

RST 100: Religious Quest for Meaning

Online

Professor: Dr. Mariam Youssef

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Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom

Course Description:

This course introduces the student to a variety of ways in which to understand religion. We will analyze common components and functions of religion to be able to see what religion is and how it works. We will consider the value and limits of religious pluralism, and debate particularism vs. universality, and exclusivism vs. inclusivism. We will also discuss issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and power, as these intersect with religion. Black, Queer, and Feminist theo/alogies will also be covered, as will shamanism and the religious use of drugs. Additionally, we will examine several world religions, not only to promote tolerance of the traditions of others but to understand the human dimension of religion. Focusing on relevancy to today's world and your lives, this course reflects "discipline-based inquiry." We will read sources critically, considering multiple interpretations. Students will also learn to analyze biases and assumptions found in the discourse (whether of one's own or others) and synthesize relevant sources towards making cohesive, purposeful, in-depth arguments.

Required Text:

Jeffrey J. Kripal. *Comparing Religions*. Found **FREE** as an e-book at our library at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csulb/reader.action?docID=1597992>.

Assignments

1. Reading Assignments: Assignments will be posted on Beachboard, asking you to respond to a prompt. In order to do the assignment properly, you will need to show full understanding of the reading. All assignments are to be typed and submitted on Beachboard. Please do not email me your assignments. They are to be in font no larger than 12 point, no smaller than 10 point, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and a single-spaced header. Put the assignment number as the title.
2. Discussion Posts: After watching our video for the week, you will be required to post a response to a prompt that I will give you, and to respond to two other students' posts. If you are paying attention and responding thoughtfully, this should be an easy way to boost your grade.
3. Projects: You will have 3 projects during this class that you will have to complete. These projects are your opportunity to do a bit of research and exploration beyond the topics in this class, and to demonstrate your ability to use the knowledge you gain in this class to move forward with independent research. For this class, you will conduct an interview with a friend or family member about their thoughts on religion, write a profile on an influential figure in religion, and analyze a religious ritual.

4. Midterm: Halfway through the term, you will complete an online midterm project to review the material we've covered so far. I will provide thorough instructions ahead of time.
5. Final exam: Your final will be a take-home, open-book/open-note exam.

Grade Breakdown

Reading Assignments	25%
Discussion Posts	20%
Projects	25%
Midterm	15%
Final	15%
TOTAL	100%

Expectations

1. Student Conduct: Students are expected to prepare themselves by doing the reading and all relevant assignments. You are also expected to maintain appropriate conduct during class. Most importantly, this means showing respect and encouragement to your fellow classmates.
2. Late/Makeup Work: Please try to turn in your assignments on time. I will accept reading assignments and will allow you to redo them for a higher grade if you wish, but any reading assignment you turn on late can receive no higher grade than a 75%. However, for all other assignments, including discussion posts, projects, midterms, and final exams, late and makeup work will not be accepted.
3. Academic Honesty: If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing on an assignment, you will receive a grade of zero on the assignment. Students who cheat or plagiarize repeatedly will face disciplinary action.
4. Special Accommodations: If you have a disability and would like to request an accommodation, please speak to me and I would be happy to accommodate you.

Course Schedule

Topic	Reading/Assignments and due dates
Introductions, Class Expectations	Discussion post due August 25
Studying Religion	Discussion post due August 27
What is religious studies?	Kripal pp. 3-16 Kripal pp. 89-94
Animism, polytheism, and monotheism	Discussion post due September 1 Reading Assignment #1 due September 3
Defining Religion	Kripal pp. 79-89 Discussion post due September 8 Reading Assignment #2 due September 10
Magic, Religion, and the Sacred	Kripal pp. 94-106 Kripal pp. 111-120 Discussion post due September 15 Reading Assignment #3 due September 17
Project 1: Religion Interview	Discussion post due September 24 Religion Interview due September 24
Myth and Ritual	Kripal pp. 120-139 Discussion post due September 29 Reading Assignment #4 due October 1
Pluralism Queer, Feminist, and Black Theologies	Kripal pp. 310-331 Discussion post due October 6 Reading Assignment #5 due October 8
Sex and Queer/Feminist Criticisms	Kripal pp. 178-205 Discussion post due October 13 Reading Assignment #6 due October 15
Midterm	Midterm due October 22
Drugs and Religion	Kripal p. 497 Kripal p. 56-69 Discussion post due October 27 Reading Assignment #7 due October 29
The Afterlife	Kripal pp. 272-296 Discussion post due November 3 Reading Assignment #8 due November 5
Project 2: Ritual Analysis	Discussion post due November 12 Ritual Analysis due November 12

Hinduism and Buddhism	Kripal pp. 33-39 Discussion post due November 17 Reading Assignment #9 due November 19
Project 3: Influential Religious Figure Profile	Discussion post due November 26 Influential Religious Figure Profile due November 26
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam	Kripal pp. 16-33 Discussion post due December 1 Reading Assignment #11 due December 3
Course Conclusion and Final Review	Discussion post due December 10
Final Exam	Final Exam due December 17 Last day to turn in any late reading assignments