

Introduction to Religious Studies (A005628)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0

Study time 150 h

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)

Dutch

Gent

independent work
lecture

Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

Lannoy, Annelies

LW01

lecturer-in-charge

Praet, Danny

LW01

co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

[Elective Set Religion Studies](#)

crdts

offering

5

A

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Religious studies, method, theory, history of religions, comparative methodology, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, phenomenology of religion

Position of the course

This course offers an extensive introduction to the scientific study of religion. It helps students to acquire a thorough knowledge of, and critical insight into the fundamental scientific theories and accompanying methods pertaining to the academic study of religion. The course offers students the necessary theoretical frameworks to study the various aspects of religions in different cultures of the past and the present.

Contents

The first part of this course discusses the history of religious studies and introduces key thinkers on religion within their specific cultural and historical contexts. Thereafter follows a thorough introduction of the key concepts used in the academic study of religion (e.g. religion, ritual, myth, magic,...). Substantial attention will here go to the major problems the general use and the definition of these concepts entail. The third part of the course is dedicated to the rich array of methods currently used in the strongly interdisciplinary discipline of religious studies, among which: history of religions, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, and phenomenology of religion. On the one hand, students will get a thorough theoretical introduction of the specific research questions and theories of religion underpinning each of these methods. On the other hand, they will be stimulated to critically reflect on the possible strengths and shortcomings of these methods, and to formulate a scientifically substantiated opinion on the complex relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in religious studies. To do so, primary texts on method and theory will be discussed in class and students will formulate answers to guiding reading questions.

Initial competences

Student have successfully finished secondary school education.

Final competences

1 To define the major currents, thinkers and debates in the history of religious studies and to situate them in their historical and cultural contexts

- 2 To define the key concepts used in academic religious studies and to formulate the major problems the definition and the general use of these concepts entail (e.g. religion, ritual, god, myth, magic)
- 3 To distinguish and to explain the specific research questions and theoretical premises of the following research methods: history of religions, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, comparative methods, and phenomenology of religion
- 4 To critically assess and scientifically substantiate the possible strengths and shortcomings of research methods and theories with regard to specific research questions (e.g. the function of religion, the relation between religion and society)
- 5 To compare the research questions and research methods of history of religions, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, and phenomenology of religion
- 6 To formulate and substantiate a personal scientific opinion on the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in religious studies on the basis of the acquired theoretical insights on widely used methods and theories in the discipline

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

Lessons (with discussions of primary texts) will be on campus (in Dutch).
In preparation of the lectures, students will read primary texts on methods and theories in religious studies and formulate answers to guiding reading questions

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: Syllabus with selected chapters of handbooks on religious studies
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : Yes

Type: Slides

Name: Powerpoints of the lectures
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : Dutch
Available on Ufora : Yes

References

- John Hinnells, ed., *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London – New York, Routledge, 2010.
- Robert A. Segal, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Malden – Oxford – Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Michael Stausberg & Steven Engler, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, Oxon – New York, Routledge, 2011.
- Ivan Strenski, *Understanding theories of religion. An introduction*, Malden – Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2015²
- Daniel L. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, Oxford – New York, OUP, 2014.

Course content-related study coaching

There will be ample opportunity for questions during the lectures. Students can also ask their questions after appointment with the lecturer.

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Calculation of the examination mark

100% written exam

Facilities for Working Students

- Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance
- Possible rescheduling of an oral examination to a different time in the same academic year
- Feedback can be given by telephone or during an appointment during office hours