

# REL 103—Religion and Sports—Online

Syllabus  
Fall 2016



Course Instructor:  
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It would be more accurate to call this class “Religion **AS** Sports” or “Sports **AS** Religion.” Nearly all sports have their origins in religious ceremonies. Olympic Games, Hockey, Sumo Wrestling, and the Martial Arts are obvious examples, but also more popular games like Football, Basketball, Soccer, and Golf connect directly with ancient ceremonial practices. This class focuses on the most important local example of this with the Haudenosaunee (i.e., Iroquois) game of Lacrosse. Even more important than their ceremonial history, however, sports are currently understood by enthusiasts and critics alike as a “religious activity.” The course will take the perspective that *it is clearer to understand the current popularity and appeal of sports (including games of all types) as ceremonial activities rather than as business or entertainment activities.*

In the first part of the class we will define religion as **exchange** in order to include sports. This follows from my work on Indigenous religions. For this class religion will be understood as a series of exchanges between different beings (gods, ancestors, animals, stars, plants, people, players, fans, announcers, cheerleaders, referees, etc.). We’ll ask several questions. What makes a *gifted* athlete or coach? Why are fans so devoted to their teams? What is sacred about sporting venues? While reading the required book and supplemental readings, we will look at how sports can strengthen cultural and ethical values. How are sports a vital force in the development of youth and communities? Do sports help disenfranchised groups of people (women, African Americans, and Native Americans, for example) overcome their social situation or do they keep them trapped in their social roles? My position is that a greater diversity and inclusiveness in sports eventually improves them. We will also think about the difficult issues facing sports today and will go through some of these issues thematically, including racial issues, mascots, money, drugs, and women in sports.

**Required text:**

Philip P. Arnold, The Gift of Sports, Indigenous Ceremonial Dimensions of the Games We Love, (<https://titles.cognella.com/the-gift-of-sports-9781621310471.html> )

(Other short readings posted on Blackboard)

**Requirements:**

The intention of this class is for students to engage the readings, videos lectures, and supplemental videos and websites in a constructive and enriching way. To do this, each student will be responsible for writing seven (7) posts that other students will respond to through Blackboard's discussion board. **These posts will require the student to do all the weekly assignments (reading, videos and links) then use the language of the religion of the class to write about sports.** Students will also be responsible for an abstract describing your final video project. Below is how each assignment breaks down within the 100-point grade scale for this class. You will also have an opportunity to do 2 Extra Point assignments of 3 points each, which will give you a potential of 6 extra points to be added onto your 100-point total grade scale, meaning that 106 points are possible.

1. At designated times on the schedule, student are required to write seven (7) original posts responding to a prompt that is on the syllabus. These posts should be between 250-300 words; or about one page, double-spaced. Under the section of the Blackboard site labeled "Posts-Reponses" find the designated forum and push the "Create New Thread" button. **Write your post offline and then copy and paste it into the dialog box. Do not post as an attachment.** If you attach your post it is more difficult to read. Also, oftentimes attachments don't download and if the instructor cannot read your post you will not receive a grade! Each post is worth a possible 6 points for a grand total of 42 points. Please consult the "Week-to-Week" schedule below.
2. On weeks following the seven (7) *original posts*, each student will be expected to write a response to two (2) other student post. After reading the student's post push the reply button and write your response in the dialog box. Responses should be 3-4 sentences in length and discussing the main points in the post. Responses should not begin with "Great job," or "I like what you said." Try and be as creative and insightful with your responses as with your original posts. Each response will be worth a possible 2 points, for a total of 4 points each week. You can earn as much as 28 points for responses over the semester. Please consult the "Week-to-Week" schedule below.
3. Your final project will consist of three components: (1) an abstract/outline posted on Blackboard, (2) two responses to other student outlines posted on Blackboard, and (3) a final video presentation posted on Blackboard.
  - a. The abstract/outline will clearly establish (and in narrative fashion) the scope and trajectory of your final project. The final project will address some sporting phenomenon (an event, athlete, fan, or other area of sports) that you see as being significant for understanding its religious dimensions. This will be worth 6 points.
  - b. The response to a classmate's outline should be a well-developed paragraph constructively responding to the abstract/outline's argument, clarity, and appropriateness for the course. Constructive suggestions should be included to help the student develop her/his video presentation. This will be worth 4 points.

- c. For your final project you will create a video presentation and posted to Blackboard by 11:59 PM on **Sunday 11 December**. It is to be between 2-3 minutes in length. This will be worth up to 20 points.

Below are three criteria that we will use when grading your written work. The percentages are only to indicate how I weight these aspects of your writing:

- **Clarity.** The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight---forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset. (40%)
- **Engagement with the material.** Entries are to be related to the reading material. They are *not reviews* of what has been stated in the book but are *your critical analysis* of the reading. Avoid direct quotes. Instead seriously take---up what you consider to be the 'key' issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class. (40%)
- **Creativity.** The 'work' of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well-argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself. (20%)

Assignment	Possible Points Per Assignment	Total Possible Points Per Semester
Seven (7) Original Posts	6	42
2 Responses to 7 Posts	2 pts/res = 4	28
Abstract/Outline: Final Project	6	6
2 Responses to Abstract/Outlines	2 pts/res = 4	4
Video Presentation	20	20
Total Possible Points (plus up to 6 points extra credit)		100

**Grading (calculated on a 100 point scale):**

- A 94-100 points  
 A- 91-93 points  
 B+ 87-90 points  
 B 84-86 points  
 B- 81-83 points  
 C+ 77-80 points  
 C 74-76 points  
 C- 71-73 points  
 D 60-70 points  
 F 59 points and below

## **Week to Week Schedule:**

### ***SECTION I: SPORTS AS RELIGION***

#### **Week 1: Introduction to *Religion and Sports* (29 August-4 September)**

1. Introduction to “Religion AS Sports”—religion and identity
  - a. Reading: Arnold (1-4)
  - b. Video: Becoming Orange at Syracuse University
2. Sports for Religion or as Religion
  - a. Reading: Arnold (5-9)
  - b. Reading: Jackson #1
  - c. Video: Sports as Religion vs. Religion as Sports
- 3. Post #1: Using the ideas of the class, write about your experience of sports as religion.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 4 September.**

#### **Week 2: What is *Religion*? (5-11 September)**

- 1) Definitions of Religion
  - a. Reading: Arnold (11-19)
  - b. Video: Definitions of Religion
- 2) Academic Study of Religion: Ambiguity and Orientation
  - a. Video: Examined Life—Cornell West
  - b. Video: 3A What is Religion?
- 3) Response #1: Respond to two (2) other posts.  
Due by 11:59 pm Sunday, 11 September.**

#### **Week 3: Gift and Profit Economies (12-18 September)**

- 1) Religion as Habitation (sacred places)
  - a. Reading: Arnold (17-19)
  - b. Video: 4: Indigenous Religions: Religion as Habitation
  - c. Video: Zen Buddhism
  - d. Video: Marathon Monks of Mt. Hiei
- 2) Religion as Exchange
  - a. Reading: Arnold (21-30)
  - b. Reading: Brennan #1
  - c. Link: <http://christinebrennan.com/best-seat-in-the-house/>
  - d. Video: 5 Gift Economy
  - a. Video: Mayan Ball Games
  - e. Video: Wade Boggs
- 3) Post #2: Create a glossary of religious terms. Define and discuss the terms: hierophany, sacred place, gift economy, ceremonial exchange and others that appeal to you.  
Due by 11:59 pm Sunday, 18 September.**

## **SECTION II: SPORTS AS ORIENTATION**

### **Week 4: The Spectacle of Sport (19-25 September)**

- 2) Money, Religion, and the Profit Economy
  - a. Reading: Arnold (31-34)
  - b. Video: 6 Money & Religion
  - c. Video: Are NCAA Players Uncompensated Employees?
- 3) Human Limitations
  - a. Reading: Arnold (35-45)
  - b. Video: 7 Human Limitations
  - c. Video: Surfers Healing: The Izzy Paskowitz Story
  - d. Video: Team Hoyt
  - e. Video: Murder Ball

**4) Response #2: Respond to two (2) other posts.**

**5) Extra Credit: Super Bowl as spectacle**

**Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 25 September.**

### **Week 5: Olympic (and the Super Bowl) Spectacle (26 September-2 October)**

- 1) Super Bowl and American Culture
  - a. Video: Super Bowl and Declaration of Independence
  - b. Video: Super Bowl 2015: Domestic Violence PSA
  - c. Video: Proud to Be
  - d. Video: #ChangetheMascot Super Bowl Ad
- 2) Mythic Origins of Olympics
  - a. Reading: Arnold (47-50)
  - b. Video: 8 Olympic Morality
  - c. Video: Ancient Olympia
  - d. Video: "Olympia" 1938 by Leni Riefenstahl

**3) Post #3: What values and symbols of the ancient Olympics are still expressed through the modern games? How are these defined in the opening ceremonies?**

**Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 2 October.**

### **Week 6: Olympic Lessons and Gifted Athletes (3-9 October)**

- 4) Olympics Lessons
  - a. Reading: Arnold (57-62)
  - b. Video: Beijing Opening Ceremony
  - c. Video: Lance Armstrong Documentary
  - d. Video: Jesse Owens: Enduring Spirit
  - e. Video: Glickman
- 5) Gifted Athletes
  - a. Reading: Arnold (51-55)
  - b. Link: <http://espn.go.com/ncaa/news/story?id=6226242>
  - c. Video: 9 Philosopher Coach
  - d. Video: Paavo Nurmi

**6) Response #3: Respond to two (2) other posts.**

**Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 9 October.**

**Week 7: Responsibilities: Talents, Gifts and Coaching (10-16 October)**

- 1) The Philosopher Coach
  - a. Reading: Arnold (63-66)
  - b. Reading: Jackson #2
  - c. Video: Coach K and Jim Boeheim Exclusive Interview
  - d. Video: How NBA Coach Phil Jackson Taught His Teams Mindfulness
- 2) Talents and Gifts
  - a. Reading: Arnold (67-69)
  - b. Reading: Talent Code by Coyle (11-29)
  - c. Video: 10 Talents and Gifts
  - d. Website: <http://thetalentcode.com>
  - e. Video: Todd Marinovich Training Session

- 3) Post #4: Define what makes a Gifted Athlete and/or Coach and then write about their duties and responsibilities to their gifts.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 16 October.**

**Week 8: Football as a Substitute for War (17-23 October)**

- 1) Origins of Football and Indian Wars
  - a. Reading: Arnold (71-75)
  - b. Reading: Jenkins
  - c. Link: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_American\\_football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_American_football)
  - d. Video: 11A Native American History
  - e. Video: Jim Thorpe: The World's Greatest Athlete-trailer
  - f. Video: After words with Sally Jenkins
- 2) Native American Boarding Schools
  - a. Reading: Arnold (77-81)
  - b. Video: 11B Indian Boarding Schools
  - c. Video: Unseen Tears (1-3)
  - d. Video: America's Prisoners of War

- 3) Response #4: Respond to two (2) other posts.**

- 4) Final Project abstract/outline.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 23 October.**

**Week 9: Sports and Racism (24-30 October)**

- 1) Racism and Sports: Conveyor Belt System
  - a. Reading: Arnold (83-89)
  - b. Reading: Rhoden
  - c. Video: 12A Racism & Sports
  - d. Video: Donald Sterling interview
  - e. Video: Breaking the Huddle-trailer
  - f. Video: Jackie Robinson BIO

- 2) Post #5: Using the idea of gift exchange, how does racism and inequality negatively affect our games? How do sports help heal society of racism and inequality?**

- 3) Final Project Response: Respond to two (2) separate final project abstracts  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 30 October.**

**Week 10: Native American Mascots (31 October-6 November)**

- 1) Indian Mascots and Racism
  - a. Reading: Arnold (91-94)
  - b. Reading: Black
  - c. Video: 12C Mascots
  - d. Video: In Whose Honor?
  - e. Video: Is the Redskins Name Racist?
  - f. Video: Washington Redskins Piece on the Daily Show

**2) Response #5: Respond to two (2) other posts.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday, 6 November.**

**Week 11: Woman and Equality (7-13 November)**

- 1) Beyond Title IX: Women and Sports
  - a. Reading: Arnold (95-99)
  - b. Reading: Brennan #2
  - c. Reading: Title IX and Athletics
  - d. Video: 12B Women & Sports
  - e. Link: <http://www.ncwge.org/athletics.html>
  - f. Video: Billie Jean King
  - g. Video: Katherine Switzer
- 3) **Post #6: Using the concepts of this class, discuss why gender equality is important in sports.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 13 November.**

**SECTION III: NATURE RELIGION AND INDIGENOUS SPORTS AS RELIGION**

**Week 12: Sports, Religion and the Environment (14-20 November)**

- 1) Nature Religion
  - a. Reading: Nature and Sports
  - b. Video: 13 Sports & Nature
  - c. Link: <http://www.opb.org/news/article/northwest-ski-resorts-call-for-action-on-climate-c/>
  - d. Video: How Climate Change is Melting the Ski Industry
- 2) Creation, The Great Law of Peace, and Thanksgiving Address
  - a. Reading: Who are the Haudenosaunee?
  - b. Link: <http://www.onondaganation.org/history/>
  - c. Video: Oren Lyons and Bill Moyers

**3) Response #6: Respond to two (2) other posts.  
Due by April 11:59 pm, Sunday 20 November.**

**Thanksgiving Break—21-27 November**

**Week 13: The Haudenosaunee Confederacy (28 November-4 December)**

- 1) From the Creator's Game to the Final Four: History of Lacrosse
  - a. Reading: Arnold (105-109)
  - b. Video: 14A Lacrosse
  - a. Video: Wooden Stick Info
  - b. Video: Alf's Talk
  - c. Website: <http://iroquoisnationals.org/the-iroquois/the-story-of-lacrosse/>
- 2) Mythic Legacy of Lacrosse:
  - a. Reading: Arnold (111-115)
  - b. Video: 14B Lacrosse
  - c. Video: America's First Sport
  - d. WILC 2015: Opening Ceremony
  - e. Website: <http://www.onondaganation.org/culture/sports/lacrosse/>
- 3) Post #7: Using the concepts of this class, discuss the relationship between lacrosse, religion and responsibility for the Haudenosaunee.  
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 4 December.**

**Week 14: The Sacred Game of Lacrosse (5-11 December)**

**Final projects**

- 1. Response #7: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
- 2. Extra Credit #2: Topic on Blackboard forum**
- 3. Final Video Project.**
  - a. Due to be posted by 11:59 PM, Sunday 11 December.**



## Course Goals

The Department of Religion has articulated three goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses and programs may expect to gain from this study:

1. to understand better the nature and diversity of religious expressions in the contemporary world and in history, and their power in peoples' personal and collective lives;
2. to think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation;
3. to recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities in a disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of a diversity of approaches and methods within that study.

## Disability-Related Accommodations

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, TDD: (315) 443-1371 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.

## Academic Integrity Policy

Syracuse University's academic integrity policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>.

## Religious Observances Notification and Policy

SU religious observances notification and policy, found at <http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html>, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes.

For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available for students in **My Slice / StudentServices / Enrollment / MyReligiousObservances / Add a Notification**. Instructors may access a list of their students who have submitted a notification in My Slice Faculty Center.