

PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Psych 3231

Georgia Southern University

Fall 2010

CRN: 81080

Dr. Michael E. Nielsen

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Class Meets: T Th, 12:30 – 1:45 p.m., Carroll 2262

Office Hours: T Th, 2:00 – 2:50 p.m., and by appointment

Course Description & Objectives

This course is a survey of psychological research on religious experience, including such topics as religion and human development, mystical experience, conversion, new religious movements (cults), and mental health. By the conclusion of the semester, students will demonstrate, by examination, discussion, and other means, an understanding of the following objectives:

Discuss the comparative effects of socialization and personality on religious belief & experience;

Describe the nature of religious beliefs, including classic and more contemporary theories addressing them;

Articulate the influence of religion on happiness, physical-, and mental-health;

Give examples of the role of religion on people's coping strategies;

Application of research to cases in current events and in recent history.

Prerequisite: Introduction to Psychology. This course may be used as an elective in the psychology major, or it may fill a requirement for the minor in religious studies.

Requirements and Grades

Required Texts

Nielsen, M. E. (1994, rev. 2008). *Psychology of religion* [World-Wide-Web resource pages]. Available online: <http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/>.

Wulff, D. W. (1997). *Psychology of religion: Classic and contemporary* (2nd ed). New York: Wiley

One of the following books is also required:

Briggs C. (2002). *This dark world*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Covington, D. (1995). *Salvation on sand mountain: Snake handling and redemption in Southern Appalachia*. New York: Penguin.

Goleman, D. (2003). *Healing emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on mindfulness, emotions and health*. Shambhala

Jessop, C. (2007). *Escape*. New York: Broadway.

Grades will be based on student achievement demonstrated on exams and class assignments. *More details on each of these will be given in class.*

Exams

Four exams will be given during the semester. Unit exams will include a combination of item types. The final exam will be an essay addressing ways that the theories presented in our textbook are illustrated in the optional book you chose. Each exam is worth 100 points.

It is essential that students make every effort to take exams on the scheduled date. If you are on a university athletic team, are participating in a religious observance, or miss an exam for some other reason recognized by GSU, you must alert me to this conflict *prior* to the event in order to take the exam at an alternative time. If you do not discuss this with me *prior* to the exam, you will need to take the exam during the make-up exam date listed on the schedule. Likewise, if you are ill, mourning the death of a loved one, or miss an exam for any other reason, plan to take the exam during the make-up exam date shown on the schedule. Note that make-up exams may use a different format and involve different questions/items than regularly scheduled exams. No cell-phones or beepers are allowed during exams. **If your cell phone rings during an exam, your grade on that exam will be reduced by one letter grade.**

Assignments

A variety of assignments will be given throughout the semester. Assignments and their point values will be announced in class. Some assignments will be in the form of short quizzes given at the beginning of class. Students must be present and on time in order to earn those points; make-up work for assignments is not accepted. Assignments will total 50 points (of the 450 points possible) through the semester.

Grades

The GSU Catalog describes undergraduate grades in the following terms:

The "A" grade may be interpreted to mean that the instructor recognized exceptional capacities and exceptional performance.

The grade of "B" signifies that the student has, for any combination of reasons, demonstrated a significantly more effective command of the material than is generally expected in the course.

The "C" grade is the instructor's certification that the student has demonstrated the required mastery of the material.

The student is graded "D" when his/her grasp of the course is minimal.

The "F" grade indicates failure to master the essentials and the necessity for repeating before credit may be allowed.

Course grades will be calculated by the sum of points accumulated during the semester. Grades are assigned according to the schedule below. Grade cutoffs are firm.

- A = 90 – 100%
- B = 80 – 89.9%
- C = 70 – 79.9%
- D = 60 – 69.9%
- F = 0 – 59.9%

To help place these in perspective, during the past several years the average grade in this course was 82% of the possible points.

Other Course Policies

Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability or some other special need that requires accommodation of some type, be sure to discuss it with me before a problem arises. It is your responsibility to provide me with the necessary information from the Georgia Southern University SDRC (871-1566 / TDD 478-0666) so that the necessary accommodations can be made.

Policy on Honesty

Students sometimes do not understand what plagiarism means. If you have a question about plagiarism, ask me. This is one area where it is especially true that there is no such thing as a stupid question! Academic dishonesty includes giving or receiving assistance on an exam, unauthorized use of notes or books during an exam, falsifying information on an assignment or project, or claiming credit for an idea or statement that belongs to someone else. If you use information or an idea from an existing source, you must provide a proper citation to document that source. Substituting words with synonyms while retaining the original sentence structure, or changing the pattern of words while retaining the original words, is considered academic dishonesty. Instead of doing that, always rephrase your work into your own words, and provide a citation to indicate where the idea originates.

Academic dishonesty may result in an "F" for the course, and the student may be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs. If you have questions about whether or not a specific act would be considered dishonest, please read the student conduct code and then discuss the matter with me!

Classroom Conduct

Participation: I expect active participation in class. Come prepared every day to answer questions based on the previous day's lecture and on the readings for the class. We will have activities, view videotapes, and do other activities that are designed to help you learn procedures, concepts and facts that are relevant to the class. Learning is an active process,

not a passive one, and your involvement in these activities will help you understand the subject better. In doing so, you may learn interpersonal skills that will serve you well in other contexts. If you prefer a class that allows you to quietly sit back and take notes, I recommend that you find another professor.

Manners: Treating others with respect is important, particularly when discussing subjects that may be deeply personal. If you disagree with a comment, seek to express it without being disagreeable. Try also to focus on the topics and activities at hand, and avoid texting or other actions that distract others.

In sum, I expect you to treat your classmates, our guest speakers, and me with respect and consideration. Although you may not agree with someone, you should strive to phrase your view without attacking that person. Students who find this to be too difficult will be asked to leave so that others can enjoy the class.

Changes: I reserve the right to change or add to assignments, and to make changes to this syllabus, with adequate notice, for good reason. I also reserve the right to move students from one seat to another, and to dismiss students whom I believe to be disruptive.

Office Hours

If you have any difficulty with the course content, feel free to stop by my office during the hours indicated above, or by special appointment. Particularly after the first exam, but well before the last day to withdraw, be sure to see me if you are having problems. I am here to help! I use e-mail frequently, so you may find it convenient to contact me via e-mail. I will respond to your e-mail as quickly as I am able.

Grading Disputes

I strive to grade projects and exams fairly and consistently. In order to ensure that each student's work is graded in accordance with standards that apply to the entire class, if you have a question regarding a grade, you must meet with me within two weeks after the work in question is graded. No exceptions will be made to this policy. If the exam or assignment is re-scored, the entire exam or project will be graded again. This means that your score may increase *or* decrease.

Study Habits

A typical course load is considered to be 15 credit hours per semester. National accreditation committees--the people whose "stamp of approval" gives meaning to a university degree--base this on the assumption that students study at least two hours outside of class for every hour that they are in class. *I base the course on this assumption.* Thus, for a 3-hour class such as this, you should expect to work at least 9 hours each week (3 hours in class, 6 hours studying outside of class). Note that a person who takes a standard, 15 hour course load is committing to be involved in school 45 hours each week, which is why 15 hours represents a full schedule--it is the equivalent of a full-time job, plus overtime. Each day, you should devote at least two hours to studying for this course. To succeed in this course:

1. Read the assigned readings before we discuss them in class. This way, you can ask questions when we are talking about the material.
2. Come to class every day. Pay attention, ask questions, and enjoy yourself.
3. Reread the material following class. This will help you improve your understanding of nuances you may have missed earlier.
4. Spend at least 9 hours studying for this class each week. Students who do this are much more likely to succeed than students who do not do this!
5. Study consistently. Don't rely on "cramming" to get you through the class. You will recall the material better if you study every day.
6. Remember that *learning is fun!* Ask questions about the material as you study. Become involved with the subject. Learning is exciting, and you are fortunate to be in school. There are millions of people throughout the world who wish they had the opportunity that you now have. Enjoy it, and take advantage of your chance!

While we're on the subject, here's something to think about. A colleague sent this to me, and although I do not know the original source, I believe the statistics are sound. If we could, at this time, shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this:

The village would be made up of 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (both North and South), and 8 Africans
 70 would be non-white; 30 white
 70 would be non-Christian; 30 Christian
 6 people would control 50% of the entire wealth, and all 6 of them would be from the U.S.
 70 would be unable to read
 50 would suffer from malnutrition
 80 would live in substandard housing
 1 would have a college education

Being in college is a rare privilege. Make good use of this opportunity!

Tentative Schedule

The following schedule is an outline listing important dates for the course. This schedule is subject to change so that we can meet with our guest speakers and meet other class goals. Changes will be announced at the beginning of class. After we have discussed the goals that class members have for the course, we will finalize the list of specific topics, readings, and presentation schedule.

14 Sep	Exam 1 (Wulff Chapters 1 & 2; Webpage readings (a) Hollow Curriculum; (b) Is There a Place...?; (c) Psychology of Religion in the USA)
12 Oct	Exam 2 (Wulff Chapters 3 & 4; Webpage reading: Research in Psych of Religion)
18 Nov	Exam 3 (Wulff Chapters 4 & 5)
2 Dec	Make-up Exams
7 Dec	Final Exam (12:30 - 2:30)

Psychology 3231, Psychology of Religion, Fall 2010

I have received a copy of the syllabus for Psychology 3231, Psychology of Religion. I have read the syllabus and have been offered an opportunity to ask questions. I understand and agree to the requirements in this syllabus. I also have considered the benefits of academic honesty, and agree to the standards and procedures outlined in this syllabus.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name (Printed) _____

My major is: _____

I am a: Senior ____
Junior ____
Sophomore ____
First-year ____

I have completed _____ psychology courses (fill in number).

I am pursuing a minor in religious studies ____ Yes ____ No