

# Introduction to Religion: What is Religion?

PAR 103

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Fall 2016, Online

**Instructor:** Andrew Coates

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## **Office Hours:**

Email Professor Coates if you have questions about the course.

## **Course Description:**

*What is religion?* The question might seem like it has an obvious answer. However, if we scratch below the surface, things quickly get complicated. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism seem like strong candidates to be considered religions. But what about new movements like Wicca or Scientology? Pushing even further, is it “religious” to conduct a séance? Is it “religious” to leave food or drink offerings at the graves of ancestors? Is wearing a head covering “religious” or “cultural” or both or neither or something in between? Does attending ComicCon in a Batman costume constitute a “religious” pilgrimage if you are *really* into Batman? Do students who paint their faces at college basketball games participate in “religious” devotion? Most importantly: *How do you know?*

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion. It looks at how some major scholars of the past century have asked and answered the question, “what is religion?” All of our sources made some important claim about what religion is, how religion works, or what religion’s role in society ought to be. We will explore how their approaches to religion teach us something important about the social, cultural, discursive, or psychological functions of religion at particular times and in particular places.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe various theoretical approaches to the study of religion
- Apply theoretical knowledge to the study of religious practices, history, and artifacts
- Evaluate approaches to the study of religion and articulate their own views on scholarly debates
- Write effective, concise analytical prose about sensitive topics

## **Course Expectations:**

This course is part of the religious studies curriculum at a state-funded, public institution. This course will teach you many different ways to think about religion in general. It will provide theoretical models for how a person might undertake the study of religions in

particular. In this course, we have certain expectations about how to study and discuss religions:

- 1) Our prime directive in this course is to *understand* and *explain* how people in the past understood the term “religion.” We will not impose our assumptions on them, but will try to understand them as products of their own time and place.
- 2) This course does not endorse a particular religion. We will treat all religious traditions and practitioners with equal respect. We will try to understand other people’s ideas about religion without imposing our own views on them.
- 3) We will use the same standards of argument and evidence to investigate all religious traditions. We will abide by the rules of courteous public discourse in our interactions with students, with the instructor, and with the course material.

## Course Modules

Each week of this course constitutes one “module.” Modules are available on blackboard, and contain the weekly assigned readings, course videos, and quizzes. Modules open on Friday at 5pm and remain open for one week, until the next Friday at 5pm. All quizzes are due by 5pm on Friday. (The only exception is week 7, which falls on the Friday of fall break. The readings and quizzes for weeks 7 and 8 are both due by 5pm on Friday, October 14.)

Each module of this course consists of three major activities:

- 1) First, students will **read** a primary source. This is a document from history (usually between 5-30 pages) that preserves the actual words of someone from the past. If you do not understand everything, read it again. Talk to your friends about it. All readings will be available on the course website.
- 2) Second, students will **watch a video** made by the instructor that gives an overview of the source’s historical context and presents some critical issues from the source. The video will discuss the significance of a particular theorist for the study of religion by situating their ideas in historical context.
- 3) Third, students will **take a quiz** based on the reading and video. DO NOT consult the internet when taking your quiz.

In addition to these weekly activities, this class includes a final writing assignment.

## Online Course Strategies and Suggested Schedule

Online classes are much harder than in-person courses because they require students to remain self-motivated and self-directing. Students are free to complete weekly assignments at their own pace. The following schedule is just a suggestion for how to manage your time:

Monday and Tuesday – Complete initial reading of primary text. Make notes and highlights with your observations.

Tuesday or Wednesday – Watch the week’s video. If necessary, re-read the primary text and make more notes.

Thursday – Take the quiz. Completing the quiz well in advance of the deadline will allow wiggle room for any technical problems that might arise.

Friday – Take the day off.

### **PROBLEMS WITH BLACKBOARD?**

Students should direct any concerns/questions about blackboard to the Technology Assistance Center, not Professor Coates.

Email: [tac@uncw.edu](mailto:tac@uncw.edu)

Phone: 910-962-4357

TAC recommends students use Mozilla Firefox as their browser for all online courses.

### **Late Assignments and Extensions**

Because this is a large online class with multiple simultaneous sections, extensions and make-up work will not be possible except in rare cases where extenuating circumstances have made it *impossible* for a student to complete an assignment.

Legitimate extenuating circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Documented medical emergencies
- Unexpected military deployments
- Travel due to death in the family
- Hospitalization
- Incapacitating accident
- Serious personal injury

Contact Professor Coates by email BEFORE the deadline or AS SOON AS POSSIBLE if you require an extension for such legitimate reasons. Professor Coates CANNOT help you if you wait until the end of the semester to claim you need an extension on an overdue assignment. Every extension is granted at the discretion of Professor Coates.

Work submitted late without approval from Professor Coates will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment. No exceptions.

The following circumstances DO NOT warrant an extension:

- Slow internet
- Trouble accessing the internet on the due date of an assignment (Friday)
- Power outage on the due date of an assignment
- Travel for leisure
- Having personal responsibilities outside this class, such as off-campus employment
- Forgetting the deadline
- Failing to read the syllabus
- Remembering the wrong deadline, ignoring the deadline, or being confused about the deadline
- Having several assignments for other courses due on the same day as an assignment in this class
- Being on academic probation and *really* needing a good grade

## **Standards of Conduct**

In this class, students are expected to do the following:

- 1) Students will access all required course content via the internet and complete assignments by the due dates listed in the syllabus. By enrolling in an online course, you acknowledge that you know how to take online classes and have an internet-connected computer that allows you to complete the requirements of this course. Your phone browser alone is probably not going to work.
- 2) Students will uphold standards of courteous professional correspondence in all emails with the instructor. "Dear Prof. Coates..." is the correct way to begin an email to the instructor of this course. Academic emails are not the same genre of writing as texts to your friends. The instructor reserves the right to ignore emails of a disrespectful, abusive, or unprofessional nature... or any email that starts with "hey."
- 3) Students will complete their own work independently. They are welcome to study together and discuss class material with others, but all quizzes and assignments must be a student's own original work. Plagiarism and cheating are punishable by strict penalties, including a grade of 0 on an assignment and/or expulsion from UNCW. Students are encouraged to consult the UNCW Code of Student Life, Section I for more information about university policies regarding plagiarism and cheating. Students can also find more information in the "Additional Information and Resources" section below.

Students can expect Professor Coates to do the following:

- 1) Professor Coates will make all required course content available when students need it. In the assigned readings and lecture videos, students will find all the necessary information for completion of assignments and tests. There will be no trick questions or tests of content you have not seen in this class.
- 2) Professor Coates will endeavor to provide fair, impartial grades that accurately reflect a student's comprehension of the course material and performance on assignments throughout the term. Students can usually expect grades of completed tests and assignments within two weeks of the date of submission.
- 3) Professor Coates will usually respond to professional emails within TWO business days. Emails received after 5pm or on weekends may not be answered immediately. He will conduct all email correspondence in a professional and courteous manner.

### **Assignments, Grades, and Evaluations:**

**Weekly Quizzes** – 72% of final grade (12 quizzes weighted equally)

You will be required to take weekly quizzes based on the assigned readings. Each quiz will have 5-25 questions. These will be multiple choice, true/false, multiple answer, fill-in-the-blank, and/or short answer. The quizzes will be based *entirely* on the assigned readings and video lectures. DO NOT CONSULT WIKIPEDIA, ONLINE ARTICLES, OR ANY OTHER OUTSIDE SOURCES. Using sources other than your notes from the lectures and the assigned readings is cheating. Your lowest quiz grade will not count toward your final grade

**Final Writing Assignment** – 28% of final grade, due December 2 by 11:59pm.

*Theory Application Assignment.* This assignment requires you visit a Buddhist monastery, a Hindu temple, Jewish synagogue, Christian church, or Muslim mosque. You may choose which you will visit and when you will visit, but it is up to you to find out how this community expects visitors to behave, when visitors are welcome, etc. PLAN AHEAD. You cannot do this the day the paper is due. You must choose to visit the service of a tradition with which you not are already familiar (e.g. if you grew up Jewish, you should attend the Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist service). After your visit, you will write a paper of 700-850 words in which you apply the theoretical texts we have read in this course to an analysis of the religious service you visited. See the "Theory Application Assignment" handout on BlackBoard for more information. DO NOT CONSULT WIKIPEDIA, ONLINE ARTICLES, OR ANY OTHER OUTSIDE SOURCES. This assignment is asking for a very *specific* application of theory to your observations of a *specific* religious service.

## **Grading Scale**

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 88-89

B = 83-87

B- = 80-82

C+ = 78-79

C = 73-77

C- = 70-72

D+ = 68-69

D = 65-67

F = 0-64

## **Schedule of Topics**

Week 1 – Key concept: **Belief I**

Reading: David Morgan, “The Matter of Belief,” from *Religion and Material Culture* (2010)

Week 2 – Key concept: **Capitalism**

Reading: Selections from Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844) and *Capital* (1867)

Week 3 – Key concept: **Belief II**

Reading: Selections from E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871)

Week 4 – Key concept: **Society**

Reading: Selections from Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)

Week 5 – Key concept: **Experience**

Reading: Selections from William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1920)

Week 6 – Key concept: **Sacred**

Reading: Selections from Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane* (1957)

Week 7 – Key concept: **Civil Religion**

Reading: Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (1967)

Week 8 – Key concept: **“Religion”**

Reading: J.Z. Smith, *Religion, Religions, Religious* (1998)

Week 9 – Key concept: **Symbol**

Reading: Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1993)

Week 10 – Key concept: **Power**

Reading: Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993)

Week 11 – Key concept: **Popular Culture**

Reading: David Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, The Fetish of Coca-Cola, The Potlatch of Rock ‘n’ Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture” (1996)

Week 12 – Key concept: **Relationship**

Reading: Selections from Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005)

Week 13 – Key concept: **Violence**

Reading: Selections from Kelly J. Baker, *The Gospel According to the Klan* (2011)

## **Course Calendar**

Aug 17 – Class begins. Watch introduction video and take introduction quiz before Aug 26 at

5pm

Aug 19 – Week 1 content opens at 5pm

Aug 26 – Week 1 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 2 content opens

Sept 2 – Week 2 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 3 content opens

Sept 9 - Week 3 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 4 content opens

Sept 16 - Week 4 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 5 content opens

Sept 23 - Week 5 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 6 content opens

Sept 30 - Week 6 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 7 content opens

Oct 7 - Week 8 content opens

Oct 14 - Weeks 7 & 8 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 9 content opens

Oct 21 - Week 9 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 10 content opens

Oct 28 - Week 10 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 11 content opens

Nov 4 - Week 11 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 12 content opens

Nov 11 - Week 12 readings and quiz due at 5pm; Week 13 content opens

Nov 18 – Week 13 readings and quiz due at 5pm

Dec 2 – FINAL Writing Assignment DUE by 11:59pm

### **Additional Information and Resources:**

#### **The University Learning Center (ULC)**

DePaolo Hall 1056 & 1003, first floor

910.962.7857

[www.uncw.edu/ulc](http://www.uncw.edu/ulc)

**The ULC's Mission:** To help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education. ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following: Learning Services, Math Services, Public Speaking Services, Study Sessions, Supplemental Instruction, and Writing Services.

#### **ULC Office Hours (May vary):**

Sunday 2pm – 9pm;

Monday – Thursday 8am – 9pm;

Friday 8am – 5pm.

#### **Make an appointment at the ULC online:**

<http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/appointmentinstructions.html>

**Learning Services:** Provides content tutoring for most University Studies classes. At Learning Services, qualified tutors are trained to work effectively with other UNCW students and support them in achieving their academic goals. This mission translates into a tutoring practice that integrates what to study with how to study, thereby fostering independent learning and developing skills that will transfer to other courses.

<http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/learning/index.html>.

**Writing Services:** All writers need readers, and the more readers you have while drafting a paper, the better your paper can become. Writing Services provides experienced peer readers for all UNCW students as they develop and improve their writing skills. Writing Services are not remedial, but designed for all student writers who want to improve their papers. Students can get help with their writing in three ways:

1. The Writing Center (DE1003) provides one-on-one writing consultations led by faculty recommended peer writing tutors who are trained to help students develop revision plans. Visit our website to schedule an appointment: <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/center.html>.



2. Students can also receive electronic response to their developing papers through our Online Writing & Learning (OWL) service. Visit our website for a variety of writing resources: handouts, guides, useful links, and the online consultation link:

<http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/owl.html>.

3. Students can drop-in at our Writing Lab (DE 1003) for help with quick questions about their developing papers. The Writing Lab is staffed with a writing tutor, and has a few computers and other writing resources for students. Check out the Writing Lab schedule here:

<http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/lab.html>.

### **UNCW's Statement on Academic Integrity**

All students enrolled at UNCW are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which is intended to help every member of the UNCW community appreciate the high value placed on academic integrity and the means that will be employed to ensure its preservation. Students are expected to perpetuate a campus culture in which each student does his or her own work while relying on appropriate resources for assistance. In such a climate, students enjoy a special trust that they are members of a unique community in which one's thoughts and words are attributed correctly and with proper ownership, and in which there is little need for systems to sanction those who cheat. As such, all UNCW students shall commit to the principles and spirit of the Honor Code by adhering to the following pledge:

*As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge.*

*I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.*

### **UNCW's Statement on Plagiarism**

Please be especially familiar with UNCW's position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

1. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them.
2. You give a presentation and use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other person's.
3. You get facts from your textbook or some other reference material and do not reference that material.
4. You copy and paste text from a web site without quotation and/or referencing the site or author.
5. You copy, paste, and change a few words of a classmate's assignment and turn it in as your own work.

### **UNCW's Statement on Services for Students with Disabilities**

Students with diagnosed disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please email me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking, please make sure I have the referral letter no less than three days before the test.

**UNCW's Statement Regarding Violence and Harassment.**

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW CARE at 962- 2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://www.uncw.edu/wsrc/crisis.html>.