

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY --FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
Department of Religious Studies  
Theories of Religion

RELS 447 L01 – Winter 2010, Wednesdays 10:00 a.m.-12:50 p.m., SS 1332

(University of Calgary Policy about course outlines may be found from page 39 of the *University Calendar*)

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### **Required Texts**

Carl Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: A Selection of Critical Readings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003.

### **Course Website: Blackboard**

Our course web site will list important announcements, electronic readings, and downloadable documents

**Course Description:** This course provides a critical examination of various theories in the academic study of religion. In modern popular and scholarly usage, “religion” refers to a wide spectrum of meanings, reflecting problems of defining the term and the variety of scholarly approaches to religion, religions, and the religious. The general instructional goal of the course is to become familiar with the core issues and problems related to the study of religion and with the main theories that inform the modern scholarly study of religion. Among the questions we will ask and address are the following: What is religion? What is it about certain human practices, experiences, and beliefs that justifies the use of the adjective “religious” to set them apart? Why is it that only some but not other human beliefs and practices are thought to be religious? Does the study of religion require its own special-to-religion method(s) of study? Or can religious phenomena be studied using any one of the methods that are used to study any human-social phenomenon? What do people do with religion? What are the explanatory strengths and weaknesses of various theories of religion that have been developed in the history of studying human religiosity?

Students should note that in the course of this class we will make reference to different religious phenomena from different religious traditions, but this will be done for the purpose of using examples to think about conceptual and theoretical issues, not with the aim of providing a comprehensive introduction to any set of religious activities or to any of the so-called world religions. Students should note also that this course is based on the view that the study of religion in the university is not a quest for personal, social, or even ultimate meaning; it will not be treated as an object of a quest, nor as an object of belief or faith, nor as a verbal signifier of Truth or Untruth, but as an object of study like any other forms of human practices.

### Course Ethos

This course requires a high degree of self-motivation. Not only is analyzing explanatory theories for religious data a truly demanding intellectual task, for which a robust reading requirement is a necessary component, but we will examine a number of sources that will not be familiar to all. Furthermore, this is a seminar course. Rather than following the lecture format, we will have discussions, and for discussions to be substantive, disciplined, and thought-creating, seminar members must do the readings and attend the seminar with the intention to contribute to the course Conferences.

### Course Requirements and Weighting:

1. Attendance and Seminar Discussion Moderator [10%]
2. Four Short critical response essays due on the following dates: 2/3, 2/24, 3/17 and 4/7. [60% total; 15% each].
3. Research Paper worth 30% of the final course grade.

**\* There will NOT be a scheduled final examination in this course**

### Grading:

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. A letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme (standardized within the Department of Religious Studies):

A+	100-96	A	95-90	A-	89-85
B+	84-80	B	79-75	B-	74-70
C+	69-65	C	64-60	C-	59-55
D+	54-53	D	52-50	F	Under 50

### Course Requirements explained:

**1. Attendance and Seminar Discussion Moderator [10%]:** All attendees will be required to lead a seminar discussion (or maybe more than one, depending on our numbers). This entails a short presentation in which the discussion leader identifies the central themes brought out by the course readings and then proposes a series of questions for the class to consider. A schedule for presentations and conference session talking points will be determined in the first two weeks of the term.

**2. Four Short critical response essays due on the following dates:** 2/3, 2/24, 3/17 and 4/7. [60% total; 15% each]. These reports will serve as documentation of your presence and as evidence of your engagement with the reading material. The short essay guidelines and topics will be distributed in class.

**3. Research Paper worth 30%** of the final course grade, is due on Wednesday, April 15 at the beginning of class. The requirement is an essay reflecting detailed research and critical reflection on a specific topic pertaining to theory in the study of religion. **PAPER PARAMETERS AND GUIDELINES WILL BE DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS.**

**Recording of the course discussions** is not permitted, except by special permission (see Tape Recording of Lectures, *University of Calgary Calendar*).

**E-mail policy:** E-mails will be responded to within 24 hours during weekdays. I do not reply to email messages that are poorly written, unclear or disrespectful.

**Academic Honesty:** *Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contributions of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarisms on any assignments or examinations are regarded as extremely serious academic offenses. Students are advised to consult pp 49-52 of the University Calendar which provides a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with plagiarism, cheating, and other academic misconduct. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.*

**Academic Accommodation:** If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 403-220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor **two weeks** before the scheduled date. (DRC web address is: [http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/Others/DRC/.](http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/Others/DRC/))

**Gnosis:** Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: [gnosis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gnosis@ucalgary.ca) or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

**Tentative Reading and Discussion Schedule:** this outline is subject to change. It may be modified if it appears to the instructor that the material is not being adequately covered in the allotted time. The amount of time devoted to particular topics is contingent on the instructor's sense of what deserves greater emphasis as the course progresses. **Remember, to be aware of changes occurring in the schedule and to receive any crucial information regarding the course, regular attendance in class is necessary.** The instructor is not responsible for accommodating those with unexcused absences. In addition, important materials are regularly handed out during class. The instructor is not responsible for providing handouts at a later date for those with an unexcused absence from class. Keep in mind that all lectures and all handouts distributed in class constitute material that may appear on the final examination. Remember, too, that it is not possible for the instructor to explain all the material contained in the readings—it is up to students to be familiar with the readings regardless of the extent to which the assigned texts and reading are discussed in class.

### Tentative Reading and Discussion Schedule

<p>January 13</p>	<p>Introductory issues Positioning religion for non-religious study The Public Study of Religion The Problem of Definition</p>	<p>* <b>J.Z. Smith</b>, "Religion, Religions, Religious." <i>Relating Religion</i>, 179–196. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.  * <b>W. Braun</b>, "Religion," in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon(eds.), <i>Guide to the Study of Religion</i> (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 3-18. <b>[Blackboard]</b>  * <b>Olson, chapter 1</b></p>
<p>January 20</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 1  The Insider/Outsider Problem        The study of religion as a scholarly discipline</p>	<p>* McCutcheon, "Insides and Outsides" <b>[Blackboard]</b>  * Martin S. Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory: On Professing and Confessing in the Religious Studies Classroom," from <i>The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion</i> ed. by Russell McCutcheon, New York: Cassell 1999, pp. 274-286. <b>[Blackboard]</b>  * Jose Cabezon, "Identity and the Work of the Scholar of Religion" from <i>Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion</i> ed, by Jose Cabezon and Sheila Greeve Davaney. New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 43-59. <b>[Blackboard]</b>  Charlotte Allen, "Is Nothing Sacred? Casting out the Gods from Religious Studies," <i>Lingua Franca</i> 6/7 (1996), pp. 30-40.  * <b>Olson, chapter 2</b>  Russell T. McCutcheon, "More Than a Shapeless Beast: Lumbering through the Academy with the Study of Religion," from his <i>Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion</i>. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 3-20. <b>[Blackboard]</b></p>
<p>January 27</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 2 Quests for the origins of religion Phenomenology and the science of religion</p>	<p>* <b>Olson, chapter 3</b>  * <b>Olson, chapter 4</b>  * <b>L. Orye</b>, "To Be or Not to Be Scientific Is Not the Question: A Science Scholar's Challenge for the Study of Religion," <b>[Blackboard]</b></p>
<p>February 3</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 3 Anthropology of Religion</p>	<p><b>[First Short Critical Essay due]</b>  * <b>Olson, chapter 7</b></p>



<p>March 24</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 9 Biological and Ecological Approaches</p>	<p>*Olson, chapter 9 (excluding by Ruether and Williams)  * Daniel C. Dennett, "The Evolution of Religious Memes: Who B or What B Benefits?" MTSR 10 (1998): 115-28. [Blackboard]  *M. Kamppinen, "Evolutionary Theory and the Study of Religion," MTSR 11 (1999): 145-49. [Blackboard].</p>
<p>March 31</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 10: Cognition and Religion</p>	<p>* E. Thomas Lawson, "Cognition," in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (eds.), Guide to the Study of Religion (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 75-84. . [Blackboard].  *E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity: Making Space for a Cognitive Approach to Religious Phenomena," JAAR 61 (1993): 201-23. [Blackboard].  * Armin W. Geertz, "How Not to Do the Cognitive Science of Religion Today." MTSR 20 (2008): 7-21. [Blackboard]  * Harvey Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity: Towards a Cognitive Explanation of the Sociopolitical Dynamics of Religion, MTSR 14 (2002): 293-315. . [Blackboard]</p>
<p>April 7</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 11 Feminist Theory and Religion</p>	<p><b>[Fourth Short Critical Essay due]</b>  * Olson, chapter 10: Olson's introduction and selections by Gross and Young  * Randi Warne, "Gender," in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (eds.), Guide to the Study of Religion (London: Cassell, 2000), 140-54. . [Blackboard]</p>
<p>April 15</p>	<p>CONFERENCE 12: Poststructuralism/Postmodernism and Religion Epilogue</p>	<p>Sarup- Post-structuralism and Post-modernism, 129-160. [Blackboard]  # Olson, chapter 11: Olson's introduction and selections by Foucault, Harpham, and Derrida.</p>