FALL 2021

RELS 101 APPROACHES TO RELIGION: MAKE-BELIEVE & MAKING BELIEF IN RELIGION

Tuesdays/Thursdays 9:25 -10:40am
ECTR 103

Instructor: Lenny J. Lowe, Ph.D.
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419-889-8749 (Cell)
Office Location: 4A Glebe 102
Office Hours: Wed 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to theoretical and methodological approaches to the academic study of religion. The course takes as its gravitational center the concept of performance as a key approach to understanding religion and its role in the production of self, the social world, values, politics, and economy as well as its potential to introduce ruptures and changes to all of these. By the end of the course, you will have developed a more complex understanding of religion and will have learned several key methodological approaches to its study.

REQUIRED TEXTS


RECOMMENDED/SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

All other readings will be provided on OAKS.

**Specific Course Goals**

- Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of performance theory and its relevance to the study of religion.
- Students will be able to identify and describe methodological approaches that correspond to this approach (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 ritual and performance in relation to religion.
- Students will demonstrate a critical-empathetic approach to encountering 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 #1)

**RELS 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)

**Course Policies**

**Attendance & COVID:**

In this course, we make robust use of OAKS (our online course page) for things like readings, weekly discussion forums, quizzes, announcements, emails, etc. All of these constitute “participation” in this class. “Attendance,” however, is fully dependent upon your actual, physical, bodily presence in the classroom. Especially in a small course that centers on lots of critical dialogue, it is absolutely essential that you make every effort to be present. Our standard attendance policy is as follows:

- After **two** (2) unexcused absences, your attendance grade takes a deduction (which registers as a “level down” in our grading system”).
- After **six** (6) unexcused absences, you will be removed from the class, or, if after appropriate withdrawal date, you will receive a failing grade for the class.
- Excused absences will be granted for **significant illness, religious exemptions**,
extraordinary circumstances beyond your control.

- Examples: Sick with a fever, observance of an acknowledged religious holiday, you were robbed at gunpoint on the way to class, etc.
- Do your best to let me know in advance about your circumstances, and when possible provide evidence of the circumstances.

**Special note on COVID:**

*Unfortunately, we are still in a very complex pandemic situation. Our individual choices and “freedoms” are now (and have always been) entwined with the community in which we live. Therefore, it is necessary that we do some things to be good neighbors and to avoid the worst possible outcomes for our semester. I ask that you please wear a mask for your classmates and for me (and for my family at home, and my youngest children who are not old enough to have received the vaccine). If you can, then please become vaccinated. Beyond the noise of hyper-politics and under-formed invocations of “personal freedom,” human society has long known and insisted that life with others requires occasional sacrifice. Indeed, we have long valorized such sacrifices. Thankfully for us in this moment, the only sacrifices we have been asked to make for the greater good come down to a piece of cloth and a thoroughly-tested vaccine technology that effectively protects you and others. Small price. Please consider it.*

*If you become ill, do not hesitate to be tested. If you are COVID positive, symptomatic or not, you will be asked to quarantine, and I will make accommodations to allow your continued participation in class. These accommodations are not available to anyone else. Contact no longer requires quarantine. Thinking you “might have COVID” requires a COVID test to confirm but does not constitute an excused absence.*

*I am a thoroughly reasonable and generous person – sometimes to a fault. I ask that you, too, exercise reason and generosity.*

**Communication:**

I will work hard to help each of us to get to know one another, trust one another, and learn together. Here’s how we can communicate well:

- You should have a CofC email address linked to OAKS. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication. Make sure you check your email daily! Please include “RELS 101” in the subject line of all emails to me or classmates.
- I will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays—I don’t check email on weekends, so if you email me on a weekend your response will wait until Monday. Hence, the sooner you would like a response, the sooner you should write me.
- I will host open office hours once a week, on Mondays from 9:30am -12:30pm. Please feel free to stop by, or – if that time doesn’t work well – make an appointment!

**GENERAL POLICIES**

**Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.
Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of 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 XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent.

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](http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php).

Disability/Access Statements:
1. Any student eligible for and needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with the professor during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged.

2. The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.

3. This College abides by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see an administrator at the Center of Disability Services/SNAP, 843.953.1431 or me so that such accommodation may be arranged.

OAKS
OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

Recording of Classes (via ZOOM)
Class sessions may be recorded via both voice and video recording. By attending and remaining in this class, the student consents to being recorded. Recorded class sessions are for instructional use only and may not be shared with anyone who is not enrolled in the class.

Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction
If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

**Center for Student Learning:**
The Center for Student Learning’s (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at http://csl.cofc.edu or call (843) 953-5635.

**Mental & Physical Wellbeing:**
At the college, we take every students’ mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at http://counseling.cofc.edu or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

**Food & Housing Resources:**
Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php). Also, you can go to http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need. Please also consider reaching out to Professor ABC if you are comfortable in doing so.

**Inclusion:**
It is my aim, as part of our class commitments and my personal commitments as a member of society, to cultivate an inclusion classroom space, especially as regards an individual’s identity. The College of Charleston offers many resources for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff along with their allies:

- Preferred Name and Pronoun Information
- On Campus Gender Inclusive facilities
- Campus Resources
- College of Charleston Reporting Portals
- National Resources for Faculty & Staff
- GSEC Reports
RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student’s religious belief or any absence thereof.

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observances in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, like many other colleges and universities, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College.

The accommodation request imposes responsibilities and obligations on both the individual requesting the accommodation and the College. Examples of reasonable accommodations for student absences might include: rescheduling of an exam or giving a make-up exam for the student in question; altering the time of a student’s presentation; allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work or arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment dates. Regardless of any accommodation that may be granted, students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives, requirements and prerequisites as defined by the instructor and by the College.

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) Make every effort to eliminate distractions and engage in the class session with your full attention.
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 to either: sit with you, listen to you, or 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 based on the number of achievements you earn. Our total list of assignments can be found below:

Writing Projects
■ #1 – Letter Home Theorist Paper (+ Option to Revise)
■ #2 – Religion as Performance Paper (+Option to Revise)

Discussion Threads
■ 8 online semi-formal discussions (due Sunday night)

Reading Quizzes
■ 8 online quizzes (due Sunday night and covering reading material for the week)

ACHIEVEMENT CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINAL GRADE EARNED</th>
<th>InQUIZitive Achievement</th>
<th>Discussion Achievement</th>
<th>Theory Analysis Achievement</th>
<th>Synthetic Research Achievement</th>
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<tr>
<td>A (100%)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Lvl. 8</td>
<td>Lvl. 4</td>
<td>Lvl. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>D- (60%)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
TOKENS: Each student will receive 3 magical Tokens at the beginning of the course. Tokens can be redeemed to submit a) a late assignment for credit or b) a redo for an “incomplete” assignment. (Note: Tokens cannot be redeemed after the final class period, so plan accordingly. Also, tokens cannot be used to submit a late revision).

Starting “B+”: Each student will start with an 88% B+, and you will only move up or down as assignments are completed (or not) and achievement badges earned. Most of you will stay at this “B+” for most of the semester, as you can only climb with revisions.

COURSE SCHEDULE

MODULE 1: THEORY

Week 1 (August 24, 26)

- Aug. 24: 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.
  - Assignment: Introductions Thread (OAKS)
  - Assignment: Syllabus Quiz

- August 26: Un-defining Religion
  - Reading: Nongbri (1-24) in OAKS

DISCUSSION #1 (Sun)

Week 2 (Aug. 31, Sept. 2) Modern Religious Theory

Aug. 31: Religion IS, Religion DOES, Religion Identifies Something Else Entirely?
  - Lecture & Discussion: Essentialist and Functionalist Definitions of Religion

Sept. 2: Religion IS (Essentialist Theories)
  - Reading: Otto, selections from *The Idea of the Holy*; Review all materials on OAKS
Week 3 (Sept. 7, 9)

Sept. 7: Religion DOES (Functionalist Theories)
- Reading: Durkheim, selections from *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (OAKS)

Sept. 9: Functionalism Continued
- Reading: Marx, Karl, “Estranged Labour” (OAKS): Review all materials on OAKS

Week 4 (Sept. 14, 16)

Sept. 14: Religion is Crowd-Think
- Elias Canetti, “Crowds and Power” (OAKS)

Sept. 16: Religion is Intimacy Lost

Week 5 (Sept. 21, 23)

Sept. 21: Writing Assignment #1 Workshop
- In Class: Assignment #1 Specifications (OAKS)
- Group Brainstorm Exercise
- Handout: Exemplars

Sept. 23: Ritual Studies: Liminality and Communitas
- Reading: Victor Turner, *Ritual Process*, selections (OAKS)

Week 6 (Sept. 28, 30)

Sept. 28: Performance Studies
• Reading: Schechner, Chs. 1, 2

Sept. 30: Ritual and Play

• Reading: Schechner, Chs. 3-4

**WRITING #1 “LETTER HOME” DUE SUNDAY, OCT. 2**

MODULE 2: CASE STUDIES IN PERFORMANCE
BUDDHIST, PROTESTANT, AND AFRO-ATLANTIC RITUAL

Week 7 (Oct. 5, 7)

Oct. 5: Buddhism

• Introducing Buddhism: The Life and Teachings of the Buddha
• Reading: DeCaroli, “Coming to Terms,” in Haunting the Buddha (OAKS)

Oct. 7: Buddhist Ritual Performance

• Reading: Owens, “Blood and Boddhisattvas” (OAKS)  
  DISCUSSION #5 (Sun.)  
  Quiz #4 (Sun)

Week 8 (Oct. 12, 14)

Oct. 12: Protestantism and the Enlightenment (or…Am I a Protestant?)

• No Reading
• Lecture: Introducing the Spirits of Progress

Oct. 14: Capitalism and the Performance of Calling

• Reading: Weber, “The Spirit of Capitalism” (OAKS)
• Lecture: Welcome to the Iron Cage

Week 9 (Oct. 19, 21)

Oct. 18: NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

Oct. 21: Performing Presence in Protestantism

• Reading: Luhrmann, “Let’s Pretend”
Week 10 (Oct. 26, 28)

Oct. 26: Performing Sincerity
• Reading: Luhrmann, “Lord, Teach me to Pray” (OAKS)

Oct. 28: Performing Spontaneity
• Reading: Hinson, Chs. 1-3 from Fire in My Bones (OAKS)

DISCUSSION #6 (Sun.)
Quiz #5 (Sun)

Week 11 (Nov. 2, 4)

Nov. 2: Introducing the Black Atlantic

• No Reading
• Historical Context and the Afterlife of Slave Trade

Nov. 4 Hot and Cool in the Black Atlantic

• Reading:
  o Robert Farris Thompson, Chs. 1-2 in Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy (OAKS)

DISCUSSION #7 (Sun.)
Quiz #6 (Sun)
Week 12 (Nov. 9, 11)

Nov. 9: Vodou Cosmos
- Reading: Desmangles, “The Faces of the Cosmic Gods” (OAKS)

Nov. 11: Performing Divinity in Haitian Vodou
- Maya Deren, “The Trinity” (OAKS)

DISCUSSION #8 (Sun.)
Quiz #7 (Sun.)

Week 13 (Nov. 16, 18)

Nov. 10: Performing Violence and Trauma
- Reading:
  - Elizabeth McAlister, “Mystical Work” in Rara! (OAKS)

Nov. 12:
- Reading:
  - Maya Deren, “The Trinity” and “White Darkness,” in The Divine Horsemen (OAKS)
  - Schechner, Ch. 6 “Performing” (170-220)

Quiz #8 (Sun)

Week 14 (Nov. 23)

Nov. 23 Black Atlantic Ritual Performance
- Film: Maya Deren’s The Divine Horsemen (1954)

**WRITING #2 – RELIGION AS PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS DUE NOV. 24th**

Week 15 (Nov. 30, Dec. 2)

Nov. 30: Performance Studies and Implications for how we understand “religion”
- No reading

Dec. 2: Course Evals/Flex Day

**WRITING #2 REVISIONS DUE BY DEC. 6th**
Writing Projects:

Writing Project #1 – “Letter Home”

Prompt:

You are writing a letter home to a family member (your family member is NOT familiar with the academic study of religion, its terms or ideas, etc.). Your family member is curious about what you’ve been learning in our class. Choose one of the theorists we have studied in our first unit (Otto, Marx, Bataille, Canetti, Durkheim), and write a letter explaining that theorist’s thinking and how it impacts our understanding of what religion is and how we should study it.

Specifications: For a grade of “Complete”, be sure to adhere to the following specifications.

- Length: 1500 to 2000 words (approx. 3-4 pages)
- Genre: Written as a letter to a family member, i.e. using first person voice and in the tone and language appropriate for a family member
- Format: Word Document (.doc or .docx), 1 inch margins, 12 pt. Times or Times New Roman, Divided into paragraphs
- Contents:
  - Heading: Should contain Student Name, Date, Professor Name
  - Pages should be numbered in top right corner
  - Should contain a greeting, e.g. “Dear Aunt Suzie,”
  - Should contain a paragraph that introduces your family member to the theorist and to the study of religion
  - Should contain multiple paragraphs that analyze the writing of the theorist (with direct interaction with the text via direct or indirect quotes)
  - Should contain parenthetical citations of your source, e.g. (Bataille 18) or (Durkheim 234), etc.
  - Should contain a concluding paragraph or paragraphs that summarize why you think this theorist’s ideas are important and the implications it has for thinking about and studying religion.
- Quality Component:
  - Should contain both description/evidence (i.e. a discussion of what the theorist says) and analysis/implications (i.e. some reflection upon what you think the theorist means and why it is important).

Due Date: **Sunday, Oct. 3rd at 11:59pm** via Dropbox on our OAKS page.

Revision Due Date: **Two weeks from receipt of returned/graded paper**
Project #2:
Religion as Performance and Performance as Religion

Description:

Religion, religion everywhere! The theorists we have studied have undoubtedly expanded our vision of what constitutes “religion.” From sporting events to political marches, everywhere we turn, we begin to see the fuzzy outlines of religion. In our course, we have focused especially on ritual as a kind of “performance,” which has helped us to understand part of how religion “works” in the lives of communities.

In this paper, you will compare Evangelical prayer practices (see Luhrmann) and Haitian possession rituals (see Deren) using Schechner’s understanding of “performance studies.” In other words, how do Schechner’s ideas of “performance”, “ritual,” “play,” and “flow,” (or any other concept that you find illuminating and useful from our text) help us to see how these things that SEEM very different can be understood as RELATED practices?

Ask yourself some questions like this to help you get started:

- How does Schechner understand the relationship of ritual and performance?
- Do Evangelical prayer practices as we see them described and explained in Luhrmann’s text involve “performance” or “ritual” in some way? In what sense? What role does performance play cultivating and supporting more familiar parts of Evangelicalism like “belief” or “personal relationship with Jesus?”
- Does Haitian possession ritual involve “performance”? In what way? How do these performances work to support and cultivate Haitian Vodou?
- Does “performance” as an analytical approach help us to compare these two different cultural practices?
- How does that comparison impact how we understand “religion” more broadly?

Specifications:

- A complete essay will be between 1200 and 1500 words long, double spaced, 1-inch margins, Times or Times New Roman
- A complete essay will demonstrate an understanding of Schechner’s idea of “performance studies” as a theoretical approach to studying religious practices.
- A complete essay will minimally use classroom sources (Luhrmann and Deren) to describe and compare Evangelical prayer practices and Haitian possession practices as “performance.”
- A complete essay will demonstrate awareness of similarities and differences that emerge when comparing these different cultural contexts.
- A complete essay will draw some conclusions about “religion” as performance based on this comparison.
A complete essay will be appropriately organized (Introduction containing a clear thesis, body paragraphs that offer comparative analysis of these two cultural phenomena and thereby advances the thesis, and a clear conclusion).

A complete essay WILL INCLUDE PROPER CITATION for all direct and indirect quotes and an accompanying “Works Cited” page (not included in word count).

**Quality Component:**

- Level 1 Researcher: Essay demonstrates a clear understanding of “performance” based on Schechner’s articulation of “performance studies” and with analysis of Schechner’s text
- Level 2 Researcher : Essay offers excellent illustrative examples from both Haitian Vodou and Evangelicalism drawn from our texts or outside sources.
- Level 3: Essay demonstrates a clear sense of the broader implications of the insights developed in THIS essay from the broader study and understanding of religion.

**Revising any level of this essay results in a “level up” with Level 4 reserved for the highest achievement.**

How to Turn it in:

- This essay is due as a Word File (.doc or .docx) in dropbox on Nov. 24 by 11:59pm
- Revisions of this essay is due by the last day of regular classes.