

**Religion 840:501**  
**Theory and Method in the Study of Religion**  
**Fall 2017**

Professor Debra Scoggins Ballentine

[debra.ballentine@rutgers.edu](mailto:debra.ballentine@rutgers.edu)

Office hours: before our class meeting or by appointment

Office: Loree Building, room 132

Class Meeting: Wednesdays 12-3, Livingston Campus, Tillett Hall 127

Catalogue course description:

This course engages the more prominent theories that have emerged since the Enlightenment that have attempted to explain religious phenomena. These include models rooted in social, psychological, economic, political, orientalist, structuralist, and postmodern explanatory paradigms. The course also engages methodologies central to the field of Religious Studies stemming from these approaches.

Course goals:

In this seminar our primary aim is for you to gain a working knowledge of modern theories of religion that you will be able to use within your area of specialty within religious studies. We will discuss various ways that the category of religion has been conceived, and you will articulate your own definition of religion. By the end of this seminar, you will have an informed understanding of the academic study of religion, including its development, prominent theories, methodologies, and critiques thereof.

Required Books:

*Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon

*The Study of Religion, A Reader*, edited by John S. Harding and Hillary P. Rodrigues

Requirements:

20% Participation in class; You should attend class having prepared to participate in discussion based on your assigned readings. Be prepared to answer questions about various scholars' views and arguments as well as to pose thoughtful questions about the weekly topic.

20% Weekly Reading Summary Essays; These should be prepared to share during class.

10% Revised Reading Summary Essays; These should be compiled at end of semester, including revisions based on class discussion.

20% Project discussion and presentation; topic and outline due 11/29; draft due 12/6

30% Final Version of Term Paper ; Dec. 18, Final paper due. Your final research project should focus on one or more theories/scholars we have discussed and how this material impacts an area of your interest within religious studies.

**We will adhere to the University's Policy on Academic Integrity.**

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources-for-students/>

Provisional Schedule and Readings:

Week 1 - 9/6

Introduction to the Seminar

Reading: Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *MTSR* 8:225-27 (on Sakai); *The Study of Religion, A Reader* ch. 3 "Premises Concerning Religious Studies"; *Reader* ch. 39 "'Religion' and 'Religious Studies': No Difference At All"

Week 2 - 9/13

What is Religion? What was/is the Academic Study of Religion?

Reading: *Guide to the Study of Religion* ch. 1 "Religion," ch. 2 "Definition"; *Reader* ch. 1 "The Study of Religion in Historical Perspective"; *Guide* ch. 24 "Modernism," ch. 25 "Romanticism," ch. 26 "Postmodernism"

Week 3 - 9/20

By what methods do we describe religion? The cases of *purity* and *sacred*

Reading: *Guide* ch. 3 "Classification," ch. 4 "Comparison," ch. 5 "Interpretation," ch. 19 "Sacred"; *Reader* ch. 26 Douglas

Week 4 - 9/27

The cases of *myth* and *ritual*

*Guide* ch. 14 "Myth," ch. 18 "Ritual"; *Reader* ch. 21 Doniger, ch. 22 Turner, ch. 23 Bell

Week 5 - 10/4

Anthropological and Sociological Explanations of Religion, part 1

Readings: *Guide* ch. 8 "Ethnicity," ch. 9 "Exchange," ch. 12 "Intellect"; *Reader* ch. 10 Malinowski, ch. 11 Durkheim, ch. 12 Weber

Week 6 - 10/11

Anthropological and Sociological Explanations of Religion, part 2

Readings: *Guide* ch. 20 "Social Formation," ch. 21 "Stratification," ch. 29 "Colonialism"; *Reader* ch. 24 Asad, ch. 25 Bellah, ch. 33 Tweed

Week 7 - 10/18

Psychological and Phenomenological Explanations of Religion

Readings: *Guide* ch. 7 "Deprivation," ch. 10 "Experience," ch. 12 "Intellect," ch. 13 "Manifestation," ch. 16 "Projection"; *Reader* ch. 13 James, ch. 14 Freud, ch. 15 Otto, ch. 16 Eliade, ch. 28 Smart

Week 8 - 10/25

Cognitive Science of Religion

Reading: *Guide* ch. 6 “Cognition; *Reader* ch. 29 Barrett

Week 9 - 11/1

Gender and Feminist theory and the Study of Religion

Reading: *Guide* ch. 11 “Gender”; *Reader* ch. 8 Daly, ch. 9 Plaskow, ch. 36 Ahmed, ch. 37 Gross

Week 10 - 11/8

Religion and violence, intolerance, exclusion; the case of *Pilgrimage*

Reading: (on Sakai) Riches; *Meanings of Violence* selections; *Oxford Handbook* selections; Wheeler on pilgrimage

Week 11 - 11/15

Religion and / as...

Readings: *Guide* ch. 22 “Structure,” ch. 23 “World,” ch. 27 “Discourse,” ch. 28 “Culture,” ch. 30 “Ideology,” ch. 31 “Play,”; *Reader* ch. 35 Paden, ch. 31 Berlinerblau

Week 12 - 11/22

No class due to change of designation day

Week 13 - 11/29

Discussion of your paper topic and outline: What is your topic? What challenges/problems do you hope to address in your paper? What theories and scholars are you utilizing/analyzing? How will you engage the theories and scholarship?

Week 14 - 12/6

Research and writing workshop. You should have a solid draft for us to read at this point.

Week 15 - 12/13

Paper presentations. Be prepared present a summary of your paper and to discuss your topic.

Tuesday, Dec 18 (Exam Week) Final Papers Due