“Religion, I submit, is that discourse whose defining characteristic is its desire to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal.” ~ Bruce Lincoln

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the academic study of religion, an interdisciplinary enterprise that calls upon a wide range of disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and feminist theory. We will draw distinctions between the academic study of religion and religion as it is practiced. We will use key concepts such as ritual, belief, gender, and sexuality to explore the construction of the category of religion. We will examine how some scholars have conceptualized “religion” and the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches. Case studies will provide entry into how people have understood and explored religion across various historical time periods and cultural locations.

The major touchstones of this course will be the questions: “What is the relationship between religion and belief?” Can religion be reduced to belief? Is religion more than belief? Is religion beyond belief? The theories and methods for the study of religion will provide some of the necessary tools to explore these questions and our case studies will provide the context in which we will ask them.

Course Objectives:

- Become familiar with the kinds of theories and methods used to study religion
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of these theories and methods
- Be able to articulate differences between the study of religion and religious practice
- Demonstrate development of critical-thinking and writing
- Learn to acknowledge the perspectives of scholars and religious thinkers, as well as how one’s own background and cultural context impacts one’s own perspective

Course Requirements:

I. Active Participation in Class
   A. This class will be conducted seminar style and students are expected to come to the class ready to participate.
   B. Students are expected to come to class prepared with their copy of text(s).
II. Attendance
A. Missing more than two courses will result in five points off your final grade per absence. If you are ill or have a family emergency please contact me.
B. Athletes needing to miss more than two class sessions please have your coaches contact me with your schedule.
C. Sleeping, cell phone usage, Internet abuse, or disruption will be counted as an absence.

III. Critiques
A. Critiques provide a students with a space for critical reflection on the readings, developing your ideas, cultivating community, and practicing writing.
B. Critiques are expected to be part of the continuation of the conversation and impact class discussion.
C. Excellent critiques often ask a question and respond to that question.
D. Critiques are 250-300 words in length.
E. Critiques are due every Monday by 10:00 pm via email.

IV. Four Exams
A. There will be four essay style exams, one of which will be the final exam. These exams will be cumulative building on previous course content and providing the students with a foundation on which they can build.
B. Students are expected to write three essays in response to the assigned materials. These are intended to be a medium length form for thinking through the theories and methods covered in the course and engaging connecting them to course themes.
C. Ideally these exams will allow students the chance to demonstrate how well they understand and engaging course materials. The exams are meant to provide the students who are actively participating and doing the readings with another chance to expand their comprehension and understanding course content in a more expanded form.
**Grading Rubric:** Students are expected to complete the work in a reflective a timely fashion, and there is a no late work policy. Participation and satisfactory completion of each class session's activities as well as the blog, final project presentation and the final project itself are assessed according to the point system as follows:

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<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Active Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Critiques</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Exam #2</td>
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<td>Exam #3</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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*There will be no extra credit.*

**The Final Letter Grade:** Students are welcome to calculate their final grade at anytime using the following grade scale. It is important for students to note the scale carefully.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>70-72</td>
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<td>65-69</td>
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<td>64 and below</td>
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Academic Integrity:
“Syracuse University sets high standards for academic integrity. Those standards are supported and enforced by students, including those who serve as academic integrity hearing panel members and hearing officers. The presumptive sanction for a first offense is course failure, accompanied by the transcript notation “Violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.” The standard sanction for a first offense by graduate students is suspension or expulsion. Students should review the Office of Academic Integrity online resource “Twenty Questions and Answers About the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy” and confer with instructors about course-specific citation methods, permitted collaboration (if any), and rules for examinations. The Policy also governs the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. Additional guidance for students can be found in the Office of Academic Integrity resource: ‘What does academic integrity mean?’”

Related Links:
The Academic Integrity Policy: http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/academic-integrity-policy/
Twenty Questions and Answers about the Academic Integrity Policy: http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/faculty-resources/
What does academic integrity mean?: http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/what-does-academic-integrity-mean/

Disability Statement:
“If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.” Syracuse University and I are committed to your success and to supporting Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This means that in general no individual who is otherwise qualified shall be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity, solely by reason of having a disability. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.”

Related Links:
Office of Disability Services (ODS): http://disabilityservices.syr.edu
Disability Cultural Center: http://sudcc.syr.edu
Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee: http://bcccsyracuse.wordpress.com/

Religious Observance Policy:
“Please note that you may miss classes and tests for religious observance provided you give notification by the end of the second week of class. You may do so online until the end of the second week through MySlice/ Student Services/ Enrollment/ My Religious
Observances. Syracuse University’s policy can be found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.html.”

Related Links:
Religious Observance Policy:
http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.html
Hendricks Chapel list of Holy Days and Holidays:
http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/holy-days-holidays.html
Interfaith Calendar: http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/

Required Books:
Malory Nye, Religion the Basics. 2nd Edition. 9780415449489. new $23.70
Voltaire, Candide, 9780486266893, new $16.37
Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, 9781614270867. new $5.00
Elie Wiesel, Night, 9780374500016 new $6.00

Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

Tu. Week 1, Sept. 1: Contextualizing The Study of Religion: An Introduction
Issues: Cover the syllabus, in class writing exercise on the questions 1) what is religion? 2) What do we study when we study religion?

Th. Week 1, Sept. 3: Contextualizing The Study of Religion: An Introduction
Reading(s): Malory Nye, “Religion” and “Gender,” in Religion: the Basics, 1-23; 79-104.

Tu. Week 2, Sept. 8, Religion and Culture in Early Christianity

Th. Week 2, Sept. 10: Religion and Culture in Early Christianity

Tu. Week 3, Sept. 15: Religion and Culture in Early Christianity

Th. Week 3, Sept. 17: Religion and Culture in the Enlightenment
Voltaire, Candide, Ch. 1-10.
Tu. **Week 4, Sept. 22: Religion and Culture in the Enlightenment**  
   **Reading(s):** Voltaire, *Candide*, Ch. 11-20.

Th. **Week 4, Sept. 24: Religion and Culture in the Enlightenment**  
   **Reading(s):** Malory Nye, “Belief,” in *Religion: the Basics*, 105-128.  
   Voltaire, *Candide*, Ch. 21-30.

Tu. **Week 5, Sept. 29: Exam #1**

Th. **Week 5, Oct. 1: Religion and Belief**  
   **Screen:** Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, *Jesus Camp*.

Tu. **Week 6, Oct. 6: Religion and Belief**  

Th. **Week 6, Oct. 8: Religion and Belief**  
   **Reading(s):** Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Pt. 2.

Tu. **Week 7, Oct. 13: Responses to Freud**  
   **Reading(s):** Julia Kristeva, “A Freudian Approach: The Pre-religious Need To Believe.”

Th. **Week 7, Oct. 15: Responses to Freud**  
   **Screen:** Vikram Gandhi, *Kumaré*

Tu. **Week 8, Oct. 20: Responses to Freud**  
   **Reading(s):** Malory Nye, “Power,” in *Religion: the Basics*, 57-78.

Th. **Week 8, Oct. 22: Exam #2 Due.**

Tu. **Week 10, Oct. 27: Death of God**  

Th. **Week 10, Oct. 29: Death of God**  
   **Reading(s):** Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorisms 115, 123-125

Tu. **Week 11, Nov. 3: Theodicy**  
   **Reading(s):** Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Pt. 1.

Th. **Week 11, Nov. 5: Theodicy**  
   **Reading(s):** Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Pt. 2.

Tu. **Week 12, Nov. 10: Theodicy**  
   **Reading(s):** Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Pt. 3.
Th.  Week 12, Nov. 12: Theodicy  
Reading(s): Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Pt. 4.

Tu.  Week 13, Nov. 17: Religion After the Death of God  
Reading(s): Malory Nye, “Contemporary Religions,” in *Religion: the Basics*, 182-211.  

Th.  Week 13, Nov. 19: Exam #3

Thanksgiving Break November 22-29

Tu.  Week 14, Dec. 1: Religion After the Death of God  

Th.  Week 14, Dec. 3: Religion After the Death of God  
Reading(s): Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, ch. 6-11.

Tu.  Week 15, Dec. 8: Religion After the Death of God  

Th.  Week 15, Dec. 10: Last Day of Class and Final Exam