
RELS 101 APPROACHES TO RELIGION: SPIRITS AND SPIRIT

Instructor: Lenny J. Lowe, Ph.D. Email:
lowelj@cofc.edu
Phone: 843-953-8033 (Office); 419-889-8749 (Cell)
Office Location: 4A Glebe 102
Office Hours: M-W-F 2pm – 3pm



Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to theoretical and methodological approaches to the academic study of religion. The course will take as its topical center of gravity the ideas of *excess*, *more than*, and *other than* that many religious cultures express through the idioms of Spirit or spirits. In each of three units, the course will use film, music, lectures, and weekly readings paired with in-class and online discussions. By the end of the semester, students will be able to demonstrate understanding of several theoretical approaches to the study of religion and corresponding methodologies as well as some familiarity with several religious traditions from around the world.

REQUIRED TEXTS

None for this course. All readings will be provided OAKS.

RECOMMENDED/SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006).

Donovan Shaeffer, *Religious Affects: Animality Evolution and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

SPECIFIC COURSE GOALS

- Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of at least two of the theoretical approaches to religion (e.g. thing-theory, gender-theory, crowd-theory, affect-theory).
- Students will be able to identify and describe methodological approaches that correspond to these theoretical approaches (e.g. historical-critical, textual-critical, critical-ethnographic).
- Students will demonstrate familiarity with beliefs, texts, objects and practices across three broad cultural-religious domains: East and Southeast Asian traditions, American Protestant traditions, and the traditions of the Black Atlantic.

- Students will be able to speak and write critically and thoughtfully about the notion of Spirit and spirits in religious traditions, connecting them to social, economic, and political realities.
- Students will demonstrate a critical-empathetic approach to encountering basic cultural and religious differences.

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

- 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture. (Evaluated through Writing Project #2)
- 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments. (Evaluated through Writing Project #2)

RELIGIOUS STUDIES STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

- 1) Students recognize and explain the major theoretical perspectives and key issues of debate in the academic study of religion. (Evaluated through Writing Project #1)

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The nature of our course requires participation, and participation requires your actual physical presence as much as is possible. To that end, I expect that you will be present and on time always. I will take attendance daily at the start of the class session, and students absent more than 6 times will be dropped from the course. In instances of extraordinary or emergency situations, please simply talk to as soon as you can about the situation and provide documentation if it is reasonable to do so.

ACCESSIBILITY

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of CofC. If any student requires assistance or academic accommodations for a disability, please contact me during office hours or by appointment as early as possible in the semester, and be sure to visit the Center for Disability Services to obtain proper documentation prior to our meeting. More information can be found at <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu>

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Religious observances will be accommodated in accordance with the Student Attendance Policy. Some care has been given to avoid obvious conflicts with prominent religious holidays. However, if you need to be absent for any given class for a specific observance please submit requests in writing to me by the end of the second week of the semester so that we can agree upon accommodations.

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON HONOR CODE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

If the instructor determines the student's actions are related to misunderstanding, it will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the X to be expunged. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others' exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance.

Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

YOU SHOULD:

- 1) Come to class regularly, on time, and prepared. Preparation means reading, *to the best of your ability and with strategy and attention*, all materials prior to the class meeting. Additionally, you should have thought critically about the materials and be ready with questions.
- 2) Put away all possible distractions including but not limited to: *cell phones, cell phones, cell phones, and cell phones*. Laptop computers will be provisionally permitted for taking notes, accessing readings, and saving trees.
- 3) Engage in discussion with classmates and professor in a way that is, affirmative, open, and above all, respectful. The classroom is a safe place to ask questions and express ideas, so never hesitate. However, words matter, and we are surrounded by differences.

So, think carefully before you speak, and cultivate a curious, thoughtful, respectful way of engaging in the classroom.

- 4) Turn assignments in on time. In extraordinary circumstances, please contact me in advance or as soon as possible.

I WILL:

- 1) Always be on time, prepared, and happy to see you.
- 2) Patient, empathetic, energetic, and interesting.
- 3) Concerned about your academic success and also your personal well-being and happiness.
- 4) Fair in my policies and respectful of your time and energy.
- 5) Available throughout the semester at most times of the day (notice...not the night, though maybe) to sit with you, listen to you, and help you with whatever you need.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Our course will utilize an alternative style of grading, commonly called “Specifications Grading.” In this model of grading, each assignment will come with clear “specifications.” If those specifications are met and if the assignment is turned in on time, then it is marked as **complete**. You will receive qualitative feedback, but you will NOT receive individual grades on assignments.

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of the number of complete and incomplete assignments. Our total list of assignments can be found below:

Writing Projects

- #1 – Letter Home
- #2 – Spirits Writ Large
- #3 – Reflection Paper

Discussion Threads

- 10 online semi-formal discussions.

Revisions

- 3 Revisions, one on each Project

Peer Reviews

- Peer Review (Project #1)
- Peer Review (Project #2)

The Grading Chart below is a guide for how to earn the final grade you desire:

FINAL GRADE EARNED	# of COMPLETE PROJECTS	# of COMPLETE DISCUSSIONS	# of PROJECT REVISIONS	# of COMPLETE QUIZZES
A (95%)	3 of 3	10 of 10	3 of 3	3 of 3
A -(90%)	3 of 3	10 of 10	2 of 3	3 of 3
B+ (88%)	3 of 3	10 of 10	1 of 3	3 of 3
B (85%)	3 of 3	10 of 10	0 of 3	3 of 3
B- (80%)	3 of 3	9 of 10	0 of 3	3 of 3
C+ (78%)	3 of 3	8 of 10	0 of 3	2 of 3
C (75%)	3 of 3	7 of 10	0 of 3	2 of 3
C- (70%)	3 of 3	6 of 10	0 of 3	2 of 3
D+ (68%)	3 of 3	5 of 10	0 of 3	1 of 3

D (65%)	2 of 3	5 of 10	0 of 3	1 of 3
D- (60%)	1 of 3	5 of 10	0 of 3	1 of 3
F	0 of 3	4 of 10	0 of 3	0 of 3



Charismata: Each student will receive 3 magical “Charismata” at the beginning of the course. Charismata can be redeemed to submit a) a late assignment for credit or b) a redo for an “incomplete” assignment. (Note: Charismata cannot be redeemed after the final class period, so plan accordingly).

Starting “B”: Each student will start with an 85% B, and you will only move up or down as assignments are completed (or not). Most of you will stay at this “B” for most of the semester, as you can only climb with revisions.

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: THEORY

Week 1 (August 22, 24)

Aug. 22: Introduction to the Course, Expectations, Assignments, and Grading Scheme

- In preparation, please have a hard or digital copy of the syllabus for reference. Ideally, examine the syllabus closely prior to our first meeting, and come prepared with questions.

Aug. 24: Un-defining “religion” and pondering “mixture”

- In preparation, please read “Religion, Religions, Religious” by J.Z. Smith (in OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #1 (DUE SUNDAY AUGUST 26 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 2 (August 27, 29, 31)

Aug. 27: Animism: Religion and Evolution

- Reading: Tylor, “Animism”, selections from *Primitive Culture* (OAKS)

Aug. 29: Religion as Social

- Lecture: Durkheim and the Idea of “Effervescence”

Aug. 31: Religion and Labor

- Reading: Mark, Karl, “Estranged Labour” (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #2 (Due Sunday, Sept. 2, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 3 (Sept. 3, 5, 7)

Sept. 3: Religion and Animality

- Reading: Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Ch. 1
- Watch and Respond: Scenes from “Grizzly Man”

Sept. 5: Humanity and Its Objects

- Read: Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Ch. 2
- Lecture: The Positing of the Object

Sept. 7: Spirits as Excess

- Planning for Project #1 (Letter Home)
- Assignment: Discussion #3 (Due Sunday, Sept. 9 by 11:59pm in OAKS)

Week 4 (Sept. 10, 12, 14)

Sept. 10: Religion as Performance

- Reading: Schechner, “What is Performance?” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Which You are You?

Sept. 12: From the Altar to the Stage and Back Again

- Lecture: Ritual and Twice Behaved Behavior

Sept. 14: Religion and Crowds

- Reading: Elias Canetti, “Crowds and Power” (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #4 (Due Sunday, Sept. 16, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 5 (Sept. 17, 19, 21)

UNIT #2: GHOSTS OF THE EAST

Sept. 17: “QUIZ” on Unit 1

- Quiz will be in class, and you cannot prepare for it. ;)

Sept. 19: Buddhisms

- No Reading
- Lecture: Introducing the Buddha

Sept. 21: Buddhisms Continued

- No Reading
- Assignment: Discussion #5 (Due Sunday, Sept. 23, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 6 (Sept. 24, 26, 28)

Sept 24: Making Space for Something in a Cosmology of Nothingness

- Reading: Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Sacrifice and Local Deities

Sept. 26: The Ancestral Dead

- Reading: DeCaroli, “Haunting the Buddha” (OAKS)
- Lecture: The Magical and the Haunted in Buddhism

Sept. 28: Pet Spirits. Why not?

- Reading: Ambros, “Vengeful Spirits of Loving Spiritual Companions?” (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #6 (Due Sunday, Sept. 30, 11:59pm)

Week 7 (Oct. 1, 3, 5)

UNIT #3 PROTESTANT GHOSTS

Oct. 1: “QUIZ” Unit 2

- In Class. You cannot prepare.

Oct. 3: Protestantism and the Enlightenment (or...Am I a Protestant?)

- No Reading
- Lecture: Introducing the Spirits of Progress

Oct. 5: Weber and the Spirit of Capitalism

- Reading: Weber, “The Spirit of Capitalism” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Welcome to the Iron Cage
- **Project #1 (Letter Home) DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59 on OAKS**

Week 8 (Oct. 8, 10, 12)

Oct. 8: Spirited Languages

- Reading: Luhrmann, “The Skill of Prayer” (OAKS)
- Lecture: So, are we talking about real spirits here?

Oct. 10: Feeling the Spirit

- Reading: Hinson, Chs. 1-3 (OAKS)
- Lecture: Spirit as a Pre-cognition

Oct. 12: Fighting Demons

- Reading: McCloud, “American Religion in an Era of Possessions” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Spiritual Warfare as Enchantment or Enlightenment?

Week 9 (Oct. 15, 17, 19)

UNIT #4 ZOMBIES, SAINTS, AND ANCESTORS

Oct. 15: “QUIZ” on Unit 3

- In Class. You can’t prepare. Stop trying.

Oct. 17: Workshop: Project #2

- Finding Spirits in Unexpected Places
- Writing a research paper
- Making a Plan

Oct. 19: Introducing the Black Atlantic

- Read: Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #7 (Due Sunday, Oct. 21 at 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 10 (Oct. 22, 24, 26)

Oct. 22: Hot and Cold/Ancestors and Gods

- Reading: Deren, “Les Morts, Les Mysteres, et les Marassa” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Re-narrating “God’s People”

Oct. 24: The Vodou Cosmos

- Reading: Desmangles, “The Faces of the Cosmic Gods” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Spirits and the Spirit

Oct. 26: Spiritual Warfare Gone Wild

- Read: Lowe, Ch. 2, *After God is Music* (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #8 (Due Sunday Oct. 28 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 10 (Oct. 29, 31, Nov. 2)

Oct. 29: Zonbis

- Reading: McAlister, “Mystical Work” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Footpaths to Highways: Genealogy of the Zombie

Oct. 31: The Cuban Dead

- Reading: Ochoa, “Kalunga, the Ambient Dead” (OAKS)
- Lecture: Who Are Your Dead?

Nov. 2: Cauldrons of the Dead

- Reading: Ochoa, “Little Corners” (OAKS)
 - No Assignment
-

Week 10 (Nov. 7, 9)

Nov. 7: FILM: “Divine Horsemen” (GUEST FACULTY)

Nov. 9: Peer Review Complete Draft of Creative Writing Project (In Class) (GUEST FACULTY)

- Assignment: Discussion #9 (Due Sunday, Nov. 11 by 11:59pm on OAKS)
-

Week 11 (Nov. 12, 14, 16)

Nov. 12 – NO CLASS

- **PROJECT #2 SPIRITS WRIT LARGE DUE TODAY, NOV. 12 by 11:59PM on OAKS**

Nov. 14: Frederick Nietzsche and Rare Types of Dead Things

- Reading: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, excerpts on OAKS
- Lecture and Discussion

Nov. 16: Matter Meets Force

- No Reading
 - Lecture: Analyzing Emerging Course Themes
-

Week 12 (Nov. 19)

Nov. 19: Make-Up/Flex Day

- Reading: TBD
-

Week 13 (Nov. 26, 28, 30)

PRESENTATIONS

Nov. 26: In Class: Informal Presentations of Project #2

Nov. 28: In Class: Informal Presentations of Project #2

Nov. 30: Course Evaluations

- **PROJECT #3 REFLECTION PAPER DUE TODAY BY 11:59PM on OAKS**
-

Week 14 (Dec. 3)

CONCLUSIONS

Dec. 3: Conclusions & Farewell (All revisions due on Project #3 by date of final exam TBD)