

## **RELIGION 450: Researching Religion**

Dr. Luke Whitmore

Office Hours: Tues. 3:20-3:45, Wed. 2-3:30, Thurs. 3:20-3:45 and by appointment.

Location: CCC 417 (or, by arrangement, Zest)

### **DESCRIPTION**

The senior seminar is where religious studies students are invited to investigate adaptively and creatively a specific set of advanced topics in the study of religion, using the knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired over the course of their studies at UWSP. In my view this means that our task is to consider cutting edge topics that are of critical importance both in the academic study of religion and in the world today. Here are my goals (or learning outcomes) for this seminar:

Participants will leave this seminar with the ability to participate in public conversations about “religion” and “spirituality” in skillful and useful ways.

Participants will understand the professional value of training in religious studies and philosophy in today’s world and will be able to express this understanding effectively to others.

Participants will be able to identify, analyze, and evaluate the reasoning used in the production of specific interpretations of specific religion-related topics.

Participants will be able to creatively synthesize *their own* interpretation of a specific religion-related topic and will be able to articulate why their approach makes sense and why the topic is important.

We will achieve these goals in two interrelated ways:

First, over the course of the semester we will read three creative, important scholarly works that model a useful array of topics and approaches within Religious Studies. Second, as we are reading and discussing these works as a group each student will develop and carry out an independent research essay on a religion-related topic.

### **ORIENTING QUESTIONS**

What topic is the author investigating?

Why has the author chosen this topic? Why does the author think this topic matters? Do you agree?

What kinds of data are being considered and why those kinds of data?

How has this data been collected and is it the appropriate data set?

What approaches are being used to analyze those data and why those approaches?

What operative understandings and/or definitions of “religion,” “religious,” “spiritual,” and “spirituality,” as well as other important interpretive terms, are present?

What are the conclusions presented and who are the audiences for these conclusions?

What evidence is presented in support of these conclusions and does the evidence support the conclusions being drawn?

## **GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS**

**Attendance: 5%**

**Participation and Preparation: (20%)**

You are expected each week to come to class having carefully prepared the reading and with your own preliminary answers to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS already prepared. Each week, in addition to the assigned reading, it is expected that you will be doing your own reading, exploring, and thinking about your final paper topic. Most weeks we will discuss your progress at some point during the seminar. You will need to upload notes to D2L before coming to class each time we have an Independent Research class. Each week several seminar participants will be asked to take on a higher level of responsibility for our conversations together. This includes coming to class with your answers to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS prepared to share with the class and with several questions or topics you think deserve emphasis. I will attempt to pair particular students with particularly appropriate weeks to the extent possible. In the last several weeks of the seminar each participant will present their in-progress final project to the class. This presentation will include an explanation of how you would describe your work this semester to a potential employer.

### **Assignment 1: (15%)**

There are three components to this assignment. The first component is an *approximately 1000-word essay* in which you will, in response to a specific prompt, offer your own analysis of what we have done in the first \_\_\_\_ weeks of the course. The second component is a preliminary *annotated bibliography* containing at least eight sources relevant to your in-progress choice of topic for the final paper. The third component is a *resume*.

### **Assignment 2: Research Prospectus (20%)**

This assignment will ask you to respond to a series of questions (guidelines to be provided) designed to ensure the success of your final paper. It will further ask for a second *annotated bibliography* containing at least sixteen sources relevant to your final paper.

### **Final Paper/Project: (40%)**

The final paper, unless otherwise stipulated, will be a 3000 word research essay on a topic of your choice that you have developed in consultation with me over the course of the semester. While the ambit is quite broad, the essay must in some way or other position itself relevant to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS and consider the relationship of the material studied in the first half of the semester (Weeks 1–7) to the material studied in the second half of the semester.

### **Absences**

Full participation is crucial. Everyone is automatically entitled to two unexcused absence.

- 2 or fewer unexcused absences (Excellent) = 90-100%
- 3-6 unexcused absences (Good) = 80-90%
- 6-10 unexcused absences (Poor) = 66-79%
- More than 10 unexcused absences = failing grade for attendance.

Absences will be excused only when the excuse is provided (via email or in person) in advance of the class that will be missed. You should also be sure to upload a note/relevant information (including a copy of emails to me) into the "Absence-Related Info" folder on D2L. Acceptable reasons for an excused absence are illness, family emergency, or school sponsored trip or athletic competition.

If you miss class (excused or unexcused) you should complete the assignments, request and review notes from a colleague, and then come to discuss with me any questions you have about the material and study any class notes posted on D2L.

***Note: If you miss more than 5 classes I strongly suggest that we meet in person to discuss how things are going. I have found that repeated absence usually means you are struggling with something.***

Mutual Respect (avoid bad *karmas*)

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

Academic Misconduct (avoid bad *karmas*)

<http://library.uwsp.edu/guides/vrd/plagiarism.htm>

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf#page=11>

Emergency Response Guidance:

- In the event of a medical emergency call 9-1-1 or use the closest Red Emergency Phone. Offer assistance if trained and willing to do so. Guide emergency responders to victim.

- In the event of a tornado warning, proceed to the lowest level interior room without window exposure.
- In the event of a fire alarm, evacuate the building in a calm manner.
- Active Shooter/Code React – Run/Escape, Hide, Fight. If trapped hide, lock doors, turn off lights, spread out and remain quiet. Call 9-1-1 when it is safe to do so. Follow instructions of emergency responders. See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Procedures at [www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures](http://www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures) for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point.”