

Theories and Methods in Religion & Theology (REL 200-31, Fall 2020)
[2:00pm - 3:15pm]

Instructor: Anthony Paul Smith, Ph.D.
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773-931-9570 (Please use WhatsApp)

Student hours: M 12:30-1:30pm , T 2:30-3:30, and by appointment. I am available to meet Monday through Friday. Please contact me through either my email (preferred) or cell number to arrange an appointment.



Rachel Whiteread, "House." Photograph © David Hoffman

Email and Phone Policy

If you need to contact me for any other reason than to arrange an appointment then *first check this syllabus first to see if your question is answered*. Also please be aware there I will only answer my email during business hours (9am-5pm) during the work week (M-F) so if you email me after 5pm you will not get a response until the following day and if on the weekend not until the new week begins. I will return your email or phone call within 48 hours. While I have provided my personal cell phone you should only use this number for emergencies. Make sure you regularly check the email account associated with your Canvas account as I will use it to communicate with you regarding changes in the class or cancellations.

Course Description

“I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

“People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.”

— Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

“‘Hortense why can't you just express these ideas more simply? Why do you have to use all these difficult words?’ And the answer is: that's the version of the fucking thought that I had and those are the words that mean what I am trying to say”

— Hortense J. Spillers, from a public talk

“If the theologian is committed to doing theology with the people, then the theologian must recognize that sometimes people do theology without underwear.”

— Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*

“I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.”

— bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

Course Description

You are asked a question like, “what is religion?” And you have, like everyone else, some kind of answer. It's something to do with belief in God. It's a moral system that holds people's lives together. It's a fantasy and a lie similar to the ones we tell children to make them behave. It's a real relationship with a personal God. In each of these examples there is a theory at work. Some theories are well-founded within their own internal logics, others are not. Some theories have methodologies that are rooted in rigorous questions and fearless exploration, others are not.

In REL 100: Religion Matters you were introduced to the tools for understanding the various religious traditions that are found in our world. You have come through that with new tools for engaging with religious difference and your own personal relationship to religion, whatever that relationship may be. In this course we are going to further hone and develop those skills by turning to the various theories and methods that have been proposed and developed in the history of the study of religion and theology. Some of those theories will be

from within religious traditions and others will stand outside of them. In each case we will ask after the method used to explore religion. We will also come to place within its own historical context the creation of the concept of religion and the field of study that has emerged around it.

This may sound abstract, because it is, but it is an abstraction that is intimate for all of us. Abstractions frame our understanding of the world everyday, they just are not often asked about. We let those abstractions rule and drive us largely without question. In this class you will be given the tools to examine and question those abstractions by writing about the theories and methods you study and in turn using theories and methods to consider an aspect of religion that is personally interesting, troubling, enlivening, infuriating, or any other host of emotional responses.

This course builds upon students' introductory exposure to religion and theology in REL 100: Religion Matters. Students survey various theories and methods and learn the intellectual scaffolding of the discipline. Theories and methods include but are not limited to anthropological, comparative, contextual, decolonial, ethical, ethnographical, hermeneutical, historical, literary, phenomenological, psychological, and systematic. This course is required for Religion and Theology majors and minors and completes the Expanded Literacies (ILO 4.2) requirement for majors.

Method of Learning

A mix of lecture and small group discussion. Students are expected to have read the assigned material, look up new words, and formulate questions regarding passages they find difficult to parse. Because of the current COVID19 crisis much of this work will take place online and the entire course may eventually be taken completely online. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns or questions.

Learning Outcomes

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to

- *Evaluate* issues, ideas, and events by analyzing relevant contexts, assumptions, and evidence within religion and theology (*assessed through reading journals and discussion leadership*).
- *Identify and explain* at least four central theories/methods in the disciplines of religion and/or theology through engagement with primary and secondary sources (*assessed through exposition papers or unessays*).
- *Apply* a theory and method to an issue in the discipline or our contemporary reality of their choosing (*final paper or project*).

Grade Summary

The grade scale is as follows: 100-95 = A, 94-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+, 86-84 = B, 83-80 = B-, 79-77 = C+, 76-74 = C, 73-70 = C-, 69-67 = D+, 66-60 = D, 59 and below = F

Assignment	Possible Points (400 overall)	Percentage of Overall Grade
1. Attendance/Participation	100 points	25%
2. Reading Journals (10)	50 points / 5 points each	12.5%
3. Exposition papers / or unessays (4)	100 points / 25 points each	25%
4. Discussion leadership	50 points	12.5%
5. Final Paper (2500 words)	100 points	25%

There will be ten reading journals, four exposition papers/or unessays, one instance of discussion leadership, and a final paper of 2500 words.

Attendance policy

Your attendance and participation is required for this course and makes up part of your overall grade. You have 100 points for attendance and participation. 25 points of this will be linked to an Opening Survey on Canvas. The other points will float around based upon your attendance. Attendance is required and if you miss more than three courses without contacting me with a reason you will lose all 75 points. If you miss more than 5 sessions without contacting me, either in face to face class or in our Zoom sessions, I reserve the right to give you a failing grade for the course. Attendance is necessary for all of us to gain from each other's perspective and insights. There is no educational experience without you, me, and the rest of the class.

Note this policy is not intended to penalize those who get ill during the semester with any illness. This includes those whose mental health sometimes becomes a problem. Contacting me immediately is the best thing to do if you get physically sick or if any mental health issues get in the way of attending and doing your work. I promise to be compassionate, and to work with you, within the bounds set by the university, to help get you back on track. A primary principle of my teaching philosophy is mutual respect, which means seeing you as a real human being and respecting when you make yourself vulnerable enough to share something that is, for many people, embarrassing or difficult.

Reading Journals

To help with your readings you will be required to write a reading journal, each of which will be turned in via Canvas. This journal is made up of 10 assignments and each assignment should be at least 250-words. These journals will be due on the dates shown below on the schedule. No late journals will be accepted, meaning that if you are not in class to turn in your journal you will receive no credit (barring serious illness or other emergencies). You are not graded on the content, unless it is clear that you have not read, and the only grades possible are "zero" (meaning no points) or "check" (meaning all possible points for that assignment). The purpose behind this journal is to get you to engage with the texts we are reading as we are reading them. Therefore your journal will take the form of a quote/note/question. You may also think of this as "they say/I say/question".

A quote is a passage from a text. A quote may be as long as a paragraph or as short as a word. The quote you select should strike you as significant for making sense of the text as a whole. You may feel like you “get” it, or you may feel utterly flummoxed by it. If you prefer to summarize instead of quote, you may do that as a “they say” summary.

A note is an observation or extended meditation about your selected quote. Notes may comment on style, language, tone or bias. A note may contextualize, explicate, and/or criticize. Your notes need not be “right,” but it ought to be thoughtful and probing. This is your “I say” response.

A question is a question that you’d like to discuss in class. By question I specially mean a textual question. That is, it is not the sort of biographical or historical question that might be adjudicated through outside research. It is rather a question about what something in the text means, does, or commits the author to.

Exposition papers

Four times during the semester you will have an exposition paper due. These papers are to be at least 750 words each (that is about three pages double-spaced). For this paper you will choose any of the authors we have read prior to the due date and you will identify and explain at the central theories and methods of that author. Each paper should show engagement with the primary text. You also may make use of secondary texts.

Should you decide that you prefer a different medium for expressing these ideas, you may propose that medium to me. You will need to do this via email at least a week before the assignment is due. You may decide to do a visual presentation, a video, and so on, but there must still be some form of engagement with the primary texts.

Discussion Leadership

During one zoom session you will be assigned with one or more partners to lead one aspect of the discussion. For at least fifteen of the scheduled minutes you will be tasked with coming up with discussion questions related to the reading and calling on or finding other ways to help us engage the texts together as a class. You will be randomly assigned a day during the first week of class.

Final paper

Your final paper will be akin to a research paper where you form an argument and bring together primary and secondary sources to support that argument, but with a small twist. You will be given a set of broad topics to choose from (an example might be “queerness and tradition” or “Black Power and the legacy of Christianity” and asked to both write an essay addressing that topic, but that includes your thinking through the relationship of that reality to the task of theory and methodological practices. The final paper prompts will be given to you around mid-term time (we have no major midterm project) and we will begin the process of thinking about the paper together then. Each student will have a one-on-one session with me to talk about their ideas prior to the end of semester and you will have until **November 25th to turn in the paper.**

Cell Phone, Laptop and Tablet Policy (only really applicable for in class sessions)

While I understand the addiction to smart phones, the material we are studying is very difficult and therefore requires your undivided attention. If you are caught using your phone during a lecture you will be given one warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework. *Please turn all cell phones off during the lecture.* If I can do it, so can you.

Laptops and tablets are acceptable in the class, but for note taking only. If you appear not to be paying attention because you're distracted by something non-class related on your laptop then I will ask you to read the last line of notes you have just written. If you can't then you will be given a warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework.

Canvas

Please make sure that you check the email attached to your Canvas profile. I will be sending emails to that address. All course documents, slides, and other helpful links will be available on the Canvas course page. Much of this semester's work will be done via Canvas because of the strains of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remarks on Lectures, Readings, Films, and Classroom Discussions

We are dealing with adult themes and a range of different belief systems in this class. You will be exposed to different ways of thinking both in the readings, the lectures, and discussions in class. At times you may find yourself offended by one or more of the ideas presented and when you are not offended a fellow classmate may well be. This is ok! While of course verbal or physical abuse (name calling, use of hate speech directed at another student, etc.) is strictly not tolerated, we have to give each other permission to be offensive (within the bounds of respectful discourse) and to be offended. By remaining in this course you are agreeing to have respectful conversations about a wide range of different beliefs which may sometimes become heated.

This goes especially for the films and clips we will watch in class. At times I have chosen material that may be offensive to some. Some films will be rated-R and some clips from TV shows will be rated TV-MA. By remaining enrolled in this class after the first session you are entering into a non-verbal agreement that you understand and accept you will be asked to watch these films and clips.

Course Content Note¹

At times this semester we will be discussing historical events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork.

¹ Adapted from Angus Johnston's work. See <https://studentactivism.net/2015/08/25/trigger-warnings-for-syllabi-a-how-to-one-year-along/> for more on course content notes/trigger warnings and the like.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

Notice Regarding the Recording of Lectures

Lectures remain the intellectual property of the instructor and as such students may not record them for dissemination. Students requiring accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act or with personal needs may record lectures, but must first discuss this with the instructor and the recordings must be used for personal use only. By remaining enrolled in this course each student understands and recognizes that any recordings of lectures are for personal use only and that if they record and disseminate them without permission they do so under risk of legal and financial penalty.

Required Texts

(All texts are available from the bookstore, though sometimes may be cheaper to buy them online. Please check to make sure you are buying the correct edition by using the ISBN provided. Note that Kindle versions are acceptable as long as they contain "real page numbers". I have indicated below if that is the case.)

The first two books are ones you need to get copies of, either through the bookstore or any other means. The "course reader" is a collection of PDF scans that are free and on the Canvas site already.

- *Cultural Approaches to Studying Religion: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, Sarah Bloesch and Meredith Minister, eds. NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. (Kindle version acceptable.) Abbreviated as **CASR**.
- *The Bloomsbury Reader in Cultural Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Sarah Bloesch and Meredith Minister, eds. NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. (Kindle version acceptable.) Abbreviated as **Reader**
- Course reader (found on Canvas under "Pages" tab and then "Course Reader" tab, file names are always the last names of the author)
 - o JZ Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"
 - o Friedrich Nietzsche, selections from *On the Genealogy of Morality*
 - o Karl Marx, selections from *The Marx-Engels Reader*
 - o Joshua Dubler, selections from *Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison*
 - o Marika Rose, "For Our Sins: Christianity, Complicity, and the Racialized Construction of Innocence"
 - o Paul Tillich, "What Faith Is"
 - o James Cone, selections from *God of the Oppressed*
 - o Linn Tonstad, selections from *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics*
 - o Friedrich Schleiermacher, selections from *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*

Outline of Course and Reading Schedule

Readings listed are to be read for that class period. If the reading is listed under September 14th, it is to be read prior to the September 14th session of class. The schedule and procedures for this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances; changes will be announced in class.

Currently the schedule is created with the plan that we may eventually be forced to go completely online due to the COVID19 emergency. If we are allowed to meet on September 8th as currently planned then when you see "Zoom Session" that will become "Face to Face Class" in College Hall 408. Given the uncertainty and virulence of this virus, I have planned the semester for far less contact than usual even if we are allowed to meet. So we will usually only be meeting once a week in person or on Zoom. The other days I expect you to be doing the work on your own so that when we are together our class sessions will be more impactful and intense.

Week 1

August 17th Introduction to the Course via Zoom
Opening Survey Due

August 19th Watch: Video lecture
 Read: Smith (on Canvas); CASR, Introduction
Reading Journal 1

Week 2

August 24th Read: Nietzsche (on Canvas)
Reading Journal 2

August 26th *Zoom session*

Week 3

August 31st Read: Douglas (in Reader); CASR ch. 1
Reading Journal 3

September 2nd *Zoom session*

Week 4

September 7th Read: Marx (on Canvas)

September 9th *Zoom session*
Exposition 1 Due

Week 5

September 14th Read: Doniger (in Reader); CASR ch. 3
Reading Journal 4

September 16th *Zoom session*

Week 6

September 21st Read: Tillich (on Canvas) and Dubler (on Canvas)
Reading Journal 5

September 23rd *Zoom session*

Week 7

September 28th	Read: Tribble (in Reader); CASR, ch. 1 Reading Journal 6
October 2nd	<i>Zoom session</i>
<i>Week 8</i>	
October 5th	Read: Mahmood (in Reader); CASR, ch. 10
October 7th	<i>Zoom session</i> Exposition 2 Due
<i>Week 9</i>	
October 12th	Read: Schleiermacher (on Canvas) Reading Journal 7
October 14th	<i>Zoom session</i>
<i>Week 10</i>	
October 19th	Read: Long (in Reader); CASR, ch. 6 Reading Journal 8
October 21st	<i>Zoom session</i>
<i>Week 11</i>	
October 26th	Read: Cone (on Canvas) and Rose (on Canvas)
October 28th	<i>Zoom session</i> Exposition 3 Due
<i>Week 12</i>	
November 2nd	Read: Anzaldúa (in Reader); CASR, ch. 8 Reading Journal 9
November 4th	<i>Zoom session</i>
<i>Week 13</i>	
November 9th	Read: Bynum (in Reader); CASR, ch. 7 Reading Journal 10
November 11th	<i>Zoom session</i>
<i>Week 14</i>	
November 16th	Read: Tonstad (on Canvas)
November 18th	<i>Zoom session</i> Exposition 4 Due

Finals week

November 25th

Final Paper Due

American Disability Act of 1990

La Salle University abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which mandates reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities. Rose Lee Pauline is the designated contact. Please call 215.951.1014 to speak with her or another representative. You will need to provide documentation of your disability if you seek accommodations, but the counselors are there to help.

Counseling Center and Alcohol and other Drug Counseling

If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, or just having a hard time adjusting to the new semester, please do not hesitate to contact the Counseling Center. They have a variety of resources, most of which are free to you as a student. They are located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1355).

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Counseling Center is also located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1357) or by emailing their staff <<http://studentaffairs.lasalle.edu/aodec/about/staff/>>. If you are struggling with alcohol or drug use please reach out to them.

Both are fully confidential.

Center for Academic Achievement

Students seeking tutoring support services (subject and writing tutoring, supplemental instruction, and FSGs), academic coaching, of disability accommodation services are encouraged to speak with the professionals at ARC. They are located in Lawrence Building Suite 409 and can be contacted via email at academicsupport@lasalle.edu.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide and every attempt is made to provide an accurate overview of the course. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the faculty member to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students. Changes to the syllabus will be made with advance notice.

Please see the Canvas page "University Policies and Resources" for other essential policies