



Course Syllabus

HONR 300 Religion, Animals, & Being Human

Course Information

Course Identification: HONR 300, "Religion, Animals, & Being Human"

Number of Credits: 4

Delivery Mode: Face to Face

Course Schedule: Fall 2026, MWF 12:40-1:40 PM (Hollenbeck 334)

Faculty: Dr. Travis Proctor

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Office : Hollenbeck 320 | **Office Hours:** Wednesdays and Fridays, 10am-Noon

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the complex interactions between religious traditions, ideas and practices surrounding the animal, and understandings of "human" identities and natures, including:

- (1) the cultural construction of religions, animals, and humans as categories
- (2) the role of animals as part of religious belief and practice, and
- (3) the challenge that the "question of the animal" has presented in recent theorizations of the nature of and future of humanity and religion.

Course Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Interpret religious, cultural, and scientific understandings of the relation between religion, animals, and humans by discussing key historical works in this area.
2. Compare scholarly analyses of the relation between religion and animals.
3. Articulate the significance of cultural understandings of religion and animals to contemporary societies and ecosystems through written assignments and in-class presentations.
4. Connect in-class lessons and discussions to contemporary issues of significance.

Program and General Education Outcomes Integration

This course supports students' mastery of the following outcomes supported by the Religion program:



1. Exploring the depth and diversity of human experience,
2. Reading, interpretation, analysis, critical thinking, writing, and speaking.

This course satisfies the **LO10 (Humanities)** general education outcome by helping students analyze problems, issues, or representations using methods appropriate to the humanities..

This course also satisfies the **LO2 (Written Communication)** general education outcome by helping students learn to write effectively, considering audience and purpose.

Required Textbooks and Materials

Donovan Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Duke University Press, 2015).

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, tr. Robert Hurley (Zone Books, 1992).

All other course readings will be made available on the course page in Moodle.

Course Assessments

Course Attendance and Participation: Baseline Attendance and Participation (15%)

You should be in class each day and make active contributions to each class. I will take attendance each day by noting how much you participate in class discussion. If you make at least two, substantial contributions to class discussion, then I will count you as present for that day's class. If you are absent or do not participate in class discussion, then you will be counted as absent. Class absences will only be excused in the cases of illness, family emergency, or University-related extracurricular activities (with prior notification).

Digital Device Policy: To help you be more present for class discussion, this class will be adopting a "no-tech" policy. All digital devices are to be stowed away during class time. This includes laptops, tablets, smart phones, etc. All notes for class should be taken using pen and paper, and all readings and reading notes should be available during class without recourse to digital devices.

(Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, LO10)

Course Attendance and Participation: Quantity and Quality of Contributions (15%)

In addition to being present for class, I will grade you on the quantity and quality of the contributions you make to class discussion. You should come to class having done the



reading (at least once), taken copious notes, and having prepared with several comments or questions on the reading and topic for the day. Comments in class should demonstrate insights into the reading or raise interesting questions based on the topics or reading. Students will receive quarterly grades on a letter grading system for this aspect of the course.

(Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, LO10)

Discussion Leadership (3 x 5%; 15% total)

Students will be assigned to be discussion leaders for course discussion three times over the semester. This will require preparing in advance discussion questions and/or discussion activities for the class to complete. Students will be graded on their ability to generate meaningful and production discussion among fellow students. This will be graded Credit/Partial Credit/No Credit. Each turn serving as discussion leader will be worth 5%, for 15% total.

(Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, LO10)

Mid-Term Essay & Tutorial (Essay 10%, Tutorial 15%, 25% Total)

For your mid-term writing assignment, you will be asked to write a short essay (2-3 double-spaced pages) in response to a prompt provided by me. Your essay will be submitted via Moodle on the date indicated below in the course schedule. This part of the assignment will be graded Credit/Partial Credit/No Credit and be worth 10%. The prompt and rubric for the paper will be distributed approximately two weeks before its due date.

Approximately one week after the paper's due date, you will be required to meet with me individually to discuss your paper for about 15 minutes. This will take the format of an Oxford-style "tutorial," where I ask you questions or make comments on your paper, providing you opportunities to expand upon your points and for us to delve deeper into the content. This part of the assignment will be graded Credit/Partial Credit/No Credit and be worth 15%. The overall mid-term writing assignment will be worth 25% total.

(Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, LO10)

Final Essay & Tutorial (Essay 10%, Tutorial 20%, 30% Total)

For your final assignment, you will be required write a 6-8 page essay exploring the intersection of Religion & Animals. The paper should be double-spaced, 1" margins, with



12 pt. Times New Roman font. These papers are due on the final day of class (see course schedule below). Late papers will not be accepted.

This final paper will give you the opportunity to respond to a paper prompt (distributed later in class) that will allow you to delve deeper into one of the key issues that we have covered in class. Prompts and a rubric for this assignment will be distributed approximately one month before its due date. The written aspect of this assignment will be graded on a letter-grade scale and be worth 10% of your grade.

A recommended resource for you as you write your paper is the article by Faye Halpern et al. on "A Guide to Writing in Religious Studies" (posted on Moodle).

During our assigned final exam time slot (see course schedule below), you will be required to meet with me for approximately 20-25 minutes to discuss your final paper. As with the mid-term writing assignment, this will take the form of an Oxford "tutorial." Your performance in the tutorial will be graded on a letter-grade scale and be worth 20% of your grade.

(Course Outcomes: 1, 2, 3, LO2, LO10).

Course Outline, Schedule, and Due Dates

Unit I: Introducing Religion & Animals

Monday, August 24: Course and Community Introductions

Reading Assignment: The Course Syllabus (Moodle)

Wednesday, August 26: Introducing Religious Studies

Russel McCutcheon, "What is the Academic Study of Religion?" (Moodle)

J.Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (Moodle)

Friday, August 28: Introducing Animal Studies

Paul Waldau, "Opening Doors" (Moodle)

Monday, August 31: Overflow Session

No new reading assignment. Review your notes!



Class Guest Presentation: Meghan Davis, Director of International Education

Wednesday, September 2: No Class (Reading Day)

Kimberley Patton, “‘Caught with Ourselves in the Net of Life and Time’:
Traditional Views of Animals in Religion” (Moodle)

Friday, September 4: Studying Animals and Religion

Aaron Gross, “The Absent Presence: Animals in the History of the Study of
Religion” (Moodle)

Review Notes on Patton Reading from Wednesday.

Monday, September 7: No Class (Labor Day)

Unit II: Animals in Religion

Wednesday, September 9: Christianity and Animals

Daniel Capper, “All the Christian Birds Chanted” (Moodle)

Friday, September 11: Christianity and Animals II: Speaking Animals

Laura Hobgood-Oster, “And Say the Animal Really Responded:
Speaking Animals in the History of Christianity” (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Monday, September 14: Animals in Mayan Traditions

Daniel Capper, “Sharing Mayan Natural Souls” (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Mid-Term Essay Prompt(s) Distributed In Class

Wednesday, September 16: Overflow Session

No new reading assignment. Review your notes!



Friday, September 18: In-Class Workshop: Formulating Effective Arguments in Religious Studies Writing

Faye Halpern et al., "A Guide to Writing in Religious Studies" (Moodle)

(No Class Discussion Leaders).

Monday, September 21: Indigenous American Cultures and Hunting

David Kinsley, "The Mistassini Cree: Hunting as Religious Ritual" (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Wednesday, September 23: Animals in Himalayan Traditions

Daniel Capper, "Friendly Yetis" (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Friday, September 25: Religious Vegetarianism in Judaism and Buddhism

Ellen Posman, "Veggieburger in Paradise: Food as World Transformer in Contemporary American Buddhism and Judaism" (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Monday, September 28: Overflow Session/Mid-Term Essay Discussion

No new reading assignment. Review your notes!

Mid-Term Essays due via Moodle.

Wednesday, September 30: Judaism, Animals, & Purity

Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus" (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Friday, October 2: Judaism, Animals, & Sacrifice

William K. Gilder, "Sacrifice in Ancient Israel" (Moodle)



Annette Yoshiko-Reed, "From Sacrifice to the Slaughterhouse: Ancient and Modern Approaches to Meat, Animals, and Civilization" (Moodle)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Monday, October 5: Mid-Term Essay Tutorials

No reading assignment or regular course meeting. See tutorial schedule.

Wednesday, October 7: Mid-Term Essay Tutorials

No reading assignment or regular course meeting. See tutorial schedule.

Friday, October 9: Mid-Term Essay Tutorials

No reading assignment or regular course meeting. See tutorial schedule.

Monday, October 12: No Class (Fall Break)

Unit III: Theorizing Religion, Animals, & Being 'Human'

Wednesday, October 14: No Class (Reading Day)

Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (from *The Freud Reader*) (Moodle)

Friday, October 16: No Class (Reading Day)

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Introduction + Ch. 1

Monday, October 19: Sacrifice, Evolution, & Animality

Review your notes on Freud and Bataille.

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Ch. 2

(No Class Discussion Leaders).

Wednesday, October 21: Bataille on Animality, Sacrifice, and the Sacred

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Ch. 3

Class Discussion Leaders: _____



Friday, October 23: Overflow Session

No new reading assignment. Review your notes on Bataille. (No Class Discussion Leaders).

Monday, October 26: Affect, Animality, and Religion: Introductions

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, "Introduction"

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Wednesday, October 28: Religion, Language, and Affect

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 1 ("Religion, Language, and Affect")

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Friday, October 30: Overflow Session

No new reading assignment. Review your notes and readings!

Monday, November 2: The Two Types of Affect

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 2 ("Intransigence")

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Wednesday, November 4: Islamic Traditions II

Capper, Ch. 2: "The Donkey Who Communed with Allah"

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Friday, November 6: Islamic Traditions I (Guest Lecturer: Matthew Hotham, Ball State University)

Reading TBD. (No Class Discussion Leaders).

Monday, November 9: Affect, Desire, & Materiality

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 4 ("Compulsion")



Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Final Paper Prompt(s) Distributed in Class

Wednesday, November 11: Overflow Session/Final Paper Discussion

No new reading assignment. Come ready to discuss your progress on your final paper.

Friday, November 13: Affect, Primatology, & Islamophobia

Shaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 5 ("Savages")

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Monday, November 16: Evolution and Affective Economies

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 6 ("Accident")

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Wednesday, November 18: Overflow Session

No new reading assignment. Review your notes and readings!

Friday, November 20: The Waterfall Dance, Pt. I

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 7 ("A Theory of the Waterfall Dance"), Pt. I (pgs. 178-192)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____

Monday, November 23: The Waterfall Dance, Pt. II

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 7 ("A Theory of the Waterfall Dance"), Pt. II (pgs. 192-205)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____



Wednesday, November 25: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Friday, November 27: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Monday, November 30: Affect, Animality, and Religion: Conclusions

Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, "Conclusion: Under the Rose"

(No Class Discussion Leaders).

Wednesday, December 2: Final Paper Discussion

No new reading assignment. Come ready to discuss your final papers!

Final Papers Due by Class Start Time via Moodle

December 8th, 12-3PM: Final Exam/Tutorials (in-person)

Fine Print, Resources, and Other Information

Grading Scale

In this class, you will not be graded on your beliefs, opinions, or theological/political positions. Instead, you will be graded on how well you articulate your thoughts and positions, how closely you read the assigned texts, and how well you develop skills in thinking critically and synthetically about the themes and issues of the course.

A: 93-100 A-: 90-92	Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development
B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82	Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.
C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72	A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.
D+: 67-69 D: 63-66 D-: 60-62	A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment.



F: 0-59	For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content.
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Statement on the Expectation of Work

In this course, students should expect to spend at least twice as much time out of class doing work for the course as they spend in class. Thus, you should plan to devote approximately 7.5 hours per week to outside-of-class preparation. This includes reading the required materials in advance of class, taking detailed notes, writing weekly position papers, studying for the final exam, and preparing for in-class debates. .

Accessibility and ADA Accommodation

Wittenberg University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision and neurological, or temporary medical conditions, etc.), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, you must register with the Accessibility Services office by emailing accessibilityservices@wittenberg.edu. You can also find information on the Accessibility Services webpage found at www.wittenberg.edu/success. Please note that services are confidential, may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. The Accessibility Services Office is located in the COMPASS, Thomas Library, on the first floor.

The Writing Center

For your written assignment(s) in this course, you are encouraged to take advantage of the resources and assistant provided by the Wittenberg Writing Center. The Wittenberg Writing Center supports students at any stage of the writing process, for any writing assignment. You can brainstorm an idea, revise a draft, look over citations, or edit sentences with a peer advisor. The advisors represent a range of disciplines, and they are practiced at working with you to determine the best way to address an assignment. You can stop in for a session, or schedule an appointment online. The Writing Center also offers email appointments--you can upload a draft and receive written comments and suggestions. For more information, visit www.wittenberg.edu/writingcenter, or stop by the Writing Center on the first floor of Thomas Library.



Ethics and Integrity

As outlined in the Wittenberg University Student Handbook, all students are expected to participate in this course and complete assignments with academic integrity. This includes the proper acknowledgment of sources that are used for course writing assignments as well as studying for and taking exams without undue external assistance.

Any written assignment completed for this course should cite all sources consulted, with appropriate citation that links the sources to the specific information the source provided (i.e., through footnotes or parenthetical citations). (See Course Policy on citation, below). The rule of thumb is that, when in doubt, cite any source that helped you formulate the thought or idea that you're writing down, but especially if you are quoting or using certain phrases from a particular source. If you are ever unclear about whether you need to cite a source or not, cite it. Failure to cite your sources properly is plagiarism, and will result in a violation of academic integrity.

Use of LLM or "AI" text generators is not allowed for the writing process in this class. All writing and editing should be your own.

I am required to report all academic integrity violations to the Wittenberg administration, which could result in punitive measures. Additionally, instances of academic plagiarism on assignments for this course will result in severe grade deductions and possible failure of the assignment and/or course.

Course Policies

1. Citation Format:

All of your written assignments will require you to cite the sources that you use. Religious Studies typically uses Chicago citation style. If you are unfamiliar with this style, please consult The Chicago Manual of Style Online (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>).

2. In-Class Digital Device Policy

No digital devices are permitted for use in this class. All computers and cell phones should be placed in your backpack during classtime.

3. Online Source Policy

The internet can be a wonderful repository of readily-available information. It can also be a black hole of poorly-sourced speculation, distortion, and

fabrication. One of the goals of a college education is to train you in discerning the former from the latter. Towards such an end, this class introduces you to peer-reviewed, vetted scholarship in order to familiarize yourself with scholarly discourses and methodologies. Scholarly sources are written by experts with formal academic training in the areas in which they are writing, are vetted by fellow experts in the field, and are published by academic presses. For your assignments and class work, you are expected to use only sources that meet these standards. Thus, to make sure you gain familiarity with such scholarly sources, **internet websites (blogs, Wikipedia, other webpages, etc.) are not an allowable source** for any assignment in this course.

Syllabus Change Statement

Just like religious scriptures, course syllabi are “living documents” that evolve and shift in response to their cultural contexts and situations. Thus, I reserve the right to adjust this syllabus and content to meet the changing needs of you (the students) and to address course outcomes. In the event of substantive changes, you will be notified via an announcement in class or in Moodle. The most recent edition of the syllabus will always be posted to the Moodle course page.