

## **Methodologies for Studying Religion**

### Course Description

This course offers a broad overview of theories and approaches in the study of religion, highlighting the central questions and issues and the major contributors that have shaped the field of religious studies so far. We will examine the origins and development of social scientific, historical, phenomenological, theological and comparative approaches.

Prerequisite: None

Texts: Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (Oxford, 2005)  
Seth Kunin, *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (Rutgers, 2006)

Recommended: Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*.

### Course Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will:

1. Be familiar with and able to discuss central ideas and theories of major contributors to the field of religious studies.
2. Be able to recognize key terms the field of religious studies, and to discuss their historical and contemporary significance.
3. Be able to demonstrate a well-developed reflective response to at least one significant theorist in religious studies.

### Course Requirements:

1. Attend classes and participate actively in discussions
2. Mid-term Test (**Feb 23**)
3. Critical Review (5 pages), with oral presentation
4. Term Paper (7-9 pages, **due Apr 20**)
5. Final Exam

### Evaluation:

- Mid-term Test (20%)
- Critical Review (25%)
- Term Paper (25%)
- Final Exam (30%)

Please note that marks will be deducted for late papers. Note: The critical review involves writing and presenting a review of one of the theorists **not covered in Pals' book**, and presenting that review during the day that theorist is covered in class. Students will be asked to sign up for these.

## Course Topics

- Jan 19: The Study of What? An Orientation  
Precursors and the founding of a “Science of Religion”
  - Missionary antecedents
  - Müller
- Jan 26: Anthropological Approaches
  - Frazer, Tylor, Malinowski
- Feb 2: Religion and Society
  - Durkheim, Weber
- Feb 9: Religion and Liberation
  - Marx, Liberation Teleologies
- Feb 16: Psychological Approaches
  - Religion and the Unconscious: Freud, Jung
- Feb 23: Patterns in Comparative Religion
  - **Mid-term Test**
  - Eliade

### **MID-TERM TEST on Wed. Feb 23**

- Mar 2: Religion & Culture
  - Evans-Pritchard, Geertz
- Mar 9: Phenomenological Methods and Models
  - Kristensen, Van der Leeuw
- Mar 16: Theological Models
  - Otto, Carman
- Mar 23: **Spring Break, no class**

- Mar 30: Metaphor and Structure
  - Douglas, Turner
- Apr 6: Myth and Symbol
  - Langer, Doniger
- Apr 13: Interpreting Religious Experience
  - H. Smith, James
- Apr 20: Feminist Interpretations
  - Reuther, Young
- Apr 27: Contemporary Issues
  - World Spirituality
  - Religious Studies as a Field
  - Perspectives and Evaluations

### **FINAL EXAM**