

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Department of Religious Studies

Fall 2017 ONLINE

RS 367: THE COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF RELIGION

COURSE SYLLABUS

Professor: Dr Claire White
Email: Primary: claire.white@csun.edu
Weekly Class: **ONLINE. Optional Zoom sessions** Tuesday 2:00-3:00pm
Course Number: 14950
Office hours: Online Tuesday 1:00-2:00pm during term
Office Location: Santa Susana Hall (SN), room 236, telephone: 818-677-5640
D2 on Map: http://www.csun.edu/maps/Campus_Map.pdf
Websites: CSUN: <http://www.csun.edu/religious.studies/profile.White.html>
External: <http://clairejwhite.wix.com/clairenw>

1. This document

This is your syllabus for the class. A syllabus is an outline of a course that describes what to expect and what you need to do to pass. It is also a contract. By coming to class, you are agreeing to the terms and conditions of this contract. You cannot pass this course unless you read and consult this document regularly. It is subject to minor changes as we progress (e.g., topics, readings), but you will be notified of any changes in advance. Before you ask me a question, consult this document (and Canvas) to ensure it has not been answered.

2. Brief course description

This course fulfills CSUN requirements for RS 367 “The Cognitive Science of Religion”. This course examines a relatively new cognitive approach to understanding religious phenomena, known as “The Cognitive Science of Religion” (CSR).
THE CLASS IS FULLY ONLINE. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO ATTEND CLASS IN-PERSON.
I do recommend that you attend the selected Zoom sessions online.

The course is divided up into four main sections:

- 1. Background:** the history and foundations of CSR.
- 2. Methods:** common methods employed in CSR to study religion.
- 3. Topics:** some religious ideas and behaviors that have been the focus of CSR research.
- 4. Evaluation of CSR:** the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

No required textbook:

There is no required textbook for this course. I recommend that you purchase or rent the book for your group presentations (see online for details). This should cost around \$20.

All readings will be posted on Moodle. There are books available for consultation in the library. You should consult with these for assignments. Please refer to the reading list, here:
<http://suncat.csun.edu/search~S9?/pwhite+/pwhite/1%2C2%2C4%2CB/frameset&FF=pwhite+c&1%2C%2C3>

3. Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

Below is a list of the aims and objectives of this course that have been determined by the University (General Education requirements), College, Department and myself.

What can you expect to learn in this course?

A. Religious Studies Student Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to recognize and to articulate (orally and in writing) the difference between an academic approach to religion and a personal, devotional approach.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in recognizing the major contributors to the modern study of religion and their models/theories from philosophy, theology, the history of religions, and the social sciences.
3. Students will be able to understand the following terms in their conventional, popular usage, and then discuss the variety of ways that religious studies scholars have critiqued, expanded, or problematized these: religion, religious, myth, ritual, symbol, philosophy, subjectivity, objectivity, secular/secularization, cult, sect, mysticism, theism, atheism, polytheism, monotheism, spirituality, magic, paganism, animism, canon, religious violence, post-colonialism, individualistic compared to community-based religions.
4. Students will be able to explain and give basic examples of the social function of religion with regard to gender, ethnicity, and nationality.
5. Students will be able to recognize religiosity in an aspect of modern culture such as different forms of media, art, music, films, politics, sports, and the public discourse on science.
6. Students will be able to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in describing several specific religious traditions, including their historical development, major beliefs and practices, and demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in interpreting religious texts and rituals from each religious tradition.

B. RS 367: Student Learning Objectives

This course fulfills CSUN requirements for RS 367 'Cognitive Approaches to the Study of Religion'.

By the end of this course you will:

1. Articulate the current approaches and methodologies to studying religion academically;
2. Describe the main features of CSR and understand how it differs from other attempts to study religion;
3. Evaluate the contribution of CSR to the study of religion generally.

4. Course Information

A.) Zoom sessions

I strongly recommend that you attend the selected Zoom sessions. Zoom is an online video conferencing, like skype (see tracker and syllabus for dates and see also the technology section below for information on how to use Zoom). See also week 1 on Moodle for registration info.

B.) Participation in Zoom

We all have different styles of interacting with the world, and some students are quieter than others, which I understand. You are welcome to listen in to the Zoom sessions and contribute when you feel comfortable ☺, I look forward to your contributions.

C.) Readings

There are around 3 articles to read each week. This may seem like a lot, but you will learn effective reading strategies, and we are in the Humanities—reading is what we do. Do the

required readings *before* you watch the online videos and attend Zoom. Readings are available on Moodle. You will be tested on them (see assignments). For selected topics, I will also inform you of extra readings available in the Oviatt Library for loan. Extra reading can increase your score in exams and the final essay.

D.) Technological information:

- This course will employ either Moodle or the Canvas based format.
- For instruction on how to use Canvas technology, go to: <http://www.csun.edu/it/canvas>
- If you are having a technical difficulty please contact the IT Help Center online at (<http://techsupport.csun.edu>) or in person (Oviatt Library, room 33).
- When assignments are due online, always submit your work at least 1 day early to allow time for any problems to be resolved. Late work is not accepted.
- We will use ZOOM for discussions during the course and you can also use it to interact with me during my online office hours. (Zoom is like Skype). See syllabus for dates.
 1. Log into Zoom here: <https://www.csun.edu/it/zoom>
(You can also download it as an iphone app and use it on your iphone).
 2. Click “join a meeting”
 3. Enter the meeting ID provided by me (check Moodle)
 4. Make sure your device is set to mute until you want to speak ☺

E.) Class materials

- Class materials (e.g., PowerPoints) will be available on Moodle by 9am on the day of class. Readings will be available from the start of term.

F.) Class etiquette and tips

- Your opinions are valued. Likewise, you must also respect the opinions of your peers. Respectful disagreements are encouraged, heated arguments are not.
- This is an academic approach to religion not a space for personal devotional statements. Theological statements (e.g., promoting or disrespecting a religion) are not appropriate.

G.) Communication

- If your name/personal pronouns/pronunciation are different from the roster/what I say, please correct me in person as soon as possible.
- Check your CSUN account regularly for class messages (at least once a week).
- Ask me anytime throughout the course, about anything that you are unsure of. I prefer to be asked questions during Zoom sessions.
- If your question cannot wait until the Zoom session, you may email me. Begin the email with the following “*Dear Dr. White, my name is _____ and I am in your RS 356 class.*” Be as specific as you can in your enquiry.
- I will answer emails within 48 hours Mon-Fri (Sat/Sun emails will be received Monday).
- You can also schedule a Zoom session with me during my office hours.

H.) Disability

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services office or the National Center on Deafness. The DRES office can be reached at (818) 677-2684. NCOD can be reached at (818) 677-2611. Please let me know how I can accommodate you at the earliest opportunity.

I.) Difficulties

If you are experiencing personal difficulties during the course – such as mental health issues (e.g.,

anxiety, depression) or severe financial or other problems, please make an appointment to come and see me as early as you can.

J.) Religious observations

If an assignment due date conflicts with a religious observation that affects you then complete the assignment early. If the observation lasts longer than 6 days then contact me for an earlier submission.

K.) Submission/Late work

- Assignments are due electronically.
- Moodle will not allow submissions after the due time.
- ***Late work and re-take assignments are **only** accepted in cases of severe emergencies (e.g., illness requiring hospitalization or a death in the family). All emergencies must be documented in writing and submitted to me for consideration within 7 days of the event.
- Technological problems (e.g., broken computer, failure to upload doc on Moodle) are not valid reasons for late submissions. Always submit your work early!

L.) Assignments

Detailed instructions on the individual assignments are available on Canvas. Assignments are typically due by 9am on Monday morning the same week as class (e.g., if class is on a Tuesday, then assignments are due by 9am the day before, on Monday). Check the syllabus tracker for due dates.

Reading Quizzes:

- Four quizzes.
- Timed (10 minutes).
- Accessed online.
- True or false. Either the answer is true, or false.
- Ten questions per quiz (0.5 point per question).

Moodle discussion/participation questions:

- 10 sets of questions/assignments about the week's materials.
- 2 point per set of questions (incomplete, spelling errors or lack of effort = 0).

Mid-Term Exam:

- Timed (2 hours 45minutes).
- Online during class time (quiz will open a few mins before class starts).
- Due online by the end of class (e.g., if class ends at 4:45pm, quiz closes at 4:45pm)
- Answer two essays question from a choice of three.
- Max. 1000 words.

Essay outline:

- Due online.
- Outline of main points/basic argument in final essay.
- Can be in bullet-point format or essay-style.
- Max 1,000 words.

Final Essay:

- Due online (see syllabus).

- Seen essay question.
- Max 2,000 words.
- Question: “What is the Cognitive Science of Religion and what can it tell us about religion? Answer with reference to at least one topic in the study of religion”

M.) Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities may arise in the course. I will notify you when they do. Do not rely on them.

N.) Academic Dishonesty

All cheating, including plagiarism, will NOT be tolerated. Students will receive a grade F and be reported to the University for disciplinary action. For more information of the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult pages 27-28 of the 2012-2013 Student Handbook.

5. Assessment Summary/Grade Tracker

#	Assignment	Due	Max. points	Earned
1	Reading quizzes	Selected weeks	20 points	
2	Moodle discussion Qs	Weekly	20 points	
3	Mid-term exam	10 th Oct at 4:45pm	20 points	
4	Final essay outline	18 th Oct by 2pm	10 points	
5	Final essay	8 th December by 9am	30 points	
	Total		100 points	

6. Grading

Grading is based on a point system. Maximum points overall = 100. All submitted work is given the total number of points gained per maximum for that task (e.g., 18/20). I do not assign grades to tasks but you can work this out using the point system below. The grade is given at the end of the course, based on 100 maximum points (extra credit is ‘extra’).

POINTS	GRADE
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
Below 60	F

Grades are not curved or normalized.

8. Weekly Class Schedule: RS356 The Cognitive Science of Religion

#	Class ZOOM Date (2pm)	Topic	READ	Assignments DUE by 9am MONDAY before Zoom/class date
1. BACKGROUND				
1	Aug 29 th	Intro to the course	-Syllabus 1. Barrett (2000)	Practice, Ungraded Quiz.
2	Sept 5 th	Intro to CSR	2. Barrett (2007) 3. White (2017)	Reading Quiz 1 Participation 1
2. METHODS AND APPROACH				
3	12 th Sept	Evolution, brain & cognition	4. Boyer (2008) 5. Ratcliffe (2006) 6. Willard et al (2013)	Reading Quiz 2 Participation 2
3. TOPICS				
Religious Concepts				
4	19 th Sept	The nature of the world	7. Kelemen (2004) 8. Banerjee & Bloom (2014) 9. Järnefelt et al (2015)	-Reading Quiz 3
5	26 th Sept	Pre-life and afterlife beliefs	10. Emmons & Kel. (2014) 11. Bering (2006) 12. White et al (in prep.)	-Reading Quiz 4 -Participation 3
6	3rd Oct	Supernatural Agents 1: Witchcraft	13. Evans-Pritchard (1936) 14. Legare et al (2012) 15. Cohen (2007)	-Participation 4
7	10 th Oct	Revision week	[Revise weeks 2- 5]	Revise
8	17 th Oct	Mid-term exam [online]		Mid-term exam
9	24 th Oct	Supernatural Agents 2: Gods	16. Barrett (2008) 17. Gervais & Henrich (2010) 18. Banerjee & Bloom (2014)	-Participation 5 -Participation 6
10	31 st Oct	Spirit Possession	19. Cohen & Barrett (2008a) 20. Cohen & Barrett (2008b) 21. Cohen (2010)	-Participation 7 -Participation 8
11	7 th Nov	Prepare final essay outlines		Final essay outline
12	14 th Nov	Reincarnation	22. White (forthcoming) 23. White (2016) 24. White et al (2015)	Essay outline due Participation 9
13	21st Nov	Religious Rituals	25. Whitehouse (2012) 26. Sosis (2004)	-Participation 10

14	28 th Nov	Prepare final essays		-Presentations
Evaluation of CSR				
15	5 th Dec	Evaluation of CSR	27. Barrett (2011) 28. Cohen et al (2008)	-Final essay due

Have you enjoyed the course? Contact me about becoming a Religious Studies Major or Double Major!

List of Reading

Syllabus

1. Barrett, J. L. (2000). Exploring the natural foundations of religion. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 4(1), 29-34.
2. Barrett, J. L. (2007). Cognitive science of religion: What is it and why is it? *Religion Compass*, 1(6), 768-786.
3. White, C. (2017). What the Cognitive Science of Religion is and is Not. In Hughes, A. (Ed.) *Theory in a Time of Excess: The Case of the Academic Study of Religion*, 95-138. Sheffield: Equinox.
4. Boyer, P. (2008). Being human: Religion: bound to believe? *Nature*, 455(7216), 1038-1039
5. Ratcliffe, M. (2006). Neurotheology: a science of what. *McNamara (Eds.). Where God and Science Meet, 2006*, 81-104.
6. Willard, A. K., & Norenzayan, A. (2013). Cognitive biases explain religious belief, paranormal belief, and belief in life's purpose. *Cognition*, 129(2), 379-391.
7. Kelemen, D. (2004). Are children "intuitive theists"? Reasoning about purpose and design in nature. *Psychological Science*, 15(5), 295-301.
8. Banerjee, K., & Bloom, P. (2014). Why did this happen to me? Religious believers' and non-believers' teleological reasoning about life events. *Cognition*, 133(1), 277-303.
9. Järnefelt, E., Canfield, C. F., & Kelemen, D. (2015). The divided mind of a disbeliever: Intuitive beliefs about nature as purposefully created among different groups of non-religious adults. *Cognition*, 140, 72-88.
10. Emmons, N. A., & Kelemen, D. (2014). The development of children's prelife reasoning: Evidence from two cultures. *Child development*, 85(4), 1617-1633.
11. Bering, J. M. (2006). The cognitive psychology of belief in the supernatural. *Where God and science meet: How brain and evolutionary studies alter our understanding of religion*, 1, 123-34.
12. White, C., Kinsella, M. & Bering, J.M. (In preparation). How to know you've survived death: Parapsychology and the cognitive science of religion.
13. Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1937). *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande* (Vol. 12). London: oxford.

14. Legare, C. H., Evans, E. M., Rosengren, K. S., & Harris, P. L. (2012). The coexistence of natural and supernatural explanations across cultures and development. *Child Development*, 83(3), 779-793.
15. Cohen, E., (2007) Witchcraft and sorcery. In: Whitehouse, H., & Laidlaw, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Religion, anthropology, and cognitive science* (No. 169). Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
16. Barrett, J. L. (2008). Why Santa Claus is not a god. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 8 (1-2), 149-161.
17. Gervais, W. M., & Henrich, J. (2010). The Zeus problem: Why representational content biases cannot explain faith in gods. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 10(3-4), 3-4.
18. Banerjee, K., & Bloom, P. (2013). Would Tarzan believe in God? Conditions for the emergence of religious belief. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 17(1), 7-8.
19. Cohen, E., & Barrett, J. L. (2008a). Conceptualizing spirit possession: Ethnographic and experimental evidence. *Ethos*, 36(2), 246-267.
20. Cohen, E., & Barrett, J. (2008b). When minds migrate: Conceptualizing spirit possession. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 8(1), 23-48.
21. Cohen, E. (2010). An author meets her critics. Around "The mind possessed": The cognition of spirit possession in an Afro-Brazilian religious tradition" by Emma Cohen [Response to comments by Diana Espirito Santo, Arnaud Halloy, and Pierre Lienard]. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, 1(1), 164-176.
22. White C., (Submitted, 2017). You Again? Establishing Personal Identity in Reincarnation. In Slone, J. (2018). *Empirical Studies in the Cognitive Science of Religion*. London: Bloomsbury.
23. White, C. (2016). The Cognitive Foundations of Reincarnation. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1-23.
24. White, C., Kelly, B., & Nichols, S. (2015). Remembering Past Lives: Intuitions about Memory and Personal Identity in Reincarnation. In Cruz, H. & Nichols, R. (Eds.) *The Cognitive Science of Religion and its Philosophical Implications*, 169-196. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
25. Whitehouse, H. (2012). Human rites: rituals bind us, in modern societies and prehistoric tribes alike; but can our loyalties stretch to all of humankind? *Aeon*, <http://www.aeonmagazine.com/being-human/harvey-whitehouse-ritual/>.
26. Sosis, R. (2004). The Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual Rituals promote group cohesion by requiring members to engage in behavior that is too costly to fake. *American Scientist*, 92(2), 166-72.
27. Barrett, J. L. (2011). Cognitive science of religion: Looking back, looking forward. *Journal for the scientific study of Religion*, 50(2), 229-239.

28. Cohen, E., Lanman, J., McCauley, R. N., & Whitehouse, H. (2008). Common criticisms of cognitive science of religion—answered. *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*, 37(4), 112-115.