances of illness or other emergency, in which case the student must contact the instructor directly before the exam, if feasible, or as soon as possible.
- If any student has a valid reason to request rescheduling of an exam—such as observance of a religious holiday—he/she must contact the instructor in person and make suitable arrangements one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions will lead to a failing grade.

## Written Assignment

- The **written report and reflection** should be based on the three in-class presentations by UF faculty, with focus on the use of various methodologies and theories about religion in their research.
- The length of the written assignment should be around **1,000 words** (1,200 words max.), inclusive of notes and citations (if any).
- The written assignment must be submitted in MS Word format and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor name and title, date, and page numbers (at the bottom).
- The written assignments must be submitted digitally, via e-Learning, before the final deadline. The file name should include your surname, course abbreviation, and name of assignment; e.g.: smith-JS-report.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, at least a week before the final deadline.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their paper and ask for feedback/advice, but they have to do that in person during the office hours.

## Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to come to class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are very disruptive.
- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful, and abstain from disruptive behavior in the classroom that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g. sleeping or inappropriate computer use), or putting down others. Phones should also be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.
- It is hoped that there will be lively debates and informed discussions. While there is room for individual opinions and disagreements, they have to be expressed in ways that are appropriate for an academic setting.

## Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to come to office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials.
- The instructor will also be glad to discuss all relevant topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in class in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly and in person, preferably during office hours. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

## Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties.
- For more information, see the “Academic Honesty—Student Guide” brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).

## Disability

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made. The student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to quizzes and exams must be made at least one week in advance.

## Other Notices

- Registration in the course implies that each student enters a contractual agreement with the instructor, whereas he/she is accountable for fulfilling all course requirements and adhering to the course policies.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following all schedules and instructions contained in this syllabus, as well as any other instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).

