

## **Religion 7770: Theory and Methods in the Study of Religion**

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### **Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce entering MA students to the approaches to the study of religion that scholars have developed since the discipline was conceived. It is a time for assembling of your “toolkit” for the study of religion. We will do a (much too fast) survey of major theorists, from the traditional voices like Otto, Eliade and Wach, to the postmodern voices, like Said, Lyotard, and Derrida. All these have brought a method (an application for analysis) or a theory (an analytical idea) to the study of religion.

### **Texts**

Carl Olson, Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: Theoretical and Critical Readings

Daniel Pals, Introducing Religion: Readings From the Classic Theorists

Post-Colonialism: A Short Introduction

Postmodernism: A Short Introduction

Thomas Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling

### **Sample Requirements:**

#### **1. Question Cards or Concept Maps; Double Entry Journals**

Due dates are indicated on the syllabus. You should analyze the designated reading for the day. Use the format attached. We want to know what the readings **SAY** so that we can understand and discuss them. The question card is a way to get at what the major points of a work are.

#### **2. Two Short (5-7 page) papers**

The paper should be an analysis of one or more readings or one aspect of the body of readings. It may include one or two of the following:

- a. An identification of one or two themes that have emerged as significant to you
- b. An “echo” (something that ties readings to each other)
- c. An exploration of a significant quotation or idea or the interpretation of a confusing passage in a single reading or two.
- d. An application of the theories/methods to a myth, ritual, or creed.

Finally, the paper should explore the **consequences and implications** of an important point suggested by the reading.

#### **3. 2. Final Paper on Tweed (5 pages)**

- How does Tom Tweed assess the theories of religion we have been studying?
- What is his object of study (what is the “stuff”?)
- How does his theory of religion emerge from the material he studies and his assessment of theorists who have come before?
  1. What does it incorporate?
  2. What does it leave behind?
  3. Why?

### **Honor Code**

All academic work must meet the standards contained in the University of Georgia student handbook, “A Culture of Honesty.” Each student is responsible to inform himself or herself about those standards before performing any academic work.

**Brief Outline of the Course: Details and changes will be announced in class.** The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

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August 13: Introduction to each other and the Course

August 15: The Enlightenment and the Invention of “Religion” and the Study of Religion

August 17: Continued: The idea of the reading for today is to give you a sense of some of the tensions in the field; so,

**Reading: Olson 143-156. Ninian Smart is one of the key thinkers in the study of religion. Read his article and Donald Wiebe’s response. These thinkers show you the “classical” thinker and the “postmodern” response. What does Smart put forward that Wiebe critiques?**

August 20: Some first scholarly theories about what religion is

Reading from Pals: E.B. Tylor (1-36) and Frazer (37-70)

**Additional Reading: Olson: 54-78. Please look at the definition of Civilization and Culture on p. 54 in Olson. No writing assignment**

August 22: Muller, Tylor, Frazer continued.

August 24: Phenomenology of Religion: Rudolph Otto

**Reading: Olson: 124-129: What is Phenomenology?**

Pals: Otto 205-236;

August 27: Rudolph Otto (Pals 205-236 and Olson 107-119)

**What does Otto mean by: numinous, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*?  
Answer by drawing a concept map of this chapter**

### Constructing a Concept Map

**Brainstorming Phase:** Looking at the reading, identify facts, terms, and ideas that you think are key elements the topic. Make a list of these items and print them neatly on small Post-It® notes, one per note, in very brief form, i.e. a single word or short phrase or write them on a blank piece of paper. This is a brainstorming process, so write down everything that you think is important.

**Organizing Phase:** Spread out your concepts (Post-It® notes) on a flat surface so that all can be read easily and together. Then, begin to create groups and sub-groups of related items. Try to group items to emphasize relationships between terms. Feel free to rearrange items and introduce new items that you omitted initially. Note that some concepts will fall into multiple groupings. This will become important later.

**Layout Phase:** On a large sheet of paper, try to come up with an arrangement (layout) that best represents your understanding of the interrelationships and connections among groupings.

- Use a consistent hierarchy in which the most important concepts are in the center or at the top.
- Within sub-grouping, place closely related items near to each other. Think in terms of connecting the items in a simple sentence that shows the relationship between them.

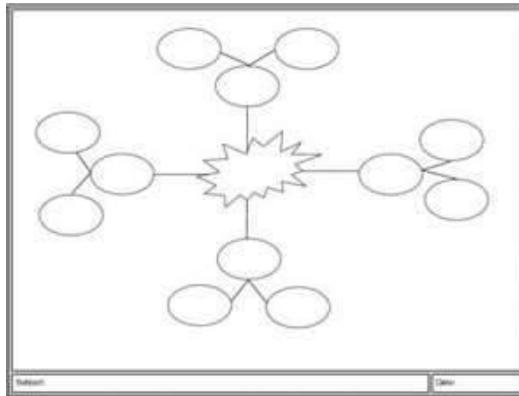
**Linking Phase:** Use lines with arrows to connect and show the relationship between connected items. Write a word or short phrase by each arrow to specify the relationship. Many arrows can originate or terminate on particularly important concepts.

**Finalizing the Concept Map:** After you have an arrangement of items that conveys your understanding, you need to convert the concept map into a permanent form that others can view and discuss. Be creative in a

constructive way through the use of colors, shapes, border thickness, etc. to communicate your understanding. Give your concept map a title.

In reviewing your concept map, consider the following attributes:

- **Accuracy and Thoroughness.** Are the concepts and relationships correct? Are important concepts missing? Are any misconceptions apparent?
- **Organization.** Was the concept map laid out in a way that higher order relationships are apparent and easy to follow? Does it have a title?
- **Appearance.** Was the assignment done with care showing attention to details such as spelling and penmanship? Is it neat and orderly or is it chaotic and messy?
- **Creativity.** Are there unusual elements that aid communication or stimulate interest without being distracting?



August 29: Otto, continued

August 31: Mircea Eliade (Eliade: Pals 271-309; Olson 161-168)

**What does Eliade mean by: sacred, profane, center, chaos and cosmos?**

### **September 3: Labor Day Holiday**

September 5: Eliade, continued

September 7: Jonathan Z. Smith (Olson 177-184 and PDF to be sent; Read Gill if you have time)

September 10: Library Day I: Main Library Computer Lab

September 12: Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot" (pdf to be sent; you can also get this through our library article search:

*The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Apr., 1972), pp. 134-149

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

September 14: Smith: continued

September 17: Sociology of Religion: Durkheim (Pals 99-142; 212-225)

**What does Durkheim mean by totem?**

September 19: Sociology of Religion: Durkheim, continued; Max Weber

Reading: Max Weber, 237-260: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

**Using a Double-Entry journal, work through Weber's argument for class discussion.**

### **Double-Entry Journals: Guidelines**

1. Journals should be handwritten
2. Begin with either two notebook pages adjacent to one another on the desk in front of you or one notebook page that you have divided into two parts by means of a vertical line down the middle.

3. Record the date and time each time you work with the text.
4. Skim the entire reading assignment, watch for headings or other means of division, and break the text into smaller units according to the way you understand the material from a very cursory reading.
5. Read the first section, and when you have finished, summarize the main points of the section on the left page (or left side of the page). If summarization is not the most effective way for you to begin to understand the text, quote the portion of the text that you are having difficulty interpreting for yourself. If you don't know a word in the text or if the author is using the word in a new way which you think is important, quote the sentence and underline the word. The left page or left side of the page ought to contain, therefore, more than one kind of writing, and the kinds of writing it does contain will reflect your attempts to understand what the author is trying to say.
6. As you work through the text, designate in the left margin where you move to a new page in the author's text.
7. When you have complete the summary and/or quotations, review it and the section you are reading once again. On the right-hand page (or the right side of the page), record comments **about** the section or your summary. These comments may be in the form of questions about what the author is saying or connections you can make with other things you have read or other examples of the point the author is making or speculations about where the author is going with the thought process. When you write down questions about parts you don't understand, then, later, as your reading continues you may return to these questions and find that, after further reading, you do know the answers. Use this section of the journal also to react intellectually (or emotionally) to the reading and reflect on its meaning. Define any terms or words that the author(s) seems to be using in a special or unusual way. **If they seem important**, define the words that you do not know.
8. When you have finished reading/analyzing/reflecting on the text, read your summary and your comments/questions/reflections. Add any new thoughts that you have from this new perspective of reading your own reflections. Analyze the effectiveness of the process for this study period. Each work session needs to have a summary section of this sort.
9. Record the date and time each time you complete your work with the text.

September 21: Weber, final things: Joachim Wach

September 24: Joachim Wach II, Master-Disciple essay (pdf to be sent)

September 26: Wach, continued; Sociologists: final things

September 28: Psychology of Religion: Reading Freud 71-98

October 1: James (Pals: 171-204)

**Map (however you want to) the continuum from the "healthy-minded" to the "twice born" to the personality that is in disintegration. What does conversion do for the twice-born? What does James think is the "highest" form of religion?**

October 3: James (continued)

October 5: Catch-up; sigh with relief

### **Rite of Passage**

October 8: Rite of Passage: Eliade, Jung and Victor Turner

October 10: Rite of Passage

October 12: Rite of Passage

October 15: Rite of Passage, Final Words

October 17: Clifford Geertz (Pals 341-372)

**What is symbol and what does it do, in Geertz's theory?**

October 19: The Postmodern: Transitus, A General Introduction

October 22: Library Day 2: Main Library Computer Lab

October 24: Structuralism: Claude Levi-Strauss (pdf); Ferdinand de Saussure

**October 26: Fall Break**

October 29: Transitions, Lyotard and Levinas (no reading)

October 31: Jacques Derrida, Postmodernism and Language: Reading Olson 587-591.

**Try to concept map this reading.**

November 2: Derrida, continued

November 5: Michel Foucault, Postmodernism and Power (Reading: Olson 573-579)

**What does Foucault mean by Genealogy and Archeology?**

November 7: Foucault, continued

November 9: Foucault, continued.

November 12: The Post-Colonial: Edward Said as Pivot: His Readings of Derrida and Foucault

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/17/reviews/001217.17saidlt.html>

November 14: Orientalism, introduction

November 16: No class

November 19-23: Thanksgiving Break

November 26: Chandra Mohanty, "Through Western Eyes" (PDF to be sent)

November 28: Mohanty continued

November 30: Final Words on the Postmodern and Postcolonial

December 3: Tom Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*

December 4: Final words and celebrations!

December 5: Reading Day

December 7: Paper on Tweed due