

**Religious Studies 701**  
**Fall 2019**  
**Issues in the Study of Religion**

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Time: Mon. 1:30-3:30 p.m. UH 122

This seminar provides the opportunity for all first year MA and PhD students to engage with key issues in the academic study of religion. Using the *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), edited by Robert A. Orsi, a former President of the American Academy of Religion, we will explore important historical debates that have shaped the field as well as current methodological approaches. By the end of the course, students will have a broad appreciation for the varied interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives that come together in Religious Studies.

The course will be organized around in-class discussion. Every student will be responsible for reading all the assigned weekly readings and for preparing a four-page (typed double-spaced) discussion paper on the readings listed in the syllabus every week. For each article or book chapter, the discussion paper should summarize and critically evaluate the author's argument and formulate questions to be raised during seminar discussion. Secondary sources may be used, but the assigned course readings for the week should be the primary focus of the discussion paper. Sample discussion papers will be posted in the Avenue to Learn site for the course. Discussion papers are due in class each week and will be evaluated together with seminar participation as the basis for the course grade. 25% of the grade will be based on seminar participation and 60% on the weekly discussion papers. The remaining 15% of the course grade will be based on a summary-critique of one of three recent books that have been influential in the study of religion, *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power*, by Stephen S. Bush (Oxford University Press, 2014), *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, by Thomas A. Tweed (Harvard University Press, 2006) or *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, by Catherine Bell (Oxford University Press, 2009, originally 1992). The summary-critique should be approximately 2000 words in length, and should provide an overview of the book's substantive and theoretical contributions that would be informative for someone who had not read the book. In addition, the summary-critique should evaluate the book in the light of the methodological and theoretical perspectives we have been discussing in class throughout the semester. The books by Orsi, Tweed, Bell and Strousma are on reserve at Mills and available through the Campus Store.

**Syllabus and Weekly Readings**

(From the *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* unless otherwise indicated)

September 9:            Organizational Meeting and Course Introduction

- September 16: Orsi: "Introduction"  
Schmidt: "On Sympathy, Suspicion and Studying Religion"
- September 23: Asad: "Thinking About Religion, Belief and Politics"  
Taves: "Special Things as Building Blocks of Religions"
- September 30: Orsi: "The Problem of the Holy"  
Puett: "Social Order or Social Chaos"
- October 7: Satlow: "Tradition: The Power of Constraint"  
Blackburn: "The Text and the World"
- October 14: **No Class - Fall Break**
- October 21: Lewis: "On the Role of Normativity in Religious Studies"  
Kavka: "Translation"
- October 28: Engelke: "Material Religion"  
Helmer: "Theology and the Study of Religion"
- November 4: Faure: "Buddhism and Violence"  
Bender: "Practicing Religions"
- November 11: Morgan: "The Look of the Sacred"  
Sullivan: "Reforming Culture: Law and Religion Today"
- November 18: Griffith: "Sexing Religion"  
Prasad: "Constituting Ethical Subjectivities"
- November 25: **No Class - AAR/SBL Meetings**
- December 2: Frederick: "Neo-Pentecostalism and Globalization"  
Salomon and Walton: "Religious Criticism, Secular Critique and the 'Critical Study of Religion'"
- December 9: Lisbeth Mikaelsson: "Gendering the History of Religions" in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion, vol. 1*, edited by Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, Randi R. Warne, pp. 295-316. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004. (Available on Avenue to Learn)
- Sian Melvill Hawthorne: "Inhospitable Landscapes: Disciplinary Territories and the Feminist 'Paradigm Shift.'" *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions* 19 (2017): 36-55. (Available on Avenue to Learn)
- December 16: **No Class - Book Summary Critique Due Mon. Dec. 16**