

**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO**  
**Department of Theology**

**Syllabus Template<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction to Religious Studies**

**Instructor's Name**

**Office Hours**

Building, Room #, Days and Times

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Course Description: Foundational & Developmental**

This course is one of two foundational courses offered by the Theology Department. Both foundational core courses (Intro to Christian Theology and Intro to Religious Studies) will always incorporate the study of scripture, belief and practices, and the historical and social context of religion. This course introduces the field of Religious Studies by looking at topics and themes such as doctrine, ritual, scripture, mysticism, pilgrimage, and myth across two or more religions, including Catholic Christianity, while also introducing methodological approaches to the comparative study of religion. Individual faculty members may choose to accent the comparative or the methodological element of the Introduction to Religious Studies course but some elements of each dimension will always be included. This course will constitute a proper and adequate foundation for any of the second-tier courses. It has no prerequisites.

**Expected Content**

Introduction to Religious Studies is designed to provide a basic introduction to foundational aspects of at least two major religions, including basic elements of Catholic Christianity. Upon completion of this gateway course, students will be prepared to engage any second-tier course from among 13 options. All these courses build on the content and the methodological approaches studied in the first tier.

In addition to introducing concepts related to the academic study of religion, this course will present a variety of approaches to the study of Religion such as ritual studies, sociology of religion, comparative mythology, literary criticism, comparative theology and history of religions.

Additional topics that might be addressed include: Ritual; Contemporary challenges and developments/modernity; Gender; Sectarian divisions; Interpretive differences (liberalism/literalism); Formative historical eras.

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<sup>1</sup> Following revisions to the Theology Core completed in Spring 2010 by the Theology Department and subsequently approved by the University Core Curriculum Committee (UCCCC), Introduction to Religious Studies became one of two first tier gateway courses, one of which must be taken before students may take any of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier Core courses. This model syllabus was approved by the Undergraduate Programs Committee (UPC) of the Department of Theology on November 16, 2010 and submitted to the UCCCC as an example of the content and shape for this 1<sup>st</sup> tier foundational course.

## **Core Curriculum**

This course satisfies Loyola University's Core knowledge Area requirement in Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge, the Value Areas of Understanding Diversity in the U.S. or the World and Understanding Spirituality or faith in Action in the World, and the skill area of Critical Thinking.

### **Knowledge Area Objectives: Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge**

\*To analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in personal, social, and global contexts.

\*To understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth and meaning.

In all, by studying the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religion, students will gain insights into similarities across religions as well as the most salient elements of religious traditions such as scripture, rituals, and institutions.

### **Value Area: Understanding Diversity in the U.S. or the World**

Because this course analyzes religious belief and practice within various religious traditions and areas of the world it will contribute to a richer understanding and appreciation of the diversity of religious activities throughout the world. It does this both by choosing multiple examples for investigations from various religious traditions (for example, rites of passage in multiple religious traditions or in various geographical areas) and by using and testing various theoretical approaches to better understand practices that may be quite different from one's own. In this way it both expands the awareness of diverse human practices and facilitates the ability to better understand this diversity.

### **Value Area: Understanding Spirituality or faith in Action in the World**

By taking this course, students will be able to comprehend ways in which religion and spirituality are related and also different. Students will understand the relationship of faith to the practical exercise of life in society.

### **Skills Objective: Critical Thinking**

This course will focus on critical thinking and dispositions. The course develops an entry-level proficiency in the vocabulary and interpretive methods in use by contemporary scholars who describe in a critically appropriate way human religious belief and behavior.

The course analyzes texts, rituals, behaviors, beliefs and practices of a variety of religious traditions. Because the student will be constantly utilizing various theoretical discourses he/she will be able to analyze the many ways in which concepts, statements, beliefs, and judgments relate to practice, action, and other concepts and beliefs, as clarified through theoretical discourse.

The student will develop the skill of evaluating how plural theoretical structures may work together to create an adequate understanding of religion. The student will also understand why some theoretical perspectives are no longer in use in contemporary scholarly practice. Thus they will be able to evaluate the strengths and weakness of theoretical discourse as it applies to religious practices.

### **Course Requirements**

**\*Note:** While individual instructors may vary in their assignments and weighting, expected course requirements will always include:

- (1) exams and written assignments (some with essay components) that assess the skill, value, and knowledge outcomes noted above
- (2) examinations and other assignments that assess student completion of, and level of engagement with, assigned readings and comprehension of the material covered in lectures, discussions and readings
- (3) Participation (accessed via quizzes, short in-class writing assignments, small group projects, individual presentations, etc.)

### **Course Style**

Lectures/presentations and class discussions will be the principal activity styles.

### **Grading**

**\*Note:** Individual instructors may provide their own grading scale and an explanation of the meaning of each letter grade.]

A	100-94%	B-	83-81%	D+	69-67%
A-	93-91%	C+	80-78%	D	66-60%
B+	90-88%	C	77-73%		
B	87-84%	C-	72-70%	F	59-0%

### **Consultation**

I welcome the opportunity to meet you and talk with you outside of class time. You may see me without an appointment during my office hours or you may arrange an appointment by seeing me before or after class or contacting me by e-mail.

### **Core Assessment**

This course will have a compulsory Core assessment component. The data collected will not be reported for individual students but used as a collective unit to inform us of how well students are performing compared with other LUC students.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me and also contact Services for Students with Disabilities (Sullivan Center Suite 260) as soon as possible to arrange appropriate accommodations.

### **Academic Integrity**

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate the truth. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating, helping another student to cheat, plagiarism, turning in the same paper for two different courses (including those in two different

semesters), purchasing papers written by others, manipulating attendance records, and falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines.

For an extensive but not exhaustive list of activities that constitute academic dishonesty, see the University's Academic Integrity Policy:

[http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg\\_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml)

Please note that any form of academic dishonesty whatsoever will result, at a minimum, in an F for the assignment in question; this is University policy. It may result in an F for the course or, in extreme cases, expulsion. A permanent record is kept by the Academic Dean of all instances of academic dishonesty.

### **Textbook Suggestions**

**\*Note:** Individual professors may elect to use other books, texts, or selected readings as primary.

Smart, Ninian. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*

Paden, William. *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*

### **Bibliographical Suggestions**

**\*Note:** Instructors should assign one reading each from the following four categories: One Scriptural text, one Modern text, one text from the Christian tradition and one from a non-Christian tradition or that has a comparative aspect. Here are some possible texts from each category (professors may select others if they choose):

#### **Scriptures:**

Bible, Qur'an, Rg Veda, Buddhist Sutra, Tao Te Ching, etc.

#### **Christian Texts:**

Augustine, *Confessions* or *City of God*

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (selections, for example I, q.1-13)

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons*

Ignarius of Loyola, *Autobiography*

Merton, Thomas, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (selections) (Timothy F. Lull ed.)

#### **Comparative Studies:**

Armstrong, Karen, *A Case for God*

Doniger, Wendy, *Other People's Myths*

Eck, Diana, *A New Religious America*

Clooney, Frank, *Comparative Theology*

Kugel, James, *How to Read the Bible: Interpretation, Critical Methods & Modernity*

Michel, Thomas F. and Irfan Omar, eds., *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*

Pope John Paul II, Speech made at Israel's Holocaust Memorial March (2000) (online).

Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections" Regensburg

Address 2006; online:[http://pontificateofpopebenedictxvi.blogspot.com/2008/08/regensburg-](http://pontificateofpopebenedictxvi.blogspot.com/2008/08/regensburg-address-faith-reason-and.html)

[address-faith-reason-and.html](http://pontificateofpopebenedictxvi.blogspot.com/2008/08/regensburg-address-faith-reason-and.html) (especially the first 16 paragraphs; read alongside the "Open Letter To Benedict XVI by 38 Leading Muslim Scholars and Leaders" and Benedict's official letter back to them).

Trible, Phyllis and Letty M. Russell, eds. *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives*

Vatican II documents such as: *Nostra aetate, Ad gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*

**Non-Christian**

Al-Ghazali's *Confessions*

Raphael, Marc Lee, *Judaism in America*

Malcolm X *Autobiography*

Reps, Paul, *Zen Flesh Zen Bones*

Kehoe, Alice, *The Ghost Dance*

Wadud, Amina, *Qur'an and Woman*

**Modern/Other:**

Abraham, Susan and Elena Procaro-Foley, *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*

Cone, James, *A Black Theology of Liberation or God of the Oppressed*

Copeland, M. Shawn, *Enfleshing Freedom*

Freud, Sigmund, *The Future of an Illusion*

Gonzalez, Michelle, *Created in God's Image*

King Jr., Martin Luther, *A Testament of Hope* (selections) (James Washington, ed.)

Juergensmeyer, Mark, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry, ed., *Freeing Theology*

Niebuhr, H. Richard, *The Meaning of Revelation or The Responsible Self*

Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and Immoral Society or The Nature and Destiny of Man*

Williams, Delores, *Sisters in the Wilderness*

**Sample Course Outline #1**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	What is Religion? What is Religious Studies?
2	What is Theology? How is it different from Religious Studies?
3-4	Introducing a non-Christian and/or primal religious tradition
5-6	Introducing comparative methods / some elements of the Christian Tradition
7-8	What is Scripture? Using Christian and/or other sources and examples
9-10	What is Mysticism?
11-12	What are Rituals?
13-14	Contemporary Issues / Religion in the American Public Conversation

**Sample Course Outline #2**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Basic concepts in the study of Religion
2-3	Basic concepts in Christianity and Judaism
4	Introduction to Mysticism

5	Comparative elements and methods – sacred time and space, pilgrimage
6-9	Religious experience: (For example: conversion and religious narratives, such as Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> Malcolm X, <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> )
10-12	Myth (For example: Wendy Doniger, <i>Other People's Myths</i> )
13-14	Scripture and Interpretation (For example: James Kugel, <i>How to Read the Bible: Interpretation, Critical Methods &amp; Modernity</i> Amina Wadud, <i>Qur'an and Woman</i> )

### Appendix: Grading Rationales

Students often ask how letter grades are awarded, and what the criteria for various letter grades are. The following is an attempt to answer that question.

**“A” work** represents superior work. In the case of writing assignments and papers, this means that the assignment has been fulfilled with care, intelligence, and genuine insight. The written work displays a clear focus and method of approach, uses pertinent examples or "facts" to support its judgments, shows a distinct personal perspective which can be distinguished from others, makes a real argument, and can discern the strengths and weaknesses of other arguments. A work also displays spelling, punctuation, grammar, word usage, and syntax that is of high quality. On examinations, A work is demonstrated by an accurate and insightful knowledge of the material in question, judicious choices in the material used in essay questions, and clarity of expression.

**“B” work** represents very good work. In the case of writing assignments and papers, this means that the assignment has been fulfilled with care and intelligence. The written work displays a fairly clear focus and uses good examples. In general, B work also displays the lack of technical errors described for A work. On exams, B work is shown by a solid knowledge of the material involved, good choices used in essay questions, and clear expression.

Often students ask what distinguishes B or B+ work from A work. The main difference is the distinctiveness, imagination, and ability to see the larger picture with intelligence and insight on the part of A work. A paper that follows the assignment exactly and does it well may well merit a B or B+ grade because it is very good, but it may not be superior if it does not include these further elements.

**“C” work** is satisfactory work. In the case of writing assignments and papers, this means that there is a basic, but not extensive, understanding of the assignment. Work will generally not demonstrate a clear focus (e.g., the paper may wander-around) or method of approach, but there is some attempt to do so. Its use of material to support judgments is adequate and will show some awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of other positions. C work demonstrates that there is sufficient knowledge of the material, but that there remain some deficiencies in understanding and expression. In exams, C work shows an adequate (but not more than adequate) knowledge of the material and on essay questions, will show the same characteristics listed above for written work. C work often displays a poor technical grasp of the conventions of writing (spelling, punctuation, etc.) and often lacks good organization.

**“D” work** is barely passing work. It is generally unsatisfactory but demonstrates a bare minimum of knowledge of the subject matter. There is little to no awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of other positions, little to no organization, and poor use of technical conventions. What saves D work from failure is a barely adequate grasp of the material.

**“F” work** does not meet any of the criteria listed above.