Religious Studies 701

Issues in the Study of Religion

Term 1, 2016-17

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Course description

This departmental seminar is required of all incoming students. It offers a forum for the discussion of issues central to the field of Religious Studies and for the exploration of a variety of approaches to investigating religious traditions, texts, institutions, ideas, experiences and practices. The primary focus of the seminar will be the key figures, texts, and arguments that have served to shape the field, but students will also explore ways of applying what they learn in order to develop the theoretical and practical skills necessary for the academic study of religion.

Assignments and evaluation

1. Seminar conference mini-panels (15%)

   For the Sept 28th and Oct 5th seminars, each student will either (a) present one of the chapters in the Taylor collection (written and sent to the discussant in advance) or (b) present a (written) response to another student's presentation. The class will discuss each pair of presentations briefly.

2. Full panels (50%)

   For one of five seminars (Nov 2, 9, 16, 30; Dec 7), each student will either (a) present the week's readings (written and sent to the discussant in advance) or (b) present a (written) response of another student's presentation. For each seminar, both students presenting will be responsible for initiating and leading the class discussion.

3. Class preparation and participation throughout the term (35%)
Seminar schedule

1. Sept. 14  Introductory meeting

2. Sept. 21  A. The seminar

  • Students should be prepared to present a short intellectual biography orally. Describe your previous studies, your areas of interest, and your career ambitions.

  B. The state of the academy – a stark perspective

  • Thomas Benton, "The Big Lie About the 'Life of the Mind'," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (8 Feb. 2010).

3. Sept. 28  Seminar conference I


4. Oct. 5  Seminar conference II


* Oct. 12  McMaster fall break

5. Oct. 17-18  Sherman A. Jackson, Hooker Visiting Professor

  • Students are required to attend Prof Sherman’s two lectures. Details TBA.

6. Oct. 26  Library resources

  • Meeting with librarian Olga Perkovic, Mills Library L107 (Wong classroom). Time TBA.
7. Nov. 2

8. Nov. 9

9. Nov. 16

* Nov. 23  Traditional AAR / SBL break

10. Nov. 30

11. Dec. 7