
RELIGION 103: RELIGION AND CULTURE

Instructor: Dr. Onishi

Office: Ladd Hall 213

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Time: TR 9:10-11:00

Skidmore College

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Through consideration of texts in a diversity of humanistic and social scientific disciplines, this course explores the nature, function, and meaning of religion in individual and collective experience. It also explores texts, practices, and symbols from a variety of world religions.

OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate why people “do” and do not “do” religion.
2. To explore how different religions have conceived the dilemma of human existence and what remedies, comforts, or guidelines they have offered.
3. Becoming familiar with the nature, meaning, and function of myth, ritual, symbol, and other categories used to study religion in an academic context.
4. To develop the ability to read and think critically.
5. To employ discussion and writing as a means of exploring and refining ideas, and to express those ideas in effective prose.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Midterm: 25%
2. Response Journal: 15%
3. Site Visit Report: 25%
4. Analysis Paper: 25%
5. Attendance/Participation = 10% total

BOOKS TO PURCHASE

Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*

Jeff Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture.*

Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ.*

THE LEFTOVERS

We are going to use the HBO series *The Leftovers* as a way to explore the core question of our course:

Why do people do (or do not) religion?

The core premise of the show as described by IMDB: “Three years after the simultaneous disappearance of 2% of the global population, a group of people from Mapleton, New York struggle to continue their lives while they cope with loss and the tragedy of the unexplained nature of the event.”

Why are we using this series to explore why or why not people do religion?

The central conflict in *The Leftovers* is the unexplainable disappearance of tens of millions of people in an event called “the Departure,” which resonates with various religious traditions’ visions of the end of the world. This event causes some of the show’s characters to turn toward religion as a means of theodicy, community formation, wish-fulfillment, and dividing the world into sacred and profane. It causes others to view religion as illusionary, harmful, and alienating.

In the first part of the course, our goal will be to relate the theories of religion we study to the show in order to see how they are played out in various ways by its major characters, themes, and symbols.

SCHEDULE

9/8: Introduction: *What is religion? Why do people do it?*

9/13: Durkheim: Pals, Chapter 3/ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

Leftovers.S1.Ep1 and 2.

9/15: Weber, Pals, Chapter 5

Leftovers.S1.Ep3 and 4.

9/20: Weber: Theodicy

Leftovers.S1.Ep5 and 6.

9/22: Freud: Pals, Chapter 2 and *The Future of an Illusion*

Leftovers.S1.Ep7 and 8.

9/27: Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*

Leftovers.S1.Ep9 and 10.

9/29: Eliade, Pals + *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

Leftovers.S2.Ep1.and 2

10/04: **NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE**

10/06: Gender, Women, and Religion

Leftovers S2.Ep 3-5

10/11: **NO CLASS: Yom Kippur**

10/13: Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*

Leftovers.S2.Ep6-8.

[http://www.thewrap.com/emmy-contenders-the-leftovers-stars-talk-about-rare-chance-to-portray-female-
rage/](http://www.thewrap.com/emmy-contenders-the-leftovers-stars-talk-about-rare-chance-to-portray-female-
rage/)

10/18: Review for Midterm

Leftovers.S2. Ep9. and10.

10/20 **Midterm**

10/25: Christianity: Matthew 1-28

10/27: Christianity: Peter, Paul, and the Early Community: Acts, Romans, Galatians

11/1: Christianity: The Apocalypse: II Thessalonians and Revelation / Knoll, *Turning Points*, Chapters 1 and 2

11/3: Henry Goldschmidt, "Introduction: Race, Nation, and Religion," / *Color of Christ*, Chapter 1

11/8: Christianity: *Color of Christ*, Chapters 2 and 3

11/10: Christianity: *Color of Christ*, Chapters 4 and 5

11/15: Christianity: *Color of Christ*, Chapters 6 and 8

11/17: Buddhism: Teachings of the Buddha and Gethin Chapter 1

11/22: No Class: Instructor at AAR Conference

Visitation Report Due on Blackboard

11/24: THANKSGIVING

11/29: Buddhism: Teachings of the Buddha and Gethin, Chapter 3

12/1: Buddhism: Gethin, Chapters 5 and 6

12/6: Pals, Chapter 2: Marx: (Religion as expression of or protection from alienation and suffering?) / Harvey, Chapter 5

12/8: *Mindful America*, Chapters 2 and 3/ Mindfulness Documentary

12/13: *Mindful America*, Chapters 4 and 5

ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend all classes. Attendance is constituted by more than your mere presence in the classroom. Teaching and learning at Skidmore is characterized by close readings of difficult texts and close learning with colleagues. Thus, you cannot participate in our class if you have not properly prepared for it. Attendance is counted when one is physically present, has completed the assigned readings and other tasks for the colloquium, and is ready to discuss, argue, and dialogue with his/her peers and instructor about them. Anything less than this will be considered an absence. If you are not prepared to participate in the discussion, I may ask you to leave.

If you are absent for any reason, I expect you to notify me. I will take every absence into consideration when it comes to calculating your final grade in the course.

PLAGIARISM:

All cases of suspected plagiarism will be taken to the Honor Council for official investigation. The consequences for any student found guilty of plagiarism range from suspension to expulsion.

The following summary will help you think about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it:

See: www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism:

“WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?”

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

ACCORDING TO THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER ONLINE DICTIONARY, TO "PLAGIARIZE" MEANS

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

BUT CAN WORDS AND IDEAS REALLY BE STOLEN?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING ARE CONSIDERED PLAGIARISM:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)
- Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source is usually enough to prevent plagiarism. See our section on [citation](#) for more information on how to cite sources properly.”

LATE WORK

Late work will not be accepted without an instructor-approved extension, which will be granted in cases involving documented illness, family emergencies, or other health-related issues.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Computers, tablets, and cellphones are not allowed in class for personal or academic use. If you have a documented need to use computers for note-taking purposes, please notify me ASAP.

TITLE IX STATEMENT

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sqbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

"If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.