

**RELS 2600**  
**ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION**  
**Wed., 3:30-6:15**  
**Denny 202**

**Instructor**

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Office Hours: Wed., 2-3PM, or by appointment

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Tue., 12-1:30

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The historical and cultural moment we inhabit is saturated with religion. Politicians, celebrities, activists, media pundits, self-help gurus, faithful believers and ardent skeptics all make claims about and in the name of religion. Regardless whether such claims are accurate, coherent, insightful, helpful or grounded in evidence, they exert enormous influence—positive and negative—in the social sphere. To understand the world we inhabit, then, it is essential that we understand the complex discourses and practices, habits and attitudes, virtues and vices that comprise religion.

What is religion? What does it *do*? What *can* it do? What tools are available for understanding what it does? What does it mean to study religion *as an academic*—rather than, say, as a devotee or a debunker? What questions and categories might be helpful for analyzing and interpreting how religion functions to make meaning, distribute power, shape identity or justify actions? These are the questions that inform this course and will occupy our attention this semester.

Because the study of religion is a broad, contentious, centuries-old, multi-faceted, interdisciplinary mode of inquiry that draws from the fields of history, anthropology, critical race theory, sociology, psychology, economics, political science, literary theory, gender studies, ethics, aesthetics, and postcolonial theory (to name just a few!), a single, semester-long course—even a number of such courses—simply cannot cover all the relevant material. This course highlights *some* key concepts and *some* important thinkers, but students should bear in mind that a different course organized by a different instructor would likely make different—but equally legitimate—choices about material to be read and assignments to be completed. This course should be understood as the beginning of an exploration rather than a definitive overview.

In addition to opening a conversation about the operation of religious discourses and practices, this course also seeks to help you develop the practical skills necessary to study religion—or any other topic—well. We will, therefore, focus a good deal of attention on enhancing your capacity to think critically, read carefully and write clearly. While these skills are certainly vital to the study of religion, they are also key to success in any intellectual or professional endeavor.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992 [1948]).

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Course readings are available through Atkins Library's electronic course reserve:  
<http://library.uncc.edu/caos/coursreserve>.

*Please bring the relevant readings to each class session.*

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY

*We want every student in this class to succeed in this class.* In selecting readings, crafting assignments, and setting a schedule, we have tried to create a framework that will help you do your best work. In presenting material, articulating expectations, and responding to assignments, we strive to be as clear as we can. We will not, however, hunt you down, or pester you, to make sure you are doing the required work.

*To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.* This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or course expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if some aspect of the course is not working for you, please let us know. We will do what we can to help, but we are completely unable to remedy the situation if we do not know there is a problem.

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to (1) attend, and be on time for, all class meetings; (2) read carefully all assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned; (3) participate actively and productively in class discussions; (4) be familiar with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling all course requirements; and (6) check your NinerMail account regularly for course-related communications.

You are *NOT* expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the graduate assistant, the course materials or other students; you are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

## CLASS DECORUM

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, please do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Cell phones must be turned off prior to class. If your cell phone rings, or you are observed text-messaging during class, you will be asked to leave class and it will be counted as an absence. (3) Computers may be used during class only to take notes or read electronic-reserve readings. If you are observed using your computer for any other purpose, you will be asked to leave class, it will be counted as an absence, *and it will jeopardize use of computers during class for all students in the course.*

## CLASS PREPARATION

Because this course focuses on close, critical analysis of difficult texts, you will need to devote sufficient time to preparing for class both to contribute to class discussion and to do well on assignments. You must read carefully prior to class taking note of the ideas and questions you want to bring to our collective conversation. You should make sure, at a minimum, that you can summarize the author's main point(s), the evidence marshaled, the chief rhetorical strategies employed and any notable short-comings in the analysis. You should also familiarize yourself with new vocabulary and investigate the relevant historical, cultural and intellectual background.

You should come to class having identified a few passages that struck you as particularly interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative. You should be prepared to discuss your reasons for selecting these passages and to guide your classmates through a consideration of the passage in relation both to the readings as a whole and the themes and questions of the course. *All members of the course—students, instructor and graduate assistant alike—are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.*

We will not have time to discuss fully all of the assigned reading during class time, but our collective consideration of the material will give you practice engaging these texts, enhancing your ability to explore the materials more carefully and thoughtfully on your own. Our class meetings are an opportunity to deepen your understanding of, ask questions of, and develop ideas about the readings, as well as improve your strategies and skills for analyzing them. Your written work provides the opportunity to demonstrate, develop and deepen this engagement.

## ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend, and be on time for, all class meetings. *Every absence after one, for whatever reason, will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade. Every two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as one absence.* If you are absent, you are responsible for getting any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The only exception to this policy is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must submit written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the class(es) you will be missing for this reason to the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu), no later than **Wednesday, August 29.**

## E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

We will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using your NinerMail (University e-mail) account. You are responsible for checking this account regularly and responding promptly to any requests.

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, we pledge to do our best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, body size, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus.

As a sign of this respect, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should strive, at the very least, to use gender-inclusive language and also to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic racial, ethnic, class, sexual or (dis)ability connotations.

## **ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services ([www.ds.uncc.edu](http://www.ds.uncc.edu)).

## **SCHEDULE**

### **8.22 INTRODUCTION TO COURSE**

#### **INTERROGATING BASIC CATEGORIES**

**8.29** Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, 179-96 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1998]).

Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 27-54 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 [1983]).

Wade Clark Roof, "Blood in the Barbecue?," in *God in the Details*, ed. Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, 109-22 (New York: Routledge, 2001).

**9.5** Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 21-35 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 94-116 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Edward R. Gray and Scott Thumma, "The Gospel Hour," in *Gay Religion*, 285-302 (Lanham, MD: AltaMiraPress, 2005 [1997]).

- 9.12** Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. IX, trans. James Strachey, 117-27 (London: Hogarth, 1959 [1907]).

Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXI, trans. James Strachey, 15-33 (London: Hogarth, 1961 [1927]).

Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIII, trans. James Strachey, 119-61 (London: Hogarth, 1953 [1913]).

### **SACRED & PROFANE**

- 9.19** Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]), 21-44, 207-41.

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1957), 8-65.

- 9.26** Mary Douglas, *Purity & Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 7-52.

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]), 1-18, 90-112

### **RITUAL & PERFORMANCE**

- 10.3** Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997 [1969]), 94-130.

Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 27-51 (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1984]).

- 10.10** Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977 [1975]), 3-31, 135-69.

Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, 13-31 (New York: Routledge, 1991).

## SACRIFICE

- 10.17** Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*, trans. W.D. Halls (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1898]), 1-49.

Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Domestication of Sacrifice," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, 145-59 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1987]).

Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 17-61.

- 10.24** Nancy Jay, "Throughout Your Generations Forever," in *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Carter, 370-83 (New York: Continuum, 2003 [1994]).

Delores Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," in *Cross Examinations*, ed. Marit Trelstad, 19-32 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006).

Kent L. Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 25-64.

## POWER

- 10.31** Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986 [1957]), 11-39.

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978 [1976]), 3-49, 92-102.

- 11.7** Mircea Eliade, *Myth & Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 1-20, 92-113.

Bruce Lincoln, "Mythic Narrative and Cultural Diversity in American Society," in *Myth and Method*, ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger, 163-76 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 44-68.

- 11.14** Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of the Right*” (excerpt) and “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 53-54, 143-45 (New York: Norton, 1978)

Louis Althusser, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus (Notes toward an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 85-126, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1970]).

Vincent Harding, “Religion & Resistance among Antebellum Slaves, 1800-1860,” in *African-American Religion*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop & Albert J. Raboteau, 107-30 (New York: Routledge, 1997).

## **11.21 THANKSGIVING BREAK – No Class**

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

- 11.28** Robert Orsi, “Snakes Alive!,” in *Between Heaven and Earth*, 177-204 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Andrea Sun-Mee Jones, “What the Doing Does,” *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 6, no. 1 (December 2004): 86-107, [www.jcrt.org/archives/06.1/jones.pdf](http://www.jcrt.org/archives/06.1/jones.pdf).

### **FINAL MEETING – Wednesday, 12.12, 2:00-4:30**

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

You must submit all assignments by e-mail. If we are unable to open an attachment, we will notify you as soon as possible. If you do not submit a readable version of the assignment within 24 hours of notification, it will be graded at our discretion. ***No late papers will be accepted.***

All assignments should be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs.

***You should familiarize yourself with, and conform your conduct to, the University’s Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.***

**Touchstone Reflection Essay**. Before our class meeting on September 5, please e-mail to the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) a 2-3 page essay that addresses the following questions: What central question(s) drew you to religious studies? What do you expect to study as a religious studies major? How do you expect the major will help you after graduation? How would you define “religion”? At some point in the essay, please mention the religious studies classes you have already taken and when you plan to graduate. Although this reflection piece is not graded, it will help the department discern why students become religious studies majors, to recruit future majors, to assess learning outcomes, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the religious studies curriculum. In addition, writing this essay will help you complete the final assignment for the course.

**Discussion Questions** (10%). You must submit **ten (10)** discussion questions. You may only submit one question per week. Questions must be submitted by noon on the date the relevant material is assigned. (For example, a discussion question on Talal Asad’s essay would be due by noon on August 29.) Questions must be submitted by e-mail to the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu). A good discussion question is more than a request for clarification; it is more than a solicitation for agreement or disagreement. A good discussion question provides an opportunity to explore an idea, to apply a concept, or to compare and contrast different claims. You will receive full credit for each question that is submitted in a timely fashion, demonstrates an adequate understanding of the material and shows reasonable effort. Although we will not always have time to address your discussion questions in class, developing the questions will help you focus your reading and it will help your classmates think more deeply about the reading as well.

**Discussion Question Responses** (20%). You must submit **two (2)** 4-6 page papers in response to a discussion question prepared by your classmates. (You will receive the discussion questions that have been submitted that week at the beginning of each class session.) You may not write on your own discussion question. One of these papers is due on or before October 10; the other is due on or before December 5. One of these papers must be submitted to your peer-review partner and revised under the guidelines outlined below in order to receive credit. You must submit these papers to both the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) and the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu). A good discussion question response will demonstrate an understanding of the question as well as an understanding of the material under consideration. It will offer a clear, complete, accurate and thoughtful response to the question.

**Expository Essays** (10%). You must submit **six (6)** 1-2 page expository essays that summarize the central idea and main argument of a single course reading. You may only submit one expository essay per week. These essays are due before class begins on the date the relevant material is assigned. (For example, an expository essay on Donald Lopez’s essay would be due before class on September 5.) You must submit these essays to both the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) and the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu). A good expository essay will clearly, accurately and completely summarize the contents of the reading. It will not attempt to make an argument or evaluate the material. Given the length of these essays, you will need to make careful choices when identifying and summarizing the main ideas of the reading.



**Analytical Essays** (20%). You must submit **two (2)** 4-6 page analytical essays that engage course readings. One of these essays is due on or before October 10; the other is due on or before December 5. One of these essays must be submitted to your peer-review partner and revised under the guidelines outlined below in order to receive credit. You must submit these essays to both the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) and the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu). These essays should engage the course material beyond summary and exposition. You can use the ideas to explain or interpret a religious text or practice; you can critique an idea expressed by the author; you can place different readings in conversation with each other; you can use the ideas to discuss the “religious” dimension of some seemingly non-religious phenomena, text or activity. These essays should demonstrate not only your understanding of the material, but also your interaction with it.

**News Analysis Essay** (20%). You must submit **two (2)** 4-6 page news analysis essays that summarize a news story about religion (broadly defined) and explain what presuppositions that story is making about the nature, function and operation of religion. One of these essays is due on or before October 10; the other is due on or before December 5. You must submit these essays to both the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) and the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu). To find a news story, you may want to consult the following blogs and websites: ReligionDispatches.org, HuffingtonPost.com/religion; KillingtheBuddha.com; The Immanent Frame, blogs.ssrc.org/tif. (This list is meant to be suggestive, not restrictive.) You may also use video sources—for example, local news broadcasts, YouTube clips, *The Daily Show*—as long as you can provide a working link to the relevant clip. The purpose of this assignment is to connect media coverage of religion to the ideas that we are considering in this course. What assumptions does this story make about religion? How can the materials of this course help you understand, interpret and evaluate media coverage of religion? How does the story cause you to rethink ideas from this course?

**Letter about Religious Studies** (10%). As a final writing assignment, you must write a 3-4 page letter explaining why a publicly funded university, like UNC Charlotte, should have a religious studies department. You must submit a copy of the letter to both the instructor (kbrintna@uncc.edu) and the graduate assistant (mhamner@uncc.edu) by noon on December 11; you must also bring a hard copy of the letter to that final meeting. Given your area of study, why should taxpayers subsidize your education? What benefit do the citizens of the state derive from you obtaining this degree? What legitimate interest do they have in your pursuit of the academic study of religion? This letter must be addressed to an actual person, like a state legislator or the editor of a local paper. As such, it should demonstrate some awareness of that person’s interests and perspective. Is your letter going to a paper that has championed liberal arts education? Are you writing to a state legislator who has voted against funding increases for the UNC system? The letter must include some discussion of ideas from the course in making its case for the value of a degree in religious studies. In other words, you must show some evidence of how being in this class has shaped your perspective on these questions.

**Final Meeting.** Our final meeting will be a press conference where you will work together as a group to determine how to present—in a clear, engaging, oral form—the most important ideas from your letters to an audience comprised of the faculty of the department. You will work together for the first hour of this final meeting, with the graduate assistant, to organize your presentation. You will then have forty-five minutes of the second hour of the final meeting to make your group presentation, followed by a question-and-answer and discussion period with the audience. *You must attend and participate in this final meeting to receive credit for the letter-writing assignment.*

**Peer Review/Revision** (10%). On or before September 12, the graduate assistant will assign you a peer-review partner. You will need to exchange one of your discussion question response papers and one of your analytical papers with your peer-review partner in order to receive credit for the assignment.

*In your capacity as a peer reviewer,* you should read your partner's draft with the following questions in mind: What does the paper do well? What are its strongest features? How could it be improved? Does the paper have a clear main idea? What is insightful, helpful, interesting, generative about this idea? What is questionable or troublesome about it? Where is the paper unclear? What might make these places easier to follow? Does the paper provide sufficient evidence to support its main idea? Does it engage the course readings sufficiently? Does the paper demonstrate an accurate understanding of the readings under discussion? Does it consider important objections to the views expressed? Does the paper approach the material under consideration sympathetically and fairly? Did you learn something or gain insight from this paper? If so, what? If not, why? Is the paper free of spelling, grammatical and citation errors? Based on your consideration of the paper in light of these questions, write a 1-2 page evaluation of the paper explaining what it does well and how it can be improved. In order to receive credit for peer-reviewing your partner's work, you will need to return your partner's paper within a week of receiving it. You will be graded, in part, on how seriously you take your responsibilities as a peer reviewer.

*When you revise your paper,* consider carefully the feedback you've received from your partner. Your revision should be more than fixing proofreading errors; it should address the reviewer's larger concerns. When submitting your revised paper, you must submit the original draft, the reviewer's comments, your revised essay, and a 1-2 page explanation of how you've responded to the reviewer's comments. (You may, for example, decide not to take a piece of advice, but you'll want to explain why. Or, you may start to revise a portion of the essay in light of a comment, and realize that it causes you to rethink the essay in a more radical way than the reviewer suggested.)

## GRADING CRITERIA

In grading your work, we will use the following criteria (listed in order of importance):

(1) Does the paper demonstrate an understanding of the questions, issues and approaches discussed in class? (A paper can demonstrate an excellent understanding of class material while disagreeing with that material.) (2) Does it give close, careful attention to the details of the relevant texts to support its general observations? (3) Does it have a well-articulated and thoughtful main idea? Is the writing clear and well-organized in support of this main idea? (4) Does it select the most relevant elements from the texts to support its central claim? (5) Is the paper free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? (6) Does the paper provide adequate and accurate citations for its sources? (7) Does the paper engage a sufficiently wide range of sources?

Your discussion response, analytical and news analysis papers will receive two scores—one for content (70%), one for mechanics (30%). These scores will be combined to establish your overall grade. ***This means that roughly a third of your grade in the course will be based on your attentiveness to grammar, spelling, proofreading and citation form.***

You should privilege depth over breadth in your writing. ***It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially.*** You are not expected to be *exhaustive*, but merely to provide sufficient detail to flesh out generalizations and to show some mastery over the topic(s) on which you choose to write. Most importantly, your writing should be *accurate* and *thoughtful*. ***Remember, you will not be in the room when we are reading your paper, so what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.***

Your writing should be free of spelling, grammatical and typographical mistakes. Failure to correct writing mistakes noted in one assignment in subsequent assignments will have severe negative consequences for your grade. ***We want to spend our time engaging your ideas, not copy-editing your prose.*** We will rely on Kate L. Turabian's *Manual for Writers* (7th edition) to resolve questions about punctuation, grammar and style. If you feel uncertain about proper grammar and usage, please consult part III of Turabian's *Manual*.

Your writing should include accurate and adequate citations. ***All citations must conform to the guidelines set forth in Turabian's Manual for Writers.*** The Department of Religious Studies' writing guidelines ([www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm](http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm)) provide sample citation forms. (You can also use the citations in this syllabus as a guide, but please note that it uses the footnote form.) You may use footnotes (Turabian, chapters 16 & 17) or parenthetical citations (Turabian, chapters 18 & 19), but you may only use one format throughout the course. Your paper must include a bibliography as well as footnotes/parenthetical citations.

Two additional style rules that will apply to assignments for this course:

- (1) Do not use “you” in formal writing.

Incorrect: “This passage in Kristeva makes you aware of your body.”

Correct: “This passage in Kristeva makes the reader aware of her body.”

(Note that this version forces the writer to think about the identity of the reader: would male-identified readers have the same bodily experience as female-identified readers?)

- (2) Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Finally, you should consider issues beyond proofreading and clarity of expression. You should also think about rhetoric, form and style. You should be attentive to how you organize an essay, how you begin and end a paper, how you express yourself (from word choice to examples to quotations to metaphors), and how you vary the length and complexity of sentences and paragraphs. While you are not expected to imitate the style(s) of authors from this course in any specific way, you should pay attention to what you like and dislike in their writing, what you think works and what you think fails, and try to incorporate that knowledge into your own writing. You should approach the readings not only to gain ideas, but also to glean insights about how best to express ideas.

## **GRADE DESCRIPTIONS**

Grades are not a judgment on you as a person or an evaluation of your *overall* capacity to perform academic work. They are one way of communicating how one particular assignment reflects your analytical skills and writing ability with respect to a specific set of materials and questions.

- A** Exceptional work. Evinces exhaustive preparation and thoughtful engagement in every aspect of the assignment. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of material and presentation of ideas. General observations supported by specific, concrete detail. Contains a strong, clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative beyond class discussion. Clear, well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the material under consideration. Conversant with the course's themes and questions. Expresses an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear, well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. May fail to attend to important features of the material under discussion. May fail to address the course's themes and questions. May have an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may be too general or superficial. Writing may be unclear, disorganized or have numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis is very general, gets significant details wrong, or ignores details that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the readings or the course's themes. Significant problems with clarity or organization. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of errors noted in prior papers.
- F** Unacceptable work.

*If you come to class, participate in discussion, demonstrate a commitment to doing well on your assignments and improve over the course of the semester, we will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.*