

**REL 241, THEORY AND METHODOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION**  
**MEETS WF 10.10-11.30 IN FILENE 119**  
**DR. CATHERINE BURRIS, CBURRIS@SKIDMORE.EDU**  
**OFFICE: LADD 215, OFFICE HOURS TR 2.00-3.30 AND BY APPOINTMENT**

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed as an introduction to the theory and methodology of the study of religion. It will provide an overview of basic theoretical approaches to the study of religions, including the historical, sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, philosophical, and comparative. The changing and diverse nature of the field will be emphasized, and you will have the opportunity to encounter and utilize both classical and recent approaches to research in religious studies.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of the term, you will:

- have acquired a basic knowledge of the development of the field of religious studies;
- recognize the (very) wide range of topics and methods that fall under the umbrella of religious studies;
- understand the ways in which reliance on one or more of the classic and/or more recent approaches to the field colors and even shapes one's research;
- be able to write a college-level research project, including the formulation of a topic and thesis, acquisition and evaluation of sources, use and citation of sources, and presentation of findings in an oral format;
- be able to write an analytical essay based on critical reading of sources.

REQUIRED TEXTS, AVAILABLE AT THE BOOKSTORE:

- Frankfurter, Religion in Roman Egypt, 978-0691070544
- Ruffe; Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice..., 978-0807834756
- Pals, Eight Theories of Religion, 978-0195165708
- Stone, The Craft of Religious Studies, 978-0312238872
- Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 978-0226509891
- Smith, Relating Religion, 978-0226763873
- Turabian, A Manual for Writers, 7th ed, 978-0226823379

GRADING/POINTS, OUT OF 100 POSSIBLE:

|                        |                                                |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1st midterm essay exam | 10                                             |
| 2nd midterm essay exam | 15                                             |
| Final essay exam       | 20; note that this exam is cumulative          |
| Research topic         | expected; lack or inadequacy can cost 5 points |
| Draft thesis paragraph | expected; lack or inadequacy can cost 5 points |

|                           |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preliminary bibliography  | 5, but lack or inadequacy can cost 10 points                                                                  |
| Research paper            | 30; grammar/punctuation/spelling errors can cost 5<br>5 for footnote/bib form<br>10 for bibliographic quality |
| Final presentation        | 5; note that your presence and response to other students' presentations is part of your grade                |
| Participation/discussion  | 15                                                                                                            |
| Small essays if necessary | expected; lack or inadequacy can cost 2 pts/each                                                              |
| Dossier                   | expected; complete or partial lack costs up to 10 pts                                                         |

A 95-100

A- 90-94

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D 60-69

F 59 and below

Rounding policy: .49 and below rounded down, .51 and above rounded up; .5 rounded down if participation score is below 10, up if participation score is 10 or above.

#### POLICIES AND CLARIFICATIONS:

Assignments are due in both in hard copy AND as an MSWord file through Blackboard SafeAssign at the beginning of the class session for which they are listed or announced in class, and are late thereafter. Find a backup printer in case something happens to your primary. Anything over one page [you may print on both sides, and I hope you will] MUST be stapled or paperclipped. Do not EVER fold the corners together as an attempt to fasten. It makes me crazy and is unacceptable. As in, I will take off half a point, as I will for unfastened multiple-page assignments. Really. Anything turned in late will be marked down from the score you would have received for an on-time assignment; the number of letter grades lost depends upon how late it is.

I reserve the right to add in small essays based on the readings if it becomes apparent that some of you are not reading the material, in order to penalize those evildoers.

Your punctual attendance is expected, as is consistent preparation (reading and consideration of all assigned texts and prompts, if any). While we all have off days, and may be late, ill, or not fully prepared on a day or even two during the term, a tendency to be late, miss class, or be unprepared will adversely affect your grade. Your respectful, informed participation in class discussion is also expected. This does not mean that you must agree with everything everyone says, or understand everything

you read before class, or speak at length every class session. It does mean that you must address your classmates, and me, politely and refrain from explicit or implicit personal attacks, insults, or intimidations as we discuss various topics and traditions, some controversial. Sometimes, your participation will begin with admitting that you just didn't understand  $x$ , and a plea for clarification. This is absolutely fine. So long as you have read the material, put real effort into deciphering it and figuring out how it fits with what we're discussing, and [this is important] looked up the meanings of words you don't understand, honest confusion is not a bad thing, and the odds are that you are not alone in your bafflement. You should bear in mind that attempting to substitute our discussions and my lectures for reading will not only be obvious in class and cost you points, but will also leave you woefully unprepared for exams. Skipping class, or sleeping through it, and attempting to substitute reading for listening, participating, and taking notes, will have the same undesirable results.

Please do not speak just to exercise your vocal cords, or to attempt to impress, or to proselytize. This will not get you any points, but will just annoy me and the rest of the class. On the subject of annoying the rest of us: you may not, barring a special circumstance arising from a documented disability, use electronic devices in class. Every time you do so, you lose points. Big time. Don't set your devices to vibrate, or to ring in the supposedly too-high-for-fogies-to-hear tone. Turn them off/silence them and put them away when you walk into the room. There are two exceptions, one incredibly rare. First, each class period, I will ask one of you to silence your phone but keep it visible in case of text alerts through the campus emergency system. Second, if you are, for instance, someone's birthing coach, and waiting for the call that labor has begun, or you are on an organ transplant list and waiting to be beeped to come to the hospital, you should, of course, keep your phone on and handy. If something along those lines is going on, and you must be reachable, warn me before class.

You may reach me outside of class by coming to office hours, or by email. I promise to check email at least once every day that we meet as a class. Meaning, if I'm out sick, or snowed in, or it's the weekend/a holiday, I may check, but I may not. If something urgent has come up that requires you to miss class or whatever, a truly urgent situation will be just as convincing when you tell me after that fact, so stop worrying and deal with whatever it is. If you are confused about something that's coming due, you can and should check with your classmates to see if you just missed some key instruction/factoid if you don't hear from me as soon as you would like. 'You didn't respond to me in time' is never, ever, an acceptable excuse for failure to do an assignment, or for turning it in late.

Checking with your classmates is also your first, best, recourse when you must miss a class. I will not provide notes, or give you any lecture I gave in class in your absence. You are responsible, regardless of your presence, for everything covered in class,

including any changes to assignments/due dates, as well as for all of the assigned readings.

Finally, the dossier listed above is a notebook containing every written assignment you do for the course, including your exams. You must include not just a copy, but the marked-up copy you turned in and I returned. Do NOT include your class notes. The assignments must be in order, and must be bound/fastened into the notebook. I suggest a 1" three-ring binder. Pocket folders and binders that consist of a cover with a plastic slide over one edge are unacceptable. Do not bring your dossier to class until it is due at the end of the term. Do not carry it around or loan it out. I suggest keeping a backup file on your computer of everything you do, so that if your dog or roommate eats your dossier you can at least print those backups out and get partial credit for the dossier. All other assignments listed above will be discussed in more detail in class as their due dates approach.

SCHEDULE – as with all things, change is possible. Changes will be announced in class or, if class is not meeting for whatever reason, via email to the entire class. I will use your Skidmore email for these emails, as well as for emails to you alone; you should, therefore, check it regularly no matter how many other email accounts you may have.

Sept. W 5

F 7 Pals chs.1-2

W 12 Pals chs.3-4

F 14 Pals chs.5-6

W 19 Pals chs.7-8

F 21 Frankfurter pp.1-58

W 26 **YOM KIPPUR, NO CLASS**

F 28 Frankfurter ch.3, Turabian chs.1-3

Oct. W 3 Library instruction day, meet in ...; Frankfurter ch.5 and 7

F 5 First essay exam due; Stone pp.1-9

W 10 Research topic and preliminary bibliography due; Stone chs.2-4

F 12 Stone chs.9-11

W 17 Stone chs.13-15

F 19 Ruffle intro and ch.1

W 24 Ruffle chs.2-3, Turabian chs.4-6

F 26 **STUDY DAY, NO CLASS**

W 31 Draft thesis paragraph due; Ruffle chs.4-5

Nov. F 2 Second essay exam due; Smith ch.13

W 7 Smith chs.7,8, and 10; Turabian chs.7,9-10, 15-16

F 9 Smith chs.11 and 12

W 14 Smith chs.14 and 15

F 16 Research papers due; Masuzawa intro

W 21 **THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS**

F 23 **THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS**  
W 28 Masuzawa ch.1 and 2.2 (only this section of ch.2); Turabian chs.12-13  
F 30 Masuzawa chs.3 and 5  
Dec. W 5 Masuzawa ch.6 and 8.3 through end of ch.8  
F 7 Presentations  
W 12 Presentations

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED FOR 6.00-9.00 P.M. DECEMBER 18.