

REL 295: Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion
Roanoke College, Fall 2015
Block 3, 10:45-11:45, MWF, 319 West

Professor: Holly Jordan
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Office Hours: 3:30-4:30 MWF
and by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will explore various writings and thinkers who have contributed to the development of the field of religious studies. We will ask several questions: *What* do we study when we study religion? *How* do we study religion?, and *What* is religion? Throughout the semester, we will examine the ways scholars have answered these questions, as well as the methods and theories they use to describe, discuss, and define “religion.” We will spend time examining classic definitions of religion, but we will also explore ways these ideas have changed overtime. Students will have an opportunity to apply and evaluate these theories and methods to religious texts and to different religious communities in the Roanoke area.

One of the primary purposes of this course is to develop your writing. We will focus on the writing *process* as a tool for *critical thinking*. We will write in a variety of ways, focusing on the writing *process* and *drafting*.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in studying religion;
- Identify the different subject matter and data sets scholars examine when they study religion;
- Apply and assess methods and theories of religious studies by observing religious communities in the Roanoke area;
- Enhance critical reading and writing skills

Required Readings

- Pals, Daniel. *Nine Theories of Religion (Paperback) (Nine)*. ISBN-10: 0199859094, ISBN-13: 978-0199859092; Oxford University Press; Third Edition, 2014.
- Yee, Gale A. *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies (JM)*. ISBN-10: 0800638581, ISBN-13: 978-0800638580; Fortress Press; Second Edition, 2007.
- McKenzie, Steven L and Stephen R. Haynes. *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application (TE)*. ISBN-10: 0664257844, ISBN-13: 978-0664257842; Westminster John Knox Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 1999.
- Additional readings posted on Inquire or available through Fintel Library.
- Note: Students must bring that day’s reading to class in either print or digital format. Failure to do so will result in a half-absence (students get one “freebie” on this requirement).

Recommended Readings

Students must have access to an ***annotated, scholarly translation*** of the (Hebrew) Bible. The King James version, especially, is not appropriate for this class. If you are unclear if your edition would be appropriate, please bring it to me. If you wish to purchase a bible for this course, the following edition is recommended

- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (Paperback). ISBN-10: 0195289552, ISBN-13: 978-0195289558; Oxford University Press; 4th edition, March 19, 2010.

Attendance

Come to class. Come to class prepared. If for some reason, you are not prepared that day, still come to class. You are paying for this degree. Come to class.

Obviously, only a select few of you will have perfect attendance in this course. If you are absent, you still must complete any work due that day. This includes any work to be submitted online. You will be allowed three unexcused absences this semester (I don't feel like it/It's too pretty outside/I just want to eat/sleep/etc. days). Use them wisely. More than three will affect your participation grade.

Legitimate situations may arise during the semester that keep you from class (illness, family death, religious holiday, etc.). If you plan to be absent for a session, please notify me via email before that session. If you are unable to attend class unexpectedly, please notify me before the next class session with the reason for your absence. Absences ultimately will only be considered "excused" if proper documentation (doctor's note, etc.) is provided within a week of the absence. Please note that every three times you are late to class will count as one absence. Absences are factored into the Participation grade.

Course Policies and Resources

Academic Integrity

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of Roanoke College, regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, see *Academic Integrity at Roanoke College* (www.roanoke.edu/academicintegrity). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonest, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

During class and at observation visits, collaboration is highly encouraged. Please note, though, that all work must be completed *individually*.

Communication with Professor:

Students should contact me at hjordan@roanoke.edu with any questions or concerns they have. It is the instructor's goal to have all written work graded within one week of submission. If you are concerned that I have not graded something of yours after this one week period, please feel free to email me. My goal is to respond to your emails within 48 hours of them being sent.

Disability Support Services

- **The Office of Disability Support Services**, located in the Goode-Pasfield Center for Learning and Teaching in Fintel Library, provides reasonable accommodations to students with identified disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are provided based on the diagnosed disability and the recommendations of the professional evaluator. In order to be considered for disability services, students must identify themselves to the Office of Disability Support Services. Students requesting accommodations are required to provide specific current documentation of their disabilities. Please contact Rick Robers, M.A., Coordinator of Disability Support Services, at 540-375-2247 or e-mail robers@roanoke.edu.
- If you are on record with the College's Office of Disability Support Services as having academic or physical needs requiring accommodations, please schedule an appointment with Mr. Robers as soon as possible. You need to discuss your accommodations with him before they can be implemented. Also, please note that arrangements for extended time on exams, testing, and quizzes in a distraction-reduced environment must be made at least one week **before every exam**.
- For more information, visit http://roanoke.edu/A-Z_Index/Center_for_Learning_and_Teaching/Disability_Support_Services.htm.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center at Roanoke College, located on the Lower Level of Fintel Library, offers writing tutorials focused on written and oral communication for students working on writing assignments/projects in any field. Writers at all levels of competence may visit the Writing Center at any point in their process, from brainstorming to drafting to editing, to talk with trained peer tutors in informal, one-on-one sessions. The Writing Center is open Sunday through Thursday from 4 to 9 pm. Simply stop in, or schedule an appointment by going to www.roanoke.edu/writingcenter, where our schedule of writing workshops and creative writing playshops is also posted. Be sure to bring a copy of the assignment and the syllabus with you. Questions? Email writingcenter@roanoke.edu or call 375-4949.

Course Structure and Rules of Conduct

The structure of our classes will change from session to session. Some days will rely more on lecture; others will be student-led. As this is a class happening in real time, a day's scheduled events may change if there is an item in the news worth bringing to the table.

As unstructured as this sounds, I do have a few rules. First, just be the adults you are. I expect everyone to treat both the material and each other with respect. Religious tolerance is expected from each student. At no time will you be required to discuss your personal religious beliefs in class, but if you do, assume that you will be treated with courtesy.

Second, use whatever technology you need to do well in this class (computers, tablets, etc.), even if that means quickly looking up a word in your phone's dictionary. That being said, use your technology wisely. If something you doing with your tech is distracting to me or someone else, we may need to have a talk. At minimum, I reserve the right to tell you to close it/turn it off immediately.

Third, bring whatever else you need to do well in this class. Yes, that includes coffee and snacks. Just don't bring anything terribly disruptive to other students (food requiring silverware, loud wrappers, anything that smells like a chicken biscuit). Feel free to bring enough to share with everyone.

Finally, check your email *often*. Set Inquire up to forward messages to your email if you are not good at checking Inquire often. Check your email before class daily to make sure there have not been last-minute handouts or articles sent out (or cancellations due to weather—I live in Blacksburg).

Assignment Requirements:

Students must complete the readings for the course in the order they appear and on time. Due dates for readings assignments will be posted at the end of this document and in the calendar tool of the website. Students shall at all times turn in *their own work*.

All assignments must be turned in Microsoft Word (.doc/.docx) or Rich Text (.rtf) format. No other file formats will be accepted. *All assignments* must be written following proper spelling and grammar and must be free of Internet-speak. Students who do not own an office suite are encouraged to download LibreOffice, a free open-source alternative to MS Office or iWork: <http://www.libreoffice.org/download/libreoffice-fresh/>.

Students should strive to complete all work on time. Work that is not handed in on time will lose 10% of their grade on the assignment for every day it is late. Exceptions can be made to this policy if requests are made prior to the scheduled date and time of an assignment, quiz, or test. Unless otherwise stated, all work will be turned in on Inquire.

At all times, I will endeavor to have assignments graded within one week of submission. If this changes, I will inform students of delays as soon as is possible.

Grades and Expected Number of Hours of Work Per Week :

Grades for this course are on a percentage system. At the end of the semester, the student’s grade will be given as a percentage, based on the points earned out of all possible points. As this is a research and theory-heavy course, you can expect to do more work for this class than some of your others. **This course expects you to spend at least 15-20 hours of work each week inside and outside of class.**

The types of graded work in this course include:

Attendance/Participation	15%
Précis	15%
Observation Papers	10%
Research Proposal	30%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

Attendance/Participation – See Attendance Policy beginning on page 1. First, students should email me *by* midnight each day before class with a question to be answered in class each day (based on that night’s readings). Second, students are expected to participate in class *daily*. This involves bringing that day’s assigned reading to class (in print or digital format) as well as being *actively engaged* in learning (being engaged and thoughtful listeners, contributing to class conversation, etc.). Exceptional students will bring material to the conversation not necessarily assigned. Attendance and participation will be graded on the following 1-3 scale:

- 1 – Student emailed the professor a question/topic of discussion from the reading.
- 2 – Student emailed the professor a question/topic of discussion from the reading *and* came to class (rear in chair only).

- 3 – Student emailed the professor a question/topic of discussion from the reading, came to class, *and* participated in class discussion.

Précis – A Rhetorical Précis, pronounced (pray-see/s), is a summary or abstract of a work. The Rhetorical Précis has a rigidly specific format (see Inquire for details on how to complete a précis). It is important that you follow the format carefully. This is not an easy task, but it is a crucial step towards building critical reading ability. Précis are always due on Inquire *by the beginning of class* the day we are discussing the article.

Observation Papers – Students will attend **two** services outside of their own tradition (if applicable) and write an observation paper (3-4-pages, double spaced, 12-point Calibri, 1' margins) on each experience. In addition to describing their experience, students will be required to relate their observations to course texts. I will provide instructions on how to structure the observation paper as well as a sample observation paper. Observation papers will be submitted on Inquire.

- **Observation Paper One is due on Friday, November 6.**
- **Observation Paper Two is due on Friday, December 11.**

Research Proposal – Students will begin researching and writing a research proposal starting at the end of September. Each student will meet with the instructor to discuss their thesis as well as outline and rough draft. Students should find a topic that dovetails with *their own interests or major* for a large research project (students in the religion major are encouraged to use this as an opportunity to begin planning for their thesis. The final proposal will be between 15-20 pages double-spaced. Proposals are due on the following schedule:

- **Thesis Statement/Intro Paragraph: Monday, September 28 at midnight on Inquire.**
- **Annotated Bibliography: Friday, October 16 at midnight on Inquire.**
- **Rough Draft: Friday, November 15 at midnight on Inquire.**
- **Final Draft: Friday, December 4 at midnight on Inquire.**

Please see Inquire for a full explanation of the proposal parts and assignments.

Midterm and Final Exams – The midterm exam for this course will be *take-home* and submitted on Inquire, whereas the final exam will take place during the assigned exam period. Each exam will consist of short and long essay questions over the preceding information. The final exam will only cover information since the midterm.

- **Final Exam Period: Tuesday, December 15, 8:30-11:30 am.**

Students in this course will be graded on a plus/minus system (i.e. A, A-, B+):

A: 100-93, A-: 92-90, B+: 89-87, B: 86-83, B-: 82-80, C+: 79-77, C: 76-73, C-: 72-70, D+: 69-67, D: 66-63, D-: 62-60, F: 59-0

Course Outline:

Week One (September 2-4)

- Wednesday: Syllabus; Introduction to the Course
- Friday: Introduction to Technology in the Course; Intro to Studying Religion (bring laptop)

Week Two (September 7-11 – Tylor/Frazer)

- Monday – Tylor/Frazer
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 1
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 1 DUE.**
- Wednesday – Tylor/Frazer
- Friday – Freud
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 2
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 2 DUE.**

Week Three (September 14-18)

- Monday – Freud
- Wednesday – Durkheim
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 3
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 3 DUE.**
- Friday – Meet with partner to brainstorm proposal (see email for assignment)

Week Four (September 21-25)

- Monday – Class Cancelled (Meet with advisor sometime between 09/18 and 09/23 to discuss brainstormed idea).
- Wednesday - Durkheim
- Friday – Marx
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 4
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 4 DUE.**

Week Five (September 28-October 2)

- Monday – Marx
 - Assignment: **THESIS STATEMENT/INTRO PARAGRAPH DUE.**
- Wednesday - Weber
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 5
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 5 DUE.**
- Friday - Weber

Week Six (October 5-9)

- Monday – Eliade
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 7
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 6 DUE.**
- Wednesday – Eliade
- Friday – Geertz
 - Reading: Nine, Chapter 9
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 7 DUE.**

Week Seven (October 12-16) – Historical and Narrative Criticism

- Monday – Geertz
- Wednesday – From Theory to Method – An Introduction to Judges
 - Reading: Judges 1-3:6; JM Chapter 1; TE Chapter 1
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 8 (JM 1) DUE.**
- Friday – From Theory to Method – An Introduction to Judge.
 - Reading: Judges 1-3:6; JM Chapter 2; TE Chapter 10 .
 - Assignment: **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE.**

Week Eight (October 19-23) – FALL BREAK (No Class). Reading: Read all of Judges.

Week Nine (October 26-30) – Form Criticism, Feminist Criticism, and Structural Criticism

- Monday – Othinel/Ehud
 - Reading: Judges 3:7-31; Christianson, Eric S., “A Fistful of Shekels: Scrutinizing Ehud’s Entertaining Violence (Judges 3:12-30),” *Biblical Interpretation*, 2003, Volume 11, Issue 1, p53-78 (**LIBRARY RESOURCE**).
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 9 (CHRISTIANSON) DUE.**
- Wednesday – Deborah
 - Reading: Judges 4; JM Chapter 4; TE 13.
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 10 (JM 4) DUE.**
- Friday – Deborah.
 - Reading: Judges 5; Vincent, Mark A., “The Song of Deborah: A Structural and Literary Consideration,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, December 2000, Issue 91, p. 61 (**LIBRARY RESOURCE**).
 - Assignment: **MIDTERM DUE ON INQUIRE BY MIDNIGHT.**

Week Ten (November 2-6) – Narrative Criticism Pt. 2 and Social-Scientific Criticism

- Monday – Gideon
 - Reading: Judges 6-8; Endris, Vince, “Yahweh versus Baal: A Narrative-Critical Reading of the Gideon/Abimelech Narrative,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 2008, Volume 23, Issue 2, pp. 173-195; (Refer back to TE Chapter 10).
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 11 (ENDRIS) DUE.**

- Wednesday – Gideon
 - Reading: Angel, Hayyim, “The Positive and Negative Traits of Gideon as Reflected in his sons Jotham and Abimelech,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, July-September 2006, Volume 34, Issue 3, pp. 160-167. **Article TBD**
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 12 (ANGEL) DUE.**
- Friday – Abimelech
 - Reading: Judges 9-10; JM Chapter 3; TE Chapter 6
 - Assignment: **OBSERVATION PAPER ONE DUE.**

Week Eleven (November 9-13) – Gender Criticism, Cultural Criticism, and Archaeological Criticism

- Monday – Abimelech
 - Reading: JM Chapter 9. **Article TBD.**
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 13 (JM 9) DUE.**
 -
- Wednesday – Jephthah
 - Reading: Judges 10; JM Chapter 10; Tribble Chapter 4 (PDF on Inquire)
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 14 (TRIBBLE) DUE.**
- Friday – Jephthah
 - Reading: Judges 11; Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth, “A Stratified Account of Jephthah’s Negotiations and Battle: Judges 11:12-33 from an Archaeological Perspective,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 2015, Volume 134, Number 2 (**LIBRARY RESOURCE**); Davies, Philip R., “Between Text and Archaeology,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 2011, Volume 18, Issue 3, pp. 316-338 (**LIBRARY RESOURCE**).
 - Assignment: **ROUGH DRAFT DUE.**

Week Twelve (November 16-20) – Tradition-Historical Criticism and Deconstructive Criticism

- Monday – Samson
 - Reading: Judges 13-16; Wilson, Stephen M, “Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 2014, Volume 133, Issue One, pp. 43-60 (Library Resource); TE Chapter 4
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 15 (WILSON) DUE.**
- Wednesday – Samson
 - Reading: Weitzman, Steve, “The Samson Story as Border Fiction,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 2002, Volume 10, Issue 2, pp. 158-174 (Library Resources), TE Chapter 8.
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 16 (WEITZMAN) DUE.**
- Friday – Achsah
 - Reading: JM Chapter 6; (Refer back to TE Chapter 9)
 - Assignment: **PRECIS 17 (JM 6) DUE.**

Week Thirteen (November 23-27) – Paper Workshops

- Monday – Paper Workshop with Peer(s).
- **Wednesday: THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- **Friday: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Week Fourteen (November 30-December 4) – Ideological Criticism, Feminist Criticism continued, and Postcolonial Criticism

- Monday – Dan and the Idols of Micah
 - Reading: Judges 17-18; JM Chapter 7
- Wednesday – Gibeah and the Levite Concubine
 - Reading: Judges 19-21; Tribble Chapter 3 (PDF on Inquire)
- Friday – “The Other” in Judges
 - Reading: JM Chapter 8; Lazare Rukundwa, “Postcolonial Theory as a Hermeneutical Tool for Biblical Reading” (link on Inquire)
 - Assignment: **FINAL DRAFT DUE.**

Week Fifteen (December 7-11) – Presentations Week

- Monday - Research Presentations
- Wednesday - Research Presentations
- Friday – Research Presentations
 - Assignment: **OBSERVATION PAPER TWO DUE.**

Week Sixteen (December 14-18) – Final Examination Week

- Final Examination Discussion. **Tuesday, December 15, 8:30-11:30 pm in our classroom.**

NOTICE: *There may be minor changes to the syllabus at the discretion of the professor, and notification of these changes will be made to students in a timely manner.*