

RELI 4500
Methods in Religious Studies
Fall 2006

Dr. Maher
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Office hours: Tuesday 10:00 – 11:00 and 1:00 – 3:00 and Thursday 9:00 – 11:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Students will read authors from various disciplines that employ different methodologies within the academic study of religion. Students will explore the utility and limitations of each. Through this pursuit, students will:

- Become familiar with each of the assigned authors and their theories.
- Be able to compare and contrast the different methodologies discussed.
- Be able to recognize and critique the underlying assumptions of different authors.

Additionally, students will:

- Cultivate critical thinking and reading comprehension skills.
- Enhance their ability to communicate more effectively, verbally and in writing.

These objectives will be pursued primarily through assigned readings, writing exercises, and classroom discussions.

REQUIRED READINGS

- Carl Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Thomson Wadsworth 2003, ISBN: 0-534-53474-0

Additional required readings will be available on the course Blackboard website. <http://ecu.blackboard.com>. Students are responsible for checking their email address linked to the Blackboard system so that they are assured of remaining up-to-date with reading assignments, exam dates, and any other information relating to the course. **In order to participate in the classroom discussions and to fully engage the assigned writing exercises, it will be necessary for students to complete the required readings.**

GRADING

- Participation (20%)
- Four Voice Papers (12% or 3% each)
- Journal (25%)
- Final Research Paper (25%)

- Cumulative final exam (18%)

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be submitted through Blackboard's digital dropbox.

PARTICIPATION

The nature of this course demands informed discussion; students must be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each class in order for each class meeting to function adequately. Students should be on time each Tuesday and fully participate in discussion. In order to facilitate the student's comprehension of the assigned reading and to foster the most productive environment in the seminar, **each student must submit one typed question or observation for every 25 pages of assigned reading.** These questions or observations should be designed to facilitate class discussion. As such, they should not be of a merely factual nature. The questions or observations will be taken up at each class meeting and will count as 50% of the class participation grade (or 10% of your final grade). The balance of the participation grade will be based on the student's attendance, involvement in class discussions, and familiarity with the readings.

VOICE PAPER

Voice papers are designed to give students the opportunity to write in a variety of styles as a way of learning how to command the "voice" of each style. Each student will sign up for four non-consecutive weeks during the semester to write a voice paper relating to the material discussed in class that week. During each class, the students who are writing for that week will be given basic guidelines for their paper, which will be submitted through blackboard at noon on Sunday of that week. One or more of the submitted papers will be distributed to the class on the next meeting. The selected papers will be read aloud by the author and critiqued by the class as a way of enhancing the writing ability of all involved.

JOURNAL

Students will keep a journal of the course readings that will be submitted at the end of the semester. Additionally, journals should be brought to class each week, and they will be picked up and evaluated several times during the semester. The journal entries should be typed, double-spaced, and approximately four pages in length. Approximately half of the journal entry should be devoted to summarizing the week's readings, and the remainder of the entry will be a reaction to the readings. The journals will serve as a useful study guide for the final exam. Students should be careful to avoid creating an entry that is based **solely** on an emotional response to the readings. Instead, students should critically assess the readings. This may include a consideration of the author's views, the implications of these views, if and how this author relates to the current week's readings as well as previous readings, how the readings relate to the subject matter of the course, and how these theoretical positions relate to actual religious phenomena.

FINAL EXAM

Students will have the option of taking either an oral or written examination. Written exams will consist of essays and short questions. Generally, I will provide several essay questions from which the student may select a lesser number. Short questions may be multiple choice, true and false, or simple identification. Details of the oral exam will be provided some time during the semester. According to the University schedule, the exam will take place on Friday, December 15, 2:00 - 4:30.

RESEARCH PAPER

Papers will focus on some issue or method related to the course. All proposals must be approved by me. If students would like to begin research prior to assigned proposal date they should discuss this with me before or after class or during office hours. Students will write and submit a paper proposal on October 3, 2006. Two copies of the proposal should be printed and brought to class as students will be divided into groups to read and comment on each other's proposals. A completed draft of the paper will be due on December 6th. They should be submitted to me and to two peers to be determined by me. Student reviewers will return the draft by December 8th having made comments and corrections (Microsoft Word's "Track Changes" found under the "Tools" tab may be used). The peer reviewers will also submit a copy of their comments and corrections to me. The final draft will be turned in to me on paper on December 10th.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER STANDARDS

A research paper is a particular form of writing that articulates and then argues for a thesis. A thesis is a clear and unambiguous statement that a research paper proves; it has the form, "I will argue that X is true." A proper thesis is a statement about which the author could be right or wrong. For example:

- The structuralist approach to myth articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss fails to account for significant features of religious narratives.
- The Judeo-Christian orientation of Rudolph Otto's depiction of the holy prevents his theories from being generally applicable.

A thesis must be controversial enough to raise interesting questions, a test that is failed by the statement, "ECU students are human beings." However, it does not need to be something utterly revolutionary. A thesis is a statement about which the author could be wrong. A matter of taste, such as the statement, "Jimi Hendrix is the greatest guitarist in history," does not count as a thesis. Also off limits would be an argument in favor of some normative posture, such as, "People throughout the world should practice democracy."

The final papers should be 12-15 pages. Authors must employ a standardized style for footnotes and bibliography, such as the MLA style. A paradigm, along with other helpful information relevant to writing papers is available online at:

<http://www.ecu.edu/religionprogram/docs/resources.html>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/>

<http://core.ecu.edu/engl/hecmovichg/4170-f03/writerstoolbox/writingtools.htm>

Both the ideas and the quoted words of others must be footnoted properly. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism. While it is fine for you to share resources and references with your peers, each person must do their own work. If you are uncertain as to whether you might be crossing the line between helpfulness and cheating, please consult with me. Online resources, such as web pages, can be extremely unreliable when it comes to religion. If you have doubts as to the authenticity of your sources, please ask for my advice. If you use material from the web, the particular URL of a referenced idea or passage must be footnoted just like any other source. In no case should you rely on websites for more than 20% of your research material. Books and journal articles are preferred.

Based on the writing displayed in the paper or project proposal, some students will be directed to take a draft of their paper to the Writing Center. The final version of the paper will not be accepted and graded without a note from the Writing Center.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to comply with the principles of Academic Integrity embodied in the ECU Honor Code. Since violations can result in expulsion from the University, suspension, or a grade of “F” for the course, students should become familiar with what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, falsification, and other violations. Note also that according to ECU policy mere attempts to plagiarize, cheat, or falsify qualify as violations. Consult the ECU Clue Book for details. <http://www.ecu.edu/studenthandbook/III.htm>

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

The Writing Center offers students in-person and on-line assistance in learning writing skills. Contact the Writing Center for hours and locations at Bate (GCB) 2026 (328-2820). <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/writing/writingcenter/index.cfm>

In addition to providing students with personal counseling, the Counseling and Student Development Center in Wright Building 316 (328-6661) offers various resources to assist students in their academic development. These include training in time management, test taking, overcoming test anxiety, and academic motivation. <http://www.ecu.edu/studentlife/counselingcenter/>

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 (252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY).

MEETING WITH ME

I have 5 hours of scheduled office hours a week. Aside from those hours, I can often be found in my office. If the times I have indicated are not practical, students are encouraged to see me before or after class. If students need to meet at another time, I am sure I can be accommodating. I encourage all students to come and see me as they begin to formulate their research paper. This will insure that the selected paper topic is appropriate and relevant.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

All readings except those in the Olson book are to be found on Blackboard.

Class 1 – Introduction

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Introduction 1-14 and 20-48
- Strenski, *Thinking About Religion*, 9-60

Class 2 - Academic Study of Religion and “Origins” of Religion

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Religious Studies as an Academic Discipline 61-84
- Strenski, *Thinking About Religion*, 63-90 and 136-160

Class 3 – Phenomenology of Religion

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, 100-124 and 143-156
- Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1-30

Class 4 – Sociology

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Sociology of Religion 209-237
- Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 3-51

Class 5 – Anthropology

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Anthropology 238-297 and 307-332

Class 6 – Psychology

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Psychology of Religion, 342-393 and 409-438

Class 7 – Ecology

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, 439-475.

Class 8 – History of Religions

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, History of Religions 161-201
- Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Chapter 1, 20-69
- Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells,” from *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, 19-35

Class 9 – Comparative Mythology

- Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, 1-31
- Dumézil, *Destiny of a King*, 1-28
- Brough, “The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an experiment in method,” 69-86

Class 10 – Feminism

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, 476-547
- [maybe something from Phyllis Trible]

Class 11 – “Post” Approaches to Religious Studies

- Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, Poststructural and Postmodern Approaches to Religion, 548-595
- Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 117-140.

Class 12 – Studying the Other

- Benz, “On Understanding Non-Christian Religions,” from *The History of Religion: Essays in Methodology*, 115-131.
- Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in South Africa*, xi-29
- Lopez, “Foreigner at the Lama’s Feet,” from *Curator’s of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, 251-295
- Said, *Orientalism*, ix-28

Class 13 – Religion in Popular Culture

- Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*, vii-51, 91-110, and 190-231

Other key dates:

October 24: Paper proposal are due in class

December 6: Submit final draft to peer reviewers by midnight

December 8: Submit final paper to me by midnight

December 15, 2:00 – 4:30 = Final Exam

There shall be no exceptions to these deadlines that do not involve grave and urgent problems.