

HDS 4515: Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion

fall 2023 / Mondays 3–5pm + section TBD

INSTRUCTOR: Annette Yoshiko Reed (areed@hds.harvard.edu), office hours TBD

TEACHING FELLOWS: Joe Currie [Head TF], Ethan Goodnight [Writing TF], Steven Harris [MRPL TF], Ivy Deng, Gio DiRusso, Siobhan Kelly, Nathan Pederson, Anthony Trujillo

SCOPE: The academic study of religion is dazzlingly and dauntingly diverse, spanning specialist research on a vastly global variety of communities, scriptures, rituals, and traditions while also bridging multiple pasts and presents, in history and memory, across sacred and secular spaces. Its methods range from philology to theology, history to ethnography, literary criticism to ritual and performance studies. Its theoretical interlocutors have included historians, philologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists, as well as thinkers engaged with race, coloniality, and gender. Topics addressed within the discipline have been no less varied, including questions about individual experience, identity-formation, meaning-making, and the human condition but also communal and societal dynamics in relation to peace, power, violence, and justice.

AIMS: No comprehensive survey of the kaleidoscopic scope of the academic study of religion is possible within the span of a single semester. This course will explore a sampling of some of its richness. The selection of this sampling has been guided by the aims of introducing students to some of the main questions and problems that unite the discipline's disparate domains, some of the shared past from which we continue to grow as we grapple, and some of the notable topics and trajectories of conversation that are now shaping its present and its future. Among the recurrent issues to which we will return, throughout this semester, is the open question (direly pressing for the future of both the broader discipline and our university) of how to create that an academic space inclusive of multiple positionings and practices of knowledge-making.

APPROACH: The astonishingly multivocal variety that makes the discipline of Religious Studies so exuberant and generative is also what makes it challenging to engage in conversations that connect us. And this perhaps holds true of our community at Harvard Divinity School as well. Much like the discipline of Religious Studies, Harvard Divinity School is an institution grounded in a long Protestant Christian history but also inspired by a present vision as a radically inclusive and multireligious space. Among our aspirations for this course is to seed and foster conversations in the discipline and among our diverse students, using our classroom spaces to model the productively challenging task of talking to one another across multiple lines of difference as we develop each our own critical views and voices. Throughout the semester, assignments will provide opportunities for students to hone skills useful for graduate study, such as strategies for reading quickly by skimming for the structure of scholarly arguments, tips to get the most from the close reading of dense or otherwise difficult texts, and some of the mechanics of research in the Humanities, including how to make the best of the unique resources at Harvard.

STRUCTURE: The first half of the semester will revolve around reflections on foundational debates for the academic discipline of Religious Studies in North America. The second half will be aimed at the charting of new perspectives raised by the discipline's diversification beyond its male, Eurocentric, and largely Protestant Christian foundations. Heeding recent critiques of Enlightenment-era ideals of "objectivity" and other disembodied, universalizing, and abstractified approaches to knowledge-making that have long structured what counts as "academic," we will explore the possibility of forging more relational methods and embodied approaches, including with insights from indigenous epistemologies, and we will survey a sampling of the perennial problems, recurrent debates, defining concerns, and current trajectories in Religious Studies in a manner grounded in Harvard's local history. Major themes will include the colonial construction and modern reification of the category of "religion(s)" and its rippling ramifications as well as the challenges of conversations between present and past—both academic and religious. In the process, students will have opportunities to become further familiarized with Harvard's libraries, museums, etc.

ASSIGNED READINGS

The following book is recommended for purchase: Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2008). All other course readings will be accessible via the course Canvas site. Note that the assigned readings for this course will be notably heavier at the beginning of the semester but become much lighter at the end, so as to counterbalance with students' other coursework.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- *Participation* (20%) - Regular attendance at lectures and sections is critical, as well as active participation in sections in particular, reflecting careful preparation of assigned readings as well as thoughtful engagement in conversation with fellow students.
- *Weekly response papers* (9 x 5% = 45%) – Throughout the semester, students will be asked to submit NINE brief papers (approx. 2 pp. = 500 words each) that relate to the assigned readings for the week. With some exceptions, these will be due an hour before the relevant class meeting (i.e., 2pm; see Canvas for specific prompts for each week). The first THREE responses are required (i.e., 9/18, 9/25, 10/2). For the rest of the semester, there are TEN options, of which students can skip TWO. In addition, in place of another ONE of the required NINE responses, students can choose to write instead on their choice one of the “Optional Further Readings” listed each week. In place of yet another ONE of the NINE responses, students can choose to attend a pre-approved campus lecture, etc., related to the academic study of religion topic and write up reflections pertaining to the approach(es) reflected therein. For these additional options, submissions will be accepted at any time before the last day of HDS classes (i.e., 12/6).
- *Final project* (35%) - For the final project (= 12-15 pages), due on Friday December 8, students will be asked to choose one specific faculty member from Harvard's past whose scholarship dealt in some way with religion (ideally in a manner related to the student's own interests or guiding questions!), research about them and their ideas, and on the basis of their writings and/or archival materials about them, articulate their approach to studying religion while also considering their own approach in comparison, contrast, and conversation. The course structure will integrate visits to the HDS library and from HDS librarians, etc., so as to aid students with this project, while also using this project as a structure for introducing students to Harvard's library resources. Students should finalize their choice and submit it for approval before 11/6; if students wish to propose a multi-media project (e.g., podcast) in place of a written project, this is also the date by which that request should be made.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

**please check Canvas for PDFs, further details, updated information, etc.*

September 11 – **Introduction & Welcome**

I. SITUATING THE STUDY OF RELIGION AS PRACTICE & KNOWLEDGE-MAKING

September 18 – **Defining “Religion” as an Object of (Western Academy) Study**

Prior to Monday's class meeting, please complete the following...

- READ Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, pp. 1-20, with special attention to pp. 1-9 + 15-17 [20 pp.]
- READ W. C. Smith, "Religion in the West," in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1964), 15-31 + 44-48 [20 pp.]

- SKIM the Harvard Pluralism Project's entries on the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions and its 1993 centennial + READ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2005), 10-20 + 259-74 [25 pp.]
- *Either* VISIT the exhibit about the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibit, "All the World Is Here," on the fourth floor of Harvard's Peabody Museum *or* LISTEN to the final speech at the 1893 Parliament by Swami Vivekananda [online on YouTube, see Canvas for link] {{both options = about 30 min.}}

→ Response paper #1 (required)

September 25 – **Placing the Sacred in the Secular University / Yom Kippur, no class meeting!**

- In lieu of this week's lecture, please set aside *at least an hour and a half* at some point during this week to VISIT TWO of the following (approx. 40-45 min. each), reflecting on the questions below:
 - **Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East** (open Sun-Fri 11am-4pm) – This is a small museum, so visit as much as you can! As you peruse the exhibits, reflect upon how antiquity, history, and the past are here presented in relation to "religion."
 - **Peabody Museum** (open daily) – *first* READ Anthony Trujillo, "Of Dreams, Relatives, Spirits and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard," *Panorama* 8 (2022), *then* VISIT all of the exhibits on Floor 1, esp. "Digging Veritas" on Harvard's colonial-era Indian College, and for the rest of the exhibits, make sure to attend to the place of "religion" within the presentation of materials as well as what is presumed of the visitor/viewer in the written captions, layout, etc.
 - **Harvard Art Museums** (open Tues-Sun 10am-5pm) – This is a large museum, so do not feel pressured to cover all of it! Instead, plan to visit around FIVE galleries total, including at least TWO that feature religious art or objects (e.g., some highlights on the first floor = Room 1610 with "Buddhism and Early East Asian Buddhist Art" + on the second floor = Room 2440 with "Medieval Art" + Room 2590 with "South Asian Art" + Room 2740 with "Buddhist Art"). In your experience, what is the place of "religion" in what is here framed as an "Art Museum," especially in contrast to the HMANE and/or Peabody museums? Did you notice any variance in how "religion" is presented for modern vs. pre-modern materials? What about Christian vs. non-Christian materials?

In addition, please plan to spend *at least 20 minutes* walking around HDS's Swartz Hall with attention to any other art/imagery that you encounter that you would consider to be "religious." Do you feel like the materiality and siting of the sacred in HDS spaces differ from Harvard's museums, the rest of the Harvard campus, etc.? If so, how? Make sure your walk includes a visit to Ramona Peter's *Earth Bound*, on which see <https://hds.harvard.edu/about/history-and-mission/ramona-peters-earth-bound>

- SKIM the timeline and summary of HDS's history online at <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/two-hundred-years-of-milestones/> + <https://hds.harvard.edu/about/history-and-mission> + the recent Faces of Divinity online exhibit // *see also* Anne Braude's survey of the history of women at HDS [12 pp.]

Sections will meet this week! Prior to your section, please also make sure to READ pp. 29-43 of Catherine Bell, "Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion," *History & Theory* 45 (2006) 27-46 [14 pp.] + Wilson, *Research as Ceremony*, 22-34 + 62-88 + 108-25 [55 pp.]

→ Response paper #2 (required)

October 2 – **Who Studies (and is Studied) in the Academic Study of Religion?**

Prior to Monday's class meeting, please complete the following...

- READ Tisa Wenger, "Making Religion on the Reservation: Native Americans and the Settler Secular," in *Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017), 101-12, 128-35 [18 pp.] + WATCH 1894 LOC footage of Sioux Ghost Dance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoMW37xfMRw>
- READ Wilson, *Research as Ceremony*, 35-61 [26 pp.]
- READ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988) 575-97 [22 pp.]
- READ Janet Gyatso, "Where Do We Stand," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 32 (2003) 10-13 [3 pp.]
- READ Ahmad Greene-Hayes, "Discredited Knowledges and Black Religious Ways of Knowing," *Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 9 (2021) 41-49 [8 pp.]

→ Response paper #3 (required)

II. GENEALOGY & FOUNDATIONAL DEBATES

October 9 – **Indigenous Peoples Day, no class meeting!**

- No assigned readings + sections will meet in the Library this week! = Introduction to key resources for the Final Project + a hands-on exercise in exploring the history and diversity of the academic Study of Religion at Harvard in pedagogy and practice, esp. by surveying past course catalogues.

By this point in the semester, make sure to begin the process of selecting a figure on whom to focus for your Final Project! See Canvas for further resources for getting ideas.

→ Response paper option #4

October 16 – **Theorizing Modernity with "Religion" and the Secular**

- READ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford UP 2003), 21-30, 56-62 [15 pp.] + SKIM Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1905], trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 102-25 with special attention to pp. 123-25 (i.e., the very end)
- READ Peter Berger, *Sacred Canopy* (NY: Anchor, 1967), 19-62 [43 pp.] + "Secularization Falsified"
- READ Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009) 836-62 [26 pp.]

Optional further readings include... Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (U. of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-18, 62-76, 93-101; Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Religious Challenge to the Secular State," in *Global Rebellion* (U. of California Press, 2008), 9-38

→ Response paper option #5

October 23 – **Re-embodiment "Religion" as/in Society, Ritual, and Practice**

- READ Émile Durkheim, selections from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [1912], etc., in *Durkheim on Religion* (London: Routledge, 2014), 74-98, 102-10 [32 pp.]
- READ Mary Douglas, "Effects of Modernization on Religious Change," *Daedalus* (1988) 457-84 [27 pp.] OR Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," *Daedalus* 101 (1972) 61-81 [20 pp.]
- READ Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 1969), 94-113 [19 pp.]
- READ Robert Orsi, "Doing Religious Studies with Your Whole Body," Roundtable on Ethnography and Religion in *Practical Matters* 6 (2013) [5 pp.]
- READ Tracy Hucks, "Perspectives in Lived History: Religion, Ethnography, and the Study of African Diasporic Religions," *Practical Matters* 3 (2010): 1-17 [17 pp.]

Optional further readings include... Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 27-54 [27 pp.] with Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), 87-125.

→ Response paper option #6

III. SOME MAJOR TRAJECTORIES

The second half of the semester will be structured around a series of guest lectures from HDS faculty—and some of our brilliant TF team!—on new theoretical trajectories in the Study of Religion, including in relation to race, gender, and coloniality, and new challenges and approaches to older methods, including philology, history, and comparison. For these sessions, a visitor will typically speak for half of the class, and we will explore related context and content for the rest. Please see Canvas for updated information.

October 30 – **Coloniality** // **Guest: Prof. Mayra Rivera**

- Assigned materials for guest lecture TBD

→ Response paper option #7

November 6 – **New Directions and Questions, with Ethan Goodnight, Gio Russo, Anthony Trujillo, and other TFs TBD**

By this point in the semester, please make sure that you have submitted the name of your focus for your Final Project to your TF and Prof. Reed. If you are having difficulty deciding, or are unsure whether your choice is apt, we are happy to help! If you have concerns about the Final Project in relation to writing, please reach out to our Writing TF. Also, if you’d like to submit this project in another form, this is the time to write to ask us.

→ Response paper option #8

November 13 – **Gender, Power, and History** // **Guest: Prof. Benjamin Dunning**

- Assigned materials for guest lecture TBD

→ Response paper option #9

November 20 – **Research Methods in Practice, with HDS Library Staff** // no sections this week!

→ Response paper option #10

November 27 – **Race and Sexuality** // **Guest: Prof. Ahmad Greene-Hayes**

- Assigned materials for guest lecture TBD

→ Response paper option #11

December 4 – **Rethinking Comparison** // **Guest(s) TBD**

- FINISH Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*
- READ J. Z. Smith, “The Wobbling Pivot,” *Journal of Religion* 52 (1972) 134-49 [15 pp.]
- READ Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges* (U. of Chicago Press, 2018), chapters 2-3.

→ Response paper option #12

Accessibility Statement: Students requesting accommodations or with accessibility needs for this course should contact Drema Bowers, Assistant Director for Student Support (dbowers@hds.harvard.edu, 617-496-3856) as soon as possible.

Religious Holy Days: Please speak with the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester if you must miss a class, examination, or course requirement due to a religious observance. Please know that Massachusetts state law specifies that all students who must miss a class, exam, or course requirement because of a religious observance shall be provided with an opportunity to make up the requirement on another day, so long as this does not create an unreasonable burden for the school.

Policy on Collaboration and Academic Integrity: You are responsible for understanding HDS's policies on academic honesty and plagiarism. You are encouraged to consult with one another on papers, and you may also share library resources. You may find it useful to discuss your ideas with your peers, but you should ensure that the written papers you submit for evaluation are the result of your own research and reflect your own approach to the topic. Plagiarism, by contrast, entails any form of writing that represents someone else's ideas or words as your own or lacks proper citation. Plagiarism can take place intentionally or unintentionally, and it may include your own work if that work has already been published or submitted for other courses. If you have any doubts or questions about academic honesty in relation to an assignment, it is your responsibility to discuss it with the instructor and your TF prior handing in the assignment.

Policy on AI: Just as you may not ask another person to complete your assignment for this course, so you may not use generative AI to create all or part of an assignment for this course and submit it as your own. If you have any doubt about whether other uses of generative AI might be permitted for assignments, it is your responsibility to discussing it with the instructor and your TF prior to using it for an assignment.

Policy on Late Submissions: Response papers are designed to be very brief informal writings, intended to facilitate discussion and intellectual community, and thus MUST be submitted PRIOR to the class meeting on the Monday to which they correspond. That said, the course's assignment structure allows for TWO to be skipped and TWO to be replaced with alternative assignments that are not due until the very last day of HDS classes. If circumstances arise that will cause you to miss more than these FOUR during the course of the semester, please be in touch with the Head TF to discuss further alternative options, ideally prior to Thanksgiving Break. For the Final Project, the policy for requesting extensions will be outlined closer to the due date; in the interests of fairness, however, projects submitted late without any prior consultation may be docked a third of a grade. Please recall that this is a very large class, and our TFs are also student with their own deadlines, etc., to manage: hence, if you are not sure whether you will be able to turn in the required number of assignments on time, please reach out to us to discuss your concerns, if at all possible, rather than waiting until the end of the semester to ask for help. The flexible assignment structure of this course is designed to enable further make-up work if need be, but please make sure to be in touch with us!

Final Grade Rubric: A = 96-100; A- = 91-95; B+ = 86-90; B = 81-85; B- = 76-80