



## Required Readings:

The following required books are available at the Babson bookstore or can be purchased through major online retailers in either physical or electronic format.

Bielo, James S. 2015. *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics*. New York: Routledge. (indicated on the schedule as ARB)

Lambek, Michael, editor. 2008. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Second edition. Blackwell Anthologies in Social & Cultural Anthropology, 2. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. (indicated on the schedule as RAR)

The Lambek reader *must* be the second edition, as this version has a different set of chapters than the first edition. All other required and supplementary readings will be available online via the course Canvas site, which can be accessed at <http://canvas.babson.edu>.



## Learning Goals:

This course is listed under the “Cultures and Values” (CVA) designation, meaning that it is one of a group of intermediate-level liberal arts courses with common goals and learning objectives. These courses cultivate ethical structures for interrogating the world, deliberating difficult choices, and making sound decisions. Courses in this category focus on frameworks for critically understanding the cultural constructions of meanings and identities and the reciprocal construction of cultural and political context by human beings as ethical agents. This course also supports learning goals common to the Babson undergraduate program as a whole, including those relating to problem solving, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

By the end of this course specifically, you should be able to

- Explain the advantages and limitations to taking an anthropological perspective of religion
- Articulate the value and ethical systems that motivate diverse religious traditions
- Describe complex relationships between governments, national identity, colonialism, and the spread of Christianity and Islam
- Consider the appearances of religious influences in supposedly secular domains, such as medicine, science, and politics
- Draft potential solutions to problems involving intercultural and interreligious relations using ethnographic evidence as a foundation for establishing mutual empathy

This course has been specifically designed to address the following Babson undergraduate program learning goals and key curricular themes:

- Communication: Students develop the rhetorical skills, both in written and oral presentation, to make well-supported arguments about the social world and communicate these to relevant audiences through interview exercises and formal essay assignments
- Global and Multicultural Perspectives: Students learn to appreciate the complexities of living in a religiously plural society, drawing on perspectives from major world religions but also lesser-known cultural traditions to broaden their understanding of a diverse world and economy

## Class Policies:

In order to create the most effective learning environment possible and for the consideration of your fellow students, I ask that we all follow these simple guidelines while in class:

1. Arrive on-time having read the assigned materials and completed any written work due that day. This class is predicated on consistent engagement and preparation on everyone's part. Out of common courtesy to all of us, please try to arrive on time, as latecomers can be a distraction, in addition to missing course material delivered at the start of class.
2. Turn all cell phones and other electronic communication devices to silent. This simple step is a common courtesy to fellow classmates and mitigates the temptation to check in continuously with electronics. If you must have use of your cell phone (e.g., you are waiting for an important call or otherwise need use of your device), please let me know at the start of class. This course demands your full presence, undistracted by concerns outside the room.
3. Always have a notebook and writing utensil in front of you. We will be writing in every class, and having quick access to something with which to jot down notes will help cultivate a habit of writing, which will serve you well in further liberal arts coursework. **Laptops should only be used when directed for particular class exercises, except in cases of documented disability (see below in "Students with Disabilities").**
4. Allow for an atmosphere of respectful academic discourse. This course covers potentially controversial topics of religious difference that can be personal or sensitive for people. Try your best to debate respectfully and sympathetically, even when you disagree with your classmates or with me. We want to allow everyone to express his or her perspective in a supportive yet academically critical setting. You may find it helpful to think of our job as to debate *ideas*, not other people.
5. Ask questions about anything (terms, concepts, history, etc.) you do not know or are unsure of. Even if it seems like a silly question, chances are that other people have the same uncertainty, and you will help others by asking it. Many of us may have deep familiarity with some religious traditions and little exposure to others, so we should always be open to learning about ideas to which we have not yet been exposed, even if they seem like "elementary" questions.
6. If you have concerns with anything in the course, please see me as soon as possible. Concerns that build over the course of the semester become more difficult to address; it will be much easier to deal with them as early on as possible. I am always available to find a solution that works best for you, regardless of what issues come up.



## Assignments:

You will complete three major kinds of assignments over the course of the semester: a fieldwork exercise, two essays, and two exams.

### *Fieldwork Exercise*

This first task will require you to adopt the techniques of participant observation and qualitative interviewing to construct a miniature project in anthropological fieldwork. Your initial step is to locate a

local religious leader from a tradition in which you have not been a participant. You must identify this person two weeks before the assignment is due so as to allow enough time to find a mutual time to meet. Next, you will interview him or her about the tradition's practices, core beliefs, and community of worship, and if appropriate, you will attend and observe a public service. After your observations, you will use your field notes and interview data to write a short social scientific analysis (no more than five double-spaced pages) of the communal dimensions of this faith tradition.

### ***Essays: Theory of Religion and Ethnography of Religion***

For the second assignment, the theory of religion essay, you will synthesize information found in two of the assigned readings covered during the first part of the course into an original argument. You will need to summarize the core argument and perspective of each author, but more importantly, the goal of this exercise is to consider how each text can shed light on the other and how, together, they constitute a synthetic whole with insights not apparent in each text individually. The essay you submit should be no longer than six double-spaced pages, so conciseness will be key.

The other extended essay, an ethnography of religion, requires you to compose an essay of no more than seven double-spaced pages in which you will offer ethnographic data about a religious practice of your choice. You will conduct secondary research using library resources (and possibly supplemented with first-hand primary observation) to give a detailed account of one aspect of how religious ideas and traditions play out in people's everyday lives. In addition to describing in rich, detailed language religious practices and beliefs, a critical component of this essay is that you incorporate your findings with the anthropological questions, concepts, and frameworks presented in the course. As your thesis, you will suggest how information about this religious group intervenes into any of the scholarly debates we have explored throughout the course (i.e., how it supports an answer or partial answer to a central question in the anthropology of religion). You are especially encouraged to take a "problem-based approach" to this assignment, whether those problems are academic (e.g., the theoretical conceptualization of magic vs. religion) or practical (e.g., the amelioration of religious intolerance or tension). More details and submission guidelines for each of these written assignments will be posted to Canvas and discussed in class well in advance of their due dates.

### ***Midterm and Final Exam***

Finally, there will be an in-class midterm exam given approximately halfway through the semester and a final exam given during Babson's designated exam period. For the midterm you will have a full class period to answer a series of short-answer and essay questions based on the readings and class discussions completed thus far. For the final you will have the full two-hour period to answer a similarly structured exam; although it draws on core concepts introduced throughout the course, its emphasis will be on the ethnographic cases covered since the midterm. The exam on which you score highest will be weighted at 15% of your final grade, while the other exam will be worth 10%. A study guide for both will be distributed beforehand to help guide your preparation.

All written assignments prepared outside of class should be fully documented with consistent use of a citation style. American anthropologists typically follow the Chicago Manual of Style (author-date version) as a disciplinary convention, and you are welcome to use the same in this course. However, if you are more familiar with another style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) and would prefer to use it, you are welcome, as long as you do so consistently. The most important point is that you give clear references to outside texts and ideas you have borrowed, even if the texts have been assigned in class. Resources to help you learn good citation practices are available in Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, online at the [Horn Library citation guide](#), and in person at Babson's Writing Center (Babson Hall 205). You are also

recommended to visit the Writing Center to improve the quality of your academic writing, especially given the writing-intensive nature of this course. You can [visit their website](#) to schedule a thirty-minute appointment, to which you should bring a printed-out copy of the assignment and your current draft.

For each day (or portion thereof) that your paper is late, your grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter (e.g., from B+ to a B). Please remember to read through your entire draft at least once before printing it. Extensions are granted *automatically* for circumstances outside your control equal to the number of study days lost, **provided you let me know ahead of the due date**. Do not hesitate to reach out by email if you are having trouble meeting deadlines or other targets.

### **Readings:**

As in other reading-intensive courses in the humanities and social sciences, you are expected to come to class having carefully read *all* the assigned materials. Due to our relatively small class size, I expect everyone to contribute something (even if it is small) to discussion at each meeting. If you have not closely read the materials for the day, it will be noticeable, and your participation grade will be affected. Since many of our readings will be available electronically on Canvas, some students find it helpful to print them out to annotate while they read and to refer to during class. While you are not *required* to print out all the readings, if you do not have them in front of you during class, I expect you to have taken notes on some of the important passages, and I may call on you to answer questions about them. Nevertheless, I want you to see the readings for this course not as a burden but as a chance to connect with ideas and ways of knowing that may be unfamiliar to you, even if approaching these themes may be unfamiliar or challenging at first.

### **Attendance and Participation:**

Attendance at all classes is expected as a basic requirement of the course. You cannot learn this material if you are not present in class, since much of what we will be covering will be brought out through discussion and many important points are not covered in the readings. Each student will begin with an A in attendance. After the first missed class, each subsequent absence will result in lowering your attendance grade by one-third of a letter (e.g., to an A-, then to a B+, etc.). However, I realize that unexpected things may come up during the semester (e.g., illness, family concerns, etc.) that may prevent you from being in class. Therefore, if you come to see me during office hours (or another time by appointment) to talk about the course content missed, this reduction in your grade will be waived.

Furthermore, while attendance will play a crucial part in determining your grade, there is more to being “present” than simply showing up. Your mental presence at and participation in each session is a crucial component of this course and your participation grade, which will be calculated separately from your attendance grade. You cannot earn an A for this component simply by showing up; you must earn it through consistent, careful, thoughtful, and eager engagement in class discussions. This expected level of engagement starts with solid preparation before each meeting. As an incentive to ensure everyone has invested an equal amount of preparation, some meetings will begin with a short quiz based on the assigned readings for the day. These quizzes do not require significant reflection or memorization, nor are you expected to understand everything you have read ahead of time; if you have read and taken notes on the main arguments in each text, you will likely earn 100% on each. They are merely a tool to ensure you are familiar enough with the material to jump into the discussion. Quizzes will be held immediately at the start of class and cannot be made up.

At the same time, careful preparation does not necessarily exclude taking risks; feel free to try new ideas without fear of being wrong. Your participation grade is a function not of correctness but of intellectual boldness and effort exerted, assuming you have put a good faith effort into your preparation and studying. Finally, I understand that outgoing conversation or debate is not a style suited to all learners. Therefore, if you feel you are not able to participate rigorously during class, please let me know so that we can find alternative modes of participation, whether through office visits or other activities.



**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Coordinator of the Learning Center at 781-239-5509 or in Hollister Hall 122 to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

**Academic Integrity:**

The standards and expectation of the Babson Honor Code and its academic honesty and integrity policies apply to this course as well as to any other course you are taking here at Babson. The policy is articulated in your [Undergraduate Handbook](#). Failure of any student to take appropriate steps to fully understand the Code will not be an acceptable nor tolerated excuse for any violations.

**Religious Observances:**

Any student who faces a conflict between the requirements of a course and the observance of his or her religious faith should contact me as early in the semester as possible. In such event, I will provide reasonable and fair accommodations that do not unduly disadvantage you.

**Grading:**

You will be evaluated based on the quality of your assignments, the degree of improvement throughout the semester, and the value of your participation in class. Each component of the course will be weighted as follows:

Fieldwork Exercise .....	20%
Essay #1: Theory of Religion .....	15%
Essay #2: Ethnography of Religion .....	20%
Lower Exam Score.....	10%
Higher Exam Score .....	15%
Attendance and Participation (including quizzes) .....	20%

Your final grade will be calculated based on the average score of all these categories and will fall on the following scale, as defined by the university:

- A.....High Distinction (for exceptional work)
- A-
- B+
- B.....Distinction (for very good work)
- B-
- C+
- C.....Satisfactory (for acceptable work)
- C-
- D+
- D.....Passing, but Unsatisfactory (for poor work)
- D-
- F.....Failing Grade



**Schedule and Important Dates:**

<i>Class Unit</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading and Assignments Due</i>
<b>Week 1: Prologue – Why Religion?</b>	January 21	None
	January 23	Syllabus  James Bielo, Chapter 1, “What is ‘Religion’?” (ARB)  Michael Lambek, “General Introduction” (RAR)
<b><u>PART I: Theories of Religion</u></b>		
<b>Week 2: Evolutionary and Psychological Models</b>	January 28	Edward Burnett Tylor, “Religion in Primitive Culture” (RAR)  Bronislaw Malinowski, “Myth in Primitive Psychology” (RAR)  Paul Radin, <i>Primitive Religion</i> (Canvas)
	January 30	W.E.H. Stanner, “Religion, Totemism and Symbolism” (RAR)  Sigmund Freud, <i>Totem and Taboo</i> (Canvas)

<b>Week 3: Sociological and Textual Contributions</b>	February 4	Emile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (RAR)  Max Weber, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (RAR)
	February 6	James Frazer, <i>The Golden Bough</i> (Canvas)  Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s <i>Golden Bough</i> ” (RAR)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Field Site Selection
<b>Week 4: Studying Religion Anthropologically</b>	February 11	James Bielo, Chapter 2, “Doing Religious Ethnography” (ARB)  Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (RAR)
	February 13	Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” (RAR)  Benson Saler, <i>Conceptualizing Religion</i> (Canvas)
<b>Week 5: Ritual and Social Transformation</b>	February 20	Victor Turner, “Liminality and Communitas” (RAR)  Arnold van Gennep, <i>Rites of Passage</i> (Canvas)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Fieldwork Exercise
<b><u>PART II: Meaning and Power</u></b>		
<b>Week 6: Semiotic Approaches to Religion</b>	February 25	Susanne K. Langer, “The Logic of Signs and Symbols” (RAR)  E.E. Evans-Pritchard, “The Problem of Symbols” (RAR)  Alfred Gell, “Closure and Multiplication: An Essay on Polynesian Cosmology and Ritual” (RAR)
	February 27	Sherry B. Ortner, “On Key Symbols” (RAR)  Eric R. Wolf, “The Virgen of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol” (RAR)
<b>Week 7: Religion and the Human Body</b>	March 3	Gananath Obeyesekere, “Medusa’s Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience” (RAR)  James Bielo, Chapter 3, “Bodies, Words, and Things” (ARB)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Theory of Religion Essay

	March 5	Mattijs van de Port, “Candomblé in Pink, Green and Black: Re-scripting the Afro-Brazilian Religious Heritage in the Public Sphere of Salvador, Bahia” (RAR)  Rebecca Seligman, “The Unmaking and Making of Self: Embodied Suffering and Mind-Body Healing in Brazilian Candomblé” (Canvas)
<b>Week 8: Structure, Revisited</b>	March 10	Claude Lévi-Strauss, “A Jivaro Version of <i>Totem and Taboo</i> ” (RAR)  Mary Douglas, “Land Animals, Pure and Impure” (RAR)
	March 12	MIDTERM EXAMINATION
<b>Week 9: Colonialism and Globalization</b>	March 24	John and Jean Comaroff, “The Colonization of Consciousness” (RAR)  James Bielo, Chapter 5, “Who Do You Trust?” (ARB)
	March 26	Michael Taussig, “The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry: Devil’s Labor and the Baptism of Money” (RAR)  James Bielo, Chapter 6, “Going Global” (ARB)
<b>Week 10: Religion and the State</b>	March 31	Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (RAR)  Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “‘Using the Past to Negate the Present’: Ritual Ethics and State Rationality in Ancient China” (RAR)  David A. French, “FIRE’s Guide to Religious Liberty on Campus” (Canvas)
	April 2	Caroline Humphrey, “Shamanic Practices and the State in Northern Asia: Views from the Center and Periphery” (RAR)  Anya Bernstein, <i>Religious Bodies Politic</i> (Canvas)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Ethnography of Religion Source Summary
<b><u>PART III: Danger and Healing</u></b>		
<b>Week 11: Belief and Praxis</b>	April 7	Jean Pouillon, “Remarks on the Verb ‘To Believe’” (RAR)  Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers” (RAR)  James Bielo, Chapter 4, “In Time, In Place” (ARB)

	April 9	Charles Hirschkind, “Passional Preaching, Aural Sensibility, and the Islamic Revival in Cairo” (RAR)  Susan F. Harding, “Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion” (RAR)
<b>Week 12: Witchcraft: Religion or Science?</b>	April 14	Raymond C. Kelly, “Witchcraft and Sexual Relations: An Exploration in the Social and Semantic Implications of the Structure of Belief” (RAR)  Meyer Fortes, “Fate in Relation to the Social Structure” (RAR)
	April 16	E.E. Evans-Pritchard, <i>Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande</i> (Canvas)  Filip de Boeck, “On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street” (RAR)
<b>Week 13: Science, Healing, and Religion</b>	April 21	Bronislaw Malinowski, “Magic, Science, and Religion” (Canvas)  James Bielo, “‘Particles-to-People...Molecules-to-Man’: Creationist Poetics in Public Debates” (Canvas)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Ethnography of Religion Essay
	April 23	Susan Martha Kahn, <i>Reproducing Jews</i> (Canvas)  Robert J. Thornton, <i>Healing the Exposed Being</i> (Canvas)  Douglas Bafford, “Aging and the End Times: Evangelical Eschatology and Experiences of Elderhood in the United States and South Africa” (Canvas)
<b>Week 14: The Future of Religion</b>	April 28	Charles Taylor, <i>A Secular Age</i> (Canvas)  Robert N. McCauley, <i>Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not</i> (Canvas)  Wes Granberg-Michaelson, “Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically” (Canvas)
<b>Exam Week: Friday, May 8 at 10:30 AM</b>		FINAL EXAMINATION

\*\*\* **NB:** This schedule and syllabus are subject to change as we move through the semester. \*\*\*.

Source for Image on First Page: Alfred Gell, “Closure and Multiplication: An Essay on Polynesian Cosmology and Ritual,” in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Second Edition*, 268. Caption: “The Tuamotuan conception of the Cosmos,” adapted from an illustration by Paiore, c. 1820