



RELS 1: Introduction to Religious Study/Study of Religion

Sections: 8837 & 8705

Summer 2016

Canvas Course Site Address: <https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/16063>



Contact Information

Instructor: Sarah Whyllly

Classroom: On the Interwebs @ the Canvas hangout spot

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Office: Hoot.Me (in Canvas), the Canvas messaging system, email, phone or BigBlueButton (in Canvas)

Office Hours: F – 10 am – 12 pm & Mondays 6:00 pm – 8 pm; Also by appointment



Bat Assistants (yes, this is a Batman reference & these are our TA's):

Section 8837: Corwin Wiltshire: blackangel431@gmail.com

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Course Description

This course introduces the study of religion as a critical, academic discipline. It will explore the meaning, origins and function of religion, and illustrate these by drawing on myths, rituals, symbols, and beliefs from cultures all over the globe and through human history. The course will survey the evolution and content of various theories and methods in the study of religion, as well as career opportunities in the field.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Identify and explain various methods and theories used in explicating the meaning, origins, functions, and elements of religions.
2. Describe, compare and contrast corresponding elements of different kinds of religions from different parts of the world and different periods of history.
3. Demonstrate appreciation for the diversity of religious expression.

Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Distinguish among differing kinds of approaches to the study of religion
2. Identify the components of religious expression
3. Evaluate religious claims and explanations
4. Analyze the usefulness of definitions of religion
5. Recognize large-scale patterns in religious belief and practice
6. Organize various religions into taxonomies
7. Support or challenge descriptions of religion with evidence drawn from a wide diversity of traditions
8. Explain religious studies as a secular as well as a sacred enterprise
9. Describe the human diversity reflected in religious phenomena, including expressions and contributions by people ancient and modern, Western and non-Western, literate and oral, and the place and perspectives of women

Course Components:

****This course is going to be run in a gamified format with elements of a multiplayer role-playing game. I will explain to all of you what this means as we progress but essentially we will be treating the work and activities of the class as part of a giant role-playing game. If you don't know what this is, please don't let that scare you, I am very patient and I guarantee we will have a lot of fun together.****

Course Site: This is a Canvas course conducted online. Make sure you understand how to access the site for this course. We will go over some of the details of Canvas in class meetings and there will be tutorials posted to help you along. I will post any announcements for class on Canvas, and it should be checked at least 3-5 times a week.

XP – Experience points or, in other classes, points.

PvP – Player versus Player; Competing against your classmates for experience points.

PvE – Player versus environment; Competing against the limits of your own knowledge; Blogging, quizzes, short writing assignments.

Guilds – Groups; I will be organizing you all into guilds based on some information I am hoping to get from you via a short survey. Once in a guild, you will be responsible for working with your guild-mates on activities requiring this. Because this is an online class, web meetings, email, Skype, etc. are all excellent ways to communicate. You will need a name for your guild so this will be your first collective decision to make!

RPG – Role-playing game

****Points for the course will be translated into XP or experience points.****

Grading Explanation:

The student will, by doing the assigned work for the course, accumulate points which will determine the final grade.

Your grade will be based on XP you earn divided by the total number of XP points from required assignments for the course.

As this is a three unit, UC transferrable course, the student is expected to do 6 hours of homework every week (2 hours outside class for every one hour inside class is the legal definition of a unit in a lecture class.

Assessment of Learning:

There will be several avenues of learning in the course. They are as follows:

Attendance Activities and Participation: You are expected to attend class regularly (be active on our course site) and attendance is monitored via login and activity on the Canvas site. Participation and presence for class discussion, lectures, and guild work is a significant portion of your grade for this class. You are expected to participate in class. This includes being prepared to speak about the reading, asking me to clarify what you do not understand, playing games, interacting in guilds, competing for points, and responding to comments made by other students in lectures and during discussion. You are also expected to treat all of your classmates with respect during class discussions.

Reading: Most of the comprehension of the learning you will do in this course will come from careful reading of assigned texts and class discussion. You will encounter a variety of writing styles in this class: philosophical essays, religious, and historical documents. You will also be analyzing works of literature and synthesizing materials written about culture with cultural products themselves. In the case of readings about mythology, you should learn to look for the author's thesis, arguments, and key terms. If you encounter a term you do not recognize you should attempt to look it up and then ask about it in class. You should come to class with ideas about what point the author is trying to convey and how this point relates to other materials we have covered in the course.

*****A reading schedule will be available each week on the Canvas site and all students are expected to have read the material listed as due for that day of the class*****

Essays: You will write one 1200 word essay. Written assignments will be graded on the basis of clear writing (including grammar and syntax), serious and original reflection on the topic, and successful integration of the terms, concepts, and ideas presented both in class and the readings. You will be expected to be able to use a formatting style for research in the essay such as MLA, APA, etc. There will be materials and guidance provided to help you accomplish this. Late work will receive a five-point deduction per day, beginning immediately after the deadline. This includes the weekend. The topics should be ones related to material covered in our course that interests you and will represent some independent research and analysis done on your part.

Essay Components: You will be responsible to produce various preparatory components of the essay throughout the semester. You will receive guidance in how to do this and these components will be due at various times throughout the semester.

Short Writing Assignments: These will be geared toward helping you gain deeper understanding of the readings and why they are assigned. You will find that most of them have a practical applications aspect to them that is meant to help you understand how to put what you have learned to use.

Classwork and Homework Activities (This is how you earn XP):

Guild Work:

This is group work. You will be playing the role of a particular historical thinker who studied religion. Your task will be to play the role of that person as best you can. Learn as much as you can about your

particular thinker, their time period, and their personal lives. You will be given a topic to discuss with your guild-mates and you will conduct that discussion in your role.

Guild Dungeon Crawling: These take on the form of reading quizzes: Earn XP by defeating dungeons and other reading based activities throughout the semester. The total number of XP possible per crawl is 10 with possible extra credit awarded. **I have not yet decided upon the format and venue of the crawls but this will be coming soon. For my face-to-face classes it is Minecraft and it is really fun so expect the unexpected!**

Peer Review/Secret Ballot: This is an **extra credit opportunity**. Each guild will be given ballots that can be used to rate your fellow guild-mates. This activity can only help your grade, not hurt your grade. Each member of the guild will be given a secret ballot that they will use to rank the other members of the guild. **Here are the rankings: Guild Leader – 35 XP, Raid Leader – 25 XP, Solid Guild Crafter -15 XP, Needs Level-Up – 5 XP, and Waste of Rations – 0 XP. This will be conducted in Google Forms as a survey at the midterm.**

Solo Quests:

These are reading and writing activities done individually or with a partner. Most of the learning you will do in this course will come from careful reading of assigned texts and class discussion. You will encounter a variety of writing styles in this class: philosophical essays, religious, and historical documents. You will also be analyzing works of film, art, and literature and synthesizing materials written about culture with cultural products themselves. In the case of readings, you should learn to look for the author's thesis, arguments, and key terms. If you encounter a term you do not recognize you should attempt to look it up and then ask about it in class. You should come to class with ideas about what point the author is trying to convey and how this point relates to other materials we have covered in the course. There will be periodic reading exercises to ensure that everyone is doing the reading.

Solo Crafting - SSRP/Reading Comprehension Summary: Twice per week, I will ask you to submit a brief response to the readings for the day. In this paragraph, you should note a passage or sentence in that week's reading, and say something about why you'd want to talk about in class. Why do you think it is significant, or why do you find it puzzling, or why do you want to praise it or curse it? **You will need to include the title of the reading at the top and a page number as a reference from the reading so we can refer to it.** Think about these as super-short response papers (SSRPs). **These will be graded on a 25 XP basis. One of these will be due per week and you may pick any one of the assigned readings to complete this on.**

Solo Crafting - Blogs: You will need to keep a blog for this class. This is a creative exercise. The

posts for your blog can be about anything related to what we are learning in class. The post needs to be at least **2-3 full paragraphs and discuss something related to what we are learning/have learned** and something that you found interesting, frustrating, unbelievable, etc. that relates to your own life and interests. **Each blog post is worth 25 XP and these are due weekly.**

Solo Crafting – PvP Battles or PvE Interactions: Player vs. Player interactions. This means a one-on-one competition with someone else in the class competing for points. There are various ways we will accomplish this which we will explore throughout the semester, usually involving a game or writing assignment based on the course material and/or films and media we will be covering in the course. I will also award points to people for those who answer questions for me in lectures or discussion boards. **Each one of these will have a total of 20 XP for students to earn max.**

Solo Crafting – Ritual Exploration: This is also a partner activity. You will choose a religious ritual to present on with your partner. You will be teaming up with another classmate at random to choose a ritual from a particular religious tradition and discuss it. You will make a presentation on it that I will post in Canvas for your classmates to view. I will give you the particular of the assignment in the General Course overview Module in Canvas. **These are worth 50 XP.**

Raid Mode:

Boss Battle - Final Project: I will require the submission of a detailed outline explaining what your project is and how it relates to the material/subject matter of the class by the midterm date for the course. You will need to be able to discuss your project in presentation style and relate it to some aspect of the history we will discuss. You will need to provide me with an annotated bibliography using source material to fill in the details of how your project is situated in a historical and religious context related to the class. I will also need you to submit a draft of the project so I can see your project's development at least 3 weeks before it is due. **This will count for 150 XP in total with the annotated bibliography worth an additional 10 XP and the draft worth an additional 10 XP for a total of 170 XP for the project.**

Grading:

- SSRPs: 25 XP each 2x weekly
- Blog Posts: 25 XP each 1x weekly
- Guild Work: 25-50 XP each
- Dungeon Crawls: 10 XP each 1x weekly
- Various Components of Essay: 20 XP total
- PvP/PvE Battles: 20 XP max each
- 1200 Word Essay: 150 XP total
- Ritual Exploration: 50 XP 1x per semester
- Final Project (Boss Battle): 150 XP

Total XP Needed Out of a 1000 XP Ranking:

Level	XP	Letter Grade
Master Dragon Slayer	901-1000	A
Apprentice Dragon Slayer	801- 900	B
Dragon Stable Cleaner	701-800	C
Squirrel Tamer	601-700	D
Town Cryer	0-600	F

All assignments will be graded on a standard numerical scale available on our Canvas Course Site in the General Course Resources Folder

Class Materials:

All of your assigned readings will come from material available online although many of these are available in material print as well. The materials, in e-format, can be read on any device: Kindle, iPad, laptop, desktop; even most smartphones. I recommend purchasing the textbook through Amazon as it is very cheap and Amazon provides explicit instructions as to how to download the text. The following are required for purchase for this course:

- **Scribd.com Membership (\$8.99 per month) – www.scribd.com**

There will be other materials required for reading during the course, however, these will be available as ebooks through the SRJC Library and posted, by me, on our Course Site. Please ensure that you are familiar with how to access and read ebooks through the SRJC Library website. This can be done either on or off-campus.

Academic Freedom and Honor:

Teaching in the humanities is a very tricky business. I, or a student, may call something a “myth” that someone in the class believes is factually true. Some people’s beliefs may be offended or even directly refuted during this class.

Below are some principles that are intended to govern the discussion. These are important given we are in a diverse, pluralistic and secular institution (and society, according to the Constitution) and given that probably more people have been tortured and killed over religious beliefs than any other reason in the history of the world.

1. **Academic Freedom.** No opinion is taboo. No one in my class will ever be silenced on the basis of the content of an opinion they express. Grades will never be based on the content of one's opinion. Academic freedom is a core value; education (as opposed to indoctrination) cannot really happen without it. This applies equally to instructor and student.

2. **Respect for Diversity.** While one may express any opinion in terms of its content, that freedom does not absolutely apply to the WAY something is said. I will not protect anyone from an offensive opinion. Indeed, one cannot simultaneously protect freedom of speech and freedom from offence. However, I will insist that opinions are expressed with respect for persons. You may argue against someone's beliefs in class, but you may not ridicule them or put them down as a person or judge them based on their membership in a particular group or classification, real or imagined.

3. **Academic rigor.** The basis of the class is that we engage in critical analysis of the religious ideas we study. It is not an "appreciation" class or a devotional study or spiritual exercise. Because of the analytical nature of the class, cherished beliefs might feel threatened regardless of the respectful intentions of the speaker. While no one will be silenced, or graded down because they express a particular opinion, everyone will be held accountable to give real evidence and valid arguments for their opinions. By argument I mean a series of reasons given to support a particular conclusion (belief). An argument is invalid if the reasons don't actually support the conclusion. I'll say more about this in class. By critical I mean the position that a claim, a belief, to be worthy of being accepted, must be made of good reasons and is subject to be judged as true/false, better/worse on the basis of the quality of the reasons given.

4. **Academic Integrity for Instructors.** It is my responsibility to distinguish personal conviction from professionally accepted views in the discipline and present data and information fairly and objectively. The student is urged to keep in mind from the get-go that "Professionally accepted views in the discipline" are not the same as "what I learned in Sunday school." In fact, those two things are usually very different.

5. **Academic Integrity for Students.** It is your responsibility to do your own, honest, research, study and writing, to back up what you claim with evidence and always cite- AND VERIFY when possible-- your sources. Cheating of any kind will not be tolerated. Copying another student's work or committing plagiarism will result in automatic zero for the assignment (first offense). Repeat offenders are subject to automatic F for the course or even expulsion.

Thank you to my colleague Eric Thompson for his hard work in developing these guidelines.

The final requirement for this course....have fun! This course should inspire learning, make you think critically, spark creativity in whatever your career path happens to be, and provide enjoyment!

Students with Disabilities:

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resources Department (SDRD). Please bring verification to class from the SDRD indicating your need and approval for academic accommodations. This should be done within the first week of class.

Please speak with me if you have any questions.

You can visit the Santa Rosa Disabilities Resources Department at the following link:

<http://online.santarosa.edu/presentation/?4928>

***The nature of myth is that it often concerns topics such as sex, violence (including rape), birth and/or death, amongst other things. We cannot avoid discussing them as they are a part of the history and themes of mythology. If you believe that any of these topics may be difficult for you, please make me aware of this ahead of time so that we can work together to make it as stress-free and instructive as possible.**