**College of Charleston**

**Department of Religious Studies**

**Spring 2016**

**RELS 210: THEORIES IN STUDY OF RELIGIONS**

**Instructor**: Dr. Todd LeVasseur

**Office**: ECTR 207E

**Office Hours**: Wednesdays 9am to 12pm, or by appointment

Email: [levasseurtj@cofc.edu](mailto:levasseurtj@cofc.edu) (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours)

Lectures: T/TR 9:25-10:40am

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Major or Minor)

**\*\*\***Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.\*\*\*

In announcing the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives (part of the State Department) at the White House, Secretary of State John Kerry expressed the following: “In fact, if I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that’s how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today.”

**Course Description and Instructional Format:** This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to some of the diverse ways of conceiving of the biosocial phenomenon of “religion.” The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, open class discussion, and small group discussion. The course is designed so that the student, by the end of the semester, has gained an appreciation and understanding of some of the varied ways the scholarly community has conceived of “religion” as a phenomenon, both past and present. This course is not a survey of various religions and their historical developments; rather, and importantly, it is a course about thinking about religion as an analytic category, and why such thinking matters.

**Course Goals and Objectives:** Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the academic study of religion, including a brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion.
2. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and often times contentious ways in which scholars have conceived of and theorized the category of religion.
3. To prepare students to succeed in 300-level classes in CofC’s RELS Department.

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to various theorists who have attempted to define, explain, interpret, and/or identify “religion.”
2. To offer students opportunities to cultivate intellectual acumen in using various theories of religion so students can analyze “religion” as a phenomenon from various theoretical perspectives.
3. To understand the various cultural, geopolitical, and academic contexts of various scholars of religion, and how these have shaped and informed various theories of religion, past and present.
4. To gain exposure to key animating dialogues/discussions/debates that have defined the academic study of religion, including but not limited to: the insider/outsider dilemma; hermeneutics of suspicion and epoché; critic vs. caretaker; colonial and postcolonial theories; queer theory; hybridity vs essentialism; reductionist vs. essentialist claims; naturalistic understandings; and cultural appropriation, amongst others.
5. To analyze how religions change over time, how, and why, and who has power in this process, and why this matters.
6. To be able to both understand the importance of asking, and of answering, the question “What is at stake?” with the study of religion.

This course satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, or valued in various expressions of human culture.
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments
   1. Both will be assessed on your movie review of *A Life Apart*, worth 8% of your grade.

**Required Texts:**

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for the day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand. Readings listed for the day are to be read by the beginning of class for that day, and ideally printed out to be brought to class.

1. Jeffrey Kripal *Comparing Religions* (2014)
2. Daniel Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (2009)
3. Bradley Herling *A Beginner’s Guide to the Study of Religion* (2015)
4. Craig Martin *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (2012)
5. Russell McCutcheon *Studying Religion* (2007)

These websites are helpful, and important, for the field of Religious Studies:

<http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/home/default.aspx> Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

[www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org) American Academy of Religion—this is the leading professional organization for religious studies professionals/scholars (>10,000 members and many sub-groups/areas of study: animals; ecology; queer theory; feminist studies; Hinduism; Islam; Buddhism; etc. etc.)

[www.sbl-site.org](http://www.sbl-site.org) Society of Biblical Literature—leading professional organization for those studying Biblical issues

[www.sssrweb.org](http://www.sssrweb.org) Society for the Scientific Study of Religion—use social scientific methods

These are informative blogs:

<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/> The Immanent Frame—Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere

<http://rel.as.ua.edu/blog/> Faculty of University of Alabama (McCutcheon), and student blogs

[www.religiondispatches.org](http://www.religiondispatches.org) Great clearinghouse from multiple leading scholars on many subjects

[www.usreligion.blogspot.com](http://www.usreligion.blogspot.com) Religion in American History—scholars who are “Americanists”

These are very helpful peer-reviewed academic journals that address theoretical and methodological issues in the study of religion: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion; Numen; History of Religions; Method & Theory in the Study of Religion; Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*

**Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:**

1) *Assignments:* Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. Class participation—this includes overall attendance, how well you engage the assigned readings, and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions and small group discussions. There may possibly be online OAKS discussions; group projects and presentations; reading quizzes; summaries of readings; and/or question prompts about the readings that count towards this aspect of your grade. This also includes possible reflection journals based on a prompt provided by the professor, which will become the basis of a discussion. No late work will be accepted on these assignments. Students who are exceptionally engaged and who exhibit mastery of course materials and a robust inquisitiveness about the course content may earn more than 100% for this part of the overall grade. **15% of grade.**
2. Movie review—you will be asked to review the movie *A Life Apart*, using one of two theorists we have read. <http://dvd.netflix.com/Movie/A_Life_Apart_Hasidism_in_America/70018988> or on reserve in Addlestone library.
   1. Hard copies of this assignment are due at the beginning of class on Friday, February 11th at 2pm; late papers will be marked down 1/3 grade for every 24 hours they are late from that point onward. **8% of grade.**
3. Tests—there will be two tests spread throughout the course. These are not cumulative, and will consist of fill in the blank, listing of key concepts, multiple choice, matching, short answer, and take home (mid-term) or in-class (final exam) essay questions. **22.5% each for 45%**. Study guides will be provided for each test.
4. Final paper—students will undertake a comparative site visit, and use two scholars to help analyze the site. Details will be covered in class. This paper will be “scaffolded.” **20% of grade**.
5. Reflection papers—students will offer 2 to 3 page reflections on:
   1. Lincoln’s theses **2% of grade.**
   2. Prothero/Orsi/et al exchange **5% of grade.**
   3. McCutcheon/Omer exchange **5% of grade.**
6. Extra Credit—there will be options for extra credit as the course develops. Most likely these will include watching movies and/or analyzing a current source of conflict over religion that is garnering media attention. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion and contain connections to what we have covered in class. Each activity is worth .5 points, and a student may earn a total of 2 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is at the beginning of class on April 21st. Any student who was present for the entirety of each class will receive .5 points.

2) *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are repeatedly more than 5 minutes late to class, you will begin to be counted as absent for that day, as tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Keep in mind that the instructor will not provide notes or discussion of class material that have already been covered; it is your responsibility to be present and to be to class on time. After 2 unexcused absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After your 4th unexcused absence, you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. An excused absence means that I receive an email from CofC’s Memo Office (Office of Student Affairs) saying your excuse was “documented;” if I receive an email (or no notice at all) saying your absence was “undocumented,” then it is unexcused. It is up to you to contact the Office of Student Affairs in order to find out what counts as a documented excuse. Please observe the totality of this attendance policy (keep in mind if you are sick, they pretty much require a Doctor’s note/evidence of visiting a doctor).

\*\*A valid, documented excuse *must be received* in order for a test to be made up; missed quizzes and reading summaries are not able to be made up or turned in late—you must be present, or must clear *in advance* with me that you will email your answers before class begins if you are unable to be in class.

3) *Common Courtesy*: As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices **must be turned off** during the whole class period.

4) *Honor Code:* On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating—this is especially true on the take-home reading quizzes, whereas if strong evidence appears that students collaborated, then all parties involved will automatically receive a “0” for that assignment.

5) *Accommodation for Disabilities:* To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cds/index.htm>

6) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

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: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

**Course Schedule**

Unit 1: Early Theorists of Religion

\*\*\*\*For this section, turn in at the beginning of each class, either typed or hand written, answers to the 5 questions from Pals pg. xvii for each theorist assigned\*\*\*\*

\*\*see OAKS document for specific pages/sections to read for each theorist\*\*

**Thrs 1/7** OAKS assignment ***1st!!!!!,*** then read Pals pgs. Xvii (“Religion” and “Theory” through beginning of “1. Defining Religion”)

**Tues 1/12** Tylor and Frazer (*Anthropology of Religion*): Pals chapter 1 selections from E.B. Tylor and Pals chapter 2 selections from James Frazer

**Thrs 1/14** finish Frazer and Tylor

**Tues 1/19** Pals chapter 5 selections from Marx (*Sociology of Religion*);

**Thrs 1/21** Pals chapter 4 selections from Durkheim (*Sociology of Religion*)

**Tues 1/26** Durkheim, continued; Kripal chapter 7

**Thrs 1/28** Pals chapter 3 selections from Freud (*Psychology of Religion*)

**Tues 2/2** Pals chapter 6 selections from William James and chapter 7 Rudolph Otto (*Psychology of Religion*)

**Thrs 2/4** Otto and James, continued; Kripal chapter 4

**Tues 2/9** Pals chapter 9 selections from Eliade (*Comparative History of Religion*)

**Thrs 2/11** class presentations

Movie Review Due Friday 2pm under door of Todd’s office

Unit 2: Situating “Religion” and the Study of Religion

**Tues 2/16** Kripal 1-76; summary of site visit 1 due

**Thrs 2/18**  Kripal 77-108; study guide to OAKS

**Tues 2/23** Herling 29-56; McCutcheon 22-39

**Thrs 2/25** Mid-Term

Unit 3: Contemporary Issues and Views

**Tues 3/1** Key terms: hermeneutics of suspicion; colonialism/postcolonial theory; bring McCutcheon and Herling to class to discuss key concepts; summary of site visit 2 due

**Thrs 3/3** Martin chapter 2 and 3

SPRING BREAK—go outside and have fun! Find an Axis Mundi!

**Tues 3/15** Martin chapters 5, 6, and 7

**Thrs 3/17** Martin chapter 8

**Tues 3/22** Contact-Boundary-Exchange and hybrids; Herling 136-139; OAKS: Hoerder

**Thrs 3/24** Appropriation; Herling 139-145; OAKS: Johnson “Wanting to be Indian”

**Fri 3/25: PAPER DUE**

**Tues 3/29** OAKS: Orsi---lived religion

**Thrs 3/31** Guest Lecture: Claudia Schippert, who will lecture on “Queering Religion;” Kripal pg. 321-331; Herling pgs. 128-136

Unit 4: “Insiders” talking to Insiders

**Tues 4/5** OAKS: J. Z. Smith

**Thrs 4/7** Guest Lecture: David Haberman, who will discuss the ethics of ethnography; possible short reading TBA by Dr. Haberman, posted to OAKS

**Tues 4/12** What is the role of the scholar? OAKS: Bruce Lincoln; Prothero and responses

\*Reflections on both due

**Thrs 4/14** No reading; begin *Kumare*; study guide for final exam on OAKS

**Tues 4/19** finish *Kumare*; OAKS: McCutcheon vs Omer

\*Reflection on McCutcheon vs. Omer due

**Thrs 4/21** OAKS: Naturalistic views and Biocultural Evolution

FINAL EXAM: see Registrar’s Office for calendar of exam times