



# Course Syllabus

## Introduction to Religion in America

REL 2121/ CRN: 80193 / Fall 2026

A Session (8/17/26 – 12/10/26)

Credit Hours: 3

Pre-requisites: ENC 1101

## Contact Information

### Instructor

Jennifer Linn Hamilton  
Associate Professor  
[jhamilton@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:jhamilton@gulfcoast.edu)  
850-769-1551, ext. 5850

Office: Social Sciences 216  
Office Hours: 9 am to 11 am Monday, Wednesday, Friday; 11 am to 12:30 pm Tuesday and Thursday; 1 pm to 2 pm Tuesday.

Response Time: 48 hours

### Division Chair

Robert Saunders, Jr., PhD.  
Professor and Chair  
[rsaunder2@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:rsaunder2@gulfcoast.edu)  
850-872-3826

### Division Administrative Assistant

Ms. Jody Walton  
Senior Administrative Assistant  
[jwalton1@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:jwalton1@gulfcoast.edu)  
850-872-3825

## Course Information

### Important Note

For any syllabus posted prior to the beginning of the term, the instructor reserves the right to make minor changes prior to or during the term. The instructor will notify students via e-mail or Canvas announcement when changes are made in the requirements and/or grading of the course.

### Catalog Description:

Prerequisite: ENC1101 with a minimum grade of “C.” Through readings, discussions, and selected primary materials, including selections from the Western Canon, this course provides an examination of the origins and social context of American religious history. Emphasis is placed on the rich diversity of American religious life through an examination of American originals (e.g., Native Americans, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Seventh-Day Adventists), imported religions (e.g., Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism), and pop culture religion. REL 2121 requires that students produce extensive college-level writing and complete the course with a minimum grade of “C.”

### Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

Student will:

- Identify the major religious events, movements, themes, and people in United States history from the colonial era to the present.
- Describe several religious communities in America and compare them through the religious studies rubric of creed, code, cultures, and community.
- Analyze the complex interaction between religious belief and the political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual context in which religious people inhabit and enact their faith.
- Demonstrate the ability to read, contextualize, and interpret arguments made by scholars.

### Course Perspectives and Goals

Introduction to Religion in America (online) **is an independent, self-study course** that requires a great deal of self-motivation and discipline from each student. This is a semester-length course in religious studies with an emphasis on the historical development of religious communities in the United States. The course, however, takes as its starting point instruction in the historical origins of religion itself. It will then provide an historical overview of the responses to the unique American ecological and political environment that has produced distinctly American religions, the Americanization of those that arrive on these shores, as well as the invention of new American denominations, sects, and cults. Above all, the goal is an academic approach to the study of religion that will encourage religious literacy. Here are the enumerated goals:

1. **To develop students' religious literacy** by introducing the historical origins of religion and tracing the development, diversity, and transformation of religious traditions in the United States from the colonial period to the present.
2. **To examine American religion within its historical contexts** by analyzing how ecological, political, social, economic, and cultural forces shaped the emergence of distinctly American religious movements and the Americanization of imported traditions.
3. **To cultivate comparative and analytical skills in religious studies** by applying the categories of creed, code, cultus, and community to the study of diverse American religious groups, including indigenous, immigrant, and new religious movements.
4. **To strengthen academic reading, writing, and research skills** through engagement with scholarly interpretations of American religious history and limited use of primary source materials, enabling students to contextualize, interpret, and critically evaluate arguments in the academic study of religion.

#### Course Materials & Resources:

The required text for this course is *Religion in American Life: A Short History* by Jon Butler, Grant Wacker and Randall Balmer. ISBN: 9780199832699.

The text provides a balanced approach to the study of religion in America, considering the people, events, and ideas that have shaped the religious developments in American life from the colonial period to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Delivery Method:

This is a web-based course. All online courses at GCSC utilize the Canvas Learning System. Students should read all information presented in the Canvas course site and should periodically check for updates—at least every 48 hours.

**Remember:** Introduction to Religion in America (online) **is an independent, self-study course** which requires a great deal of self-motivation and discipline from each student. This is a semester length course in religious studies with an emphasis on the historical development of religious communities in the United States. This course is not one in which students may work at their own pace. Each week there are learning modules, assignments, online lectures, online discussions, and/or online exams with due dates. Refer to the schedule within this syllabus and within Canvas for more information.

#### Attendance and Make-Up Policies for this Course

### Attendance Policy:

Although physical class meetings are not part of this course, participation in all interactive learning activities is required. Students “attend” class by engaging with the lecture and reading material and viewing videos through note taking.

### Make-Up Work Policy:

I accept late work, with points deducted for each day late: typically 1 to 2 points a day, depending upon the type of assignment – exams and papers will have higher point deductions than small discussion postings or analyses.

## AI Policy for this Course

### Limited Assistive Use Only

Students may use basic assistive technologies for spelling, grammar, and formatting (e.g., PaperRater or SpellCheckPLUS); however, the use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Grammarly's AI function, etc.) for generating, rewriting, or enhancing content is not permitted. All work must reflect the student's original ideas and writing. Representing work created by AI as one's own is a violation of academic integrity and may result in penalties, including a zero on the assignment and additional disciplinary actions as outlined in the college's academic integrity policy.

## Student Expectations

Communication and feedback within the course will occur through various channels: Canvas Inbox, Canvas Announcements, Canvas Discussions, Zoom, assignment feedback, and/or instructor office hours.

Additionally, as a student at Gulf Coast State College, you are expected to:

- **Adhere to Course Guidelines:** Follow the instructions within the course syllabus, along with any additional instructions provided by the instructor. Be certain you understand the course objectives, grading criteria, and academic policies.
- **Maintain Regular Contact:** Keep in touch with your instructor via your GCSC email or other designated communication channels. Regular contact helps clarify doubts, share ideas, and foster a collaborative learning environment.
- **Active Participation:** Engage actively in the course and submit assignments on time. Your active participation is crucial for your academic success and contributes to a deeper learning experience.

As your instructor, my commitment to you is to:

- **Provide Timely Feedback:** I will review and provide feedback on your assignments and submissions promptly. My goal is to help you understand your strengths and areas for improvement.

- **Respond Via Canvas Inbox:** I will respond to your emails or messages within 48 hours (excluding weekends) unless otherwise noted. I understand the importance of clear and timely communication in addressing your questions and concerns.
- **Post Regular Announcements:** Announcements will be posted to keep you updated and help you manage your time. These reminders will include important dates, upcoming assignments, and any changes to the course schedule.
- **Maintain Weekly Office Hours:** I will maintain regular weekly office hours, but I can also be available by appointment. This is to ensure I'm available for any questions or concerns that may come up during the week.

### Course Requirements:

Students enrolled in this course will be required to:

- Take and pass three examinations, which include a comprehensive final
- Participate in Discussion Board
- Complete the Four C's Project
- Complete the Research Paper

## Assignments/Assessment Instruments

### I. Exams

- The three exams will consist of short answers and essays.
- The exams will be delivered online via Canvas.
- The exams will be open access, 24/7, about five days before the due date. Students are required to use lecture material, textbook readings, and primary source material on each exam. No outside material is allowed.
- Students are not allowed to discuss the exam once it is opened. Any plagiarism, use of Generative AI, or other outside source material will render the exam void.
- See the exam instructions within each Canvas dropbox for further instructions.

### II. Discussion Board

This is an opportunity to communicate your understanding of the material with others in the class. These exercises help us refine our thinking, build community, and develop our communication skills. Many of these discussion boards will require an initial post due before the deadline, with your follow-up posts to classmates due on the due date. Please make sure you read the directions for each discussion board to note when those initial posts are due.

### III. Four C's Project

For this project, you will need to pick a religious community to research and visit -- ideally something outside of your own faith tradition if you have one. Let me know if you have questions. I am here to help.

Your 800-word essay will include:

- our class definition of religion (Catherine Albanese's definition, which includes the Four C's -- from Module 1)
- its application to the religious community you picked
- your anthropological observations from your visit.

Most religious communities have a web presence from which you can locate the 4 c's of religion. For example, the national bodies of the United Methodist Church, the Southern Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints all have websites. Other communities do too. Use these websites to gain your factual knowledge, and use your visit to gain a more interpersonal/experiential understanding of the community.

**See the Four C's Module for guidance with this project.**

### IV. Research Paper

Research and write one major paper. The approximately 2000-word paper will include: one title page, one thesis and outline page, about seven pages of double-spaced text, endnotes or footnotes, and a bibliography. Your minimum source requirements are 7 academic writings, of which two must be books, and three must be peer-reviewed journal articles. When applicable, primary source material should be included in your source material and used in your paper. Please consult with me on an appropriate primary source document. While you may consult and use your textbook, it does not count as one of the required books. You will use the Chicago Manual of Style citation guidelines for this paper. If you are not familiar with this citation format, please begin learning this style as soon as possible. **See the Research Paper Module for assistance with this project.** Late papers are accepted, but will receive a 2-point reduction for every day late. Papers will be returned electronically by the final exam. **It is the policy of this course that any student work that contains plagiarized or Generative AI material will receive a 0.**

## Course Schedule

Here is a general course outline, organized around your textbook chapters:

Week 1: Intro to Study of Religion

Week 2: Worlds Old and New

Religion and Missions in New Spain and New France

Week 3: Religion in England's First Colonies

Week 4: Colonial Religious Diversity

**Four C's Project Due**

Week 5: African and American Indian Religion

**Research Paper Topic Selection Due**

Week 6: Reviving Colonial Religion

Week 7: Religion and the American Revolution

**Exam 1**

Week 8: Prophets for a New Nation

Awakeners of the Heart

**Research Paper Thesis and Annotated Bibliography Due**

Week 9: Reformers and Visionaries

Restorers of Ancient Ways

Week 10: Sojourners at Home

Warriors for God and Religion

Week 11: Fashioners of Immigrant Faiths

Innovators in a World of New Ideas

**Research Paper Outline Due**

Week 12: Conservers of Tradition

Adventurers of the Spirit

**Exam 2**

Week 13: A New Century

The Age of Militancy

Week 14: In God We Trust

Religion in the New Frontier

Week 15: Religion in an Age of Upheaval

Preachers, Politicians, and Prodigals

**Complete Research Paper Due**

Week 16: Coming to Terms with Pluralism

Religion in the New Millennium

**Final Exam: Due in dropbox, midnight, Wednesday of Finals Week.**

## Grading

### Grading Scale

All grades will be posted in the student grade book in Canvas and will be assigned according to the following scale:

A 90%-100%

B 80%-89%

C	70%-79%
D	60%-69%
F	59% and below

### Calculation of Grades

<b>Discussion Board</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Examinations</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Four C's Project</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Research Paper</b>	<b>25%</b>

### Incomplete Grades

Grades of Incomplete in any course can only be assigned to students who have an emergency arise during the last two weeks of the course. To receive an Incomplete, students must:

- Submit a written request to the instructor prior to the last face-to-face class meeting. For online courses, a written Incomplete request must be received no later than the week before the Final Exam period begins.
- Have completed no less than sixty percent of the course requirements and be passing the course at the time the request for an Incomplete is submitted.

**Important Note:** The Incomplete option provides 30 days from the date grades are due to make up any missing work; if all remaining work is not submitted during this period, the grade will automatically change to an "F."

## General GCSC Course Policies

### Accessibility Statement

Gulf Coast State College supports an inclusive learning environment for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that hinder your full participation, reasonable accommodations can be arranged. Prior to receiving accommodations, you must register with Student Accessibility Resources. Appropriate academic accommodations will be determined based on the documented needs of the student. Please visit [GCSC's Student Accessibility Resource \(SAR\) webpage](#) to learn more. For information regarding the registration process, email [sar@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:sar@gulfcoast.edu) or call 850-747-3243.

### GCSC Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance and participation are significant factors that help to promote success in college. Students are expected to attend all class meetings of all courses for which they are registered.

You are expected to know the instructor's specific attendance policy as stated in the syllabus for each course. In the event of absence, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible to indicate the reason and to inquire whether make-up work is possible. (Make-up work is offered solely at the discretion of your professor.)

If your absences in a class become excessive, as stated in the course syllabus, your professor can withdraw you from a course for excessive absences without your permission.

Instructors will monitor attendance at the beginning of each semester. If you are not in attendance during this period, you may be withdrawn from the course. You will be financially responsible for the course, and a "W or NS" will appear on your transcript. Withdrawal from a course may also have implications for financial aid.

### Withdrawal Policy

Two withdrawals are permitted per credit course. After that, a grade will be assigned. Please be concerned about withdrawals. When admitting students into certain programs, universities may calculate withdrawals as grades. It is your responsibility to verify the effects of enrollment and/or withdrawal upon your financial assistance (financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc.).

There are two kinds of withdrawals---student and administrative.

- **Student Withdrawal (W1)** - Students wishing to withdraw must complete the online Student Withdrawal Form before the scheduled withdrawal deadline as published in the College catalog. Student withdrawals initiated prior to the scheduled withdrawal deadline will be recorded as a grade of "W." The withdrawal deadline for an off-term or condensed term is one week after midterm.
- **Administrative Withdrawal (W2)** – A faculty member may withdraw a student up to the published withdrawal deadline for violation of the class attendance policy, in which case the student will receive a grade of "W." The withdrawal deadline for an off-term or condensed term is one week after midterm.

Students cannot withdraw from developmental studies courses (college-preparatory classes) after the drop/add period without written permission from their instructor and/or their academic advisor.

### Academic Integrity

Honest participation in academic endeavors fosters an environment in which optimal learning can take place and is consistent with the college's mission. Academic misconduct, including cheating or plagiarism, is destructive to the spirit of an educational environment. GCSC professors report every instance of student academic misconduct to the college for inclusion in the student's records.

Most course syllabi include an academic honesty policy and the consequences for violating this policy. Familiarize yourself with course policies regarding authorized or unauthorized use of AI to avoid the pitfalls of academic dishonesty.

The following definitions will apply:

"Cheating" includes but is not limited to the use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; the acquisition without permission of tests or other academic materials belonging to a member of the College's faculty.

"Plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment as well as the purchase of papers or projects. It can also include overuse of an editing program like Grammarly or submitting work written by an Artificial Intelligence (AI) generator like ChatGPT. Make certain to consult your course syllabi for your instructor's guidelines on AI material.

"Self-plagiarism" occurs when a student submits the same or a considerably similar document to fulfill requirements in different classes. For example, if a student submits a term paper in Religion that they originally wrote for an English class, this is self-plagiarism. Once a paper receives a grade in one class, it cannot be submitted again for another class.

"Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)" is technology that uses machine learning to create new content, such as text, images, or code, based on user input. These systems are trained on vast amounts of data, including large language models and image or code generators. Common examples include ChatGPT, GitHub, Copilot, Google Gemini, Perplexity, and the Grammarly AI function.

Sanctions for incidents of academic misconduct, depending on the severity of the incident and/or its repetition, may range from receiving an F grade (or 0) for the test, assignment, or activity, to failure of the course, to suspension or dismissal from the college.

### Classroom Recording

In accordance with federal and state privacy laws, students may record class lectures for their own personal educational use, in connection with a complaint to the college, or as evidence in internal or external legal proceedings. Students may not publish or upload the recordings or any components thereof without the knowledge and written permission of the faculty member.

Failure to obtain permission to publish could lead to the students having to pay damages, attorney fees, and court costs. For more information about what can be recorded, please see the guidelines in the GCSC Student Handbook.

### Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

The use of generative AI tools in academic work requires clear guidelines to maintain academic integrity. Please review the policy selected for this course regarding the use of AI tools such as

ChatGPT, Copilot, Grammarly's AI features, and similar platforms for assignments, research, and other coursework.

See the student handbook for further information. Students with questions about acceptable use should consult their instructor.

### Anti-Discrimination Policy

Gulf Coast State College does not discriminate against any person in its programs, activities, policies, or procedures on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, marital status, religion, age, gender, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, disability, or veteran status.

All questions or inquiries regarding compliance with laws relating to non-discrimination and all complaints regarding sexual misconduct or discrimination may be directed to Amanda Reed, Executive Director of Human Resources/Title II/504/Title IX Coordinator and Employment Equity Officer, Gulf Coast State College, 5230 W. US Highway 98, Panama City, FL 32401; 850-769-1551, ext. 3516. Rules, policies, fees, and courses described in this catalog are subject to change without notice.

## Student Support Resources

Gulf Coast State College is committed to providing you with the resources you need for success as a student and beyond. View all the academic and student support resources provided at GCSC on the [Student Services web page](#).

### Course Technology & Support

To successfully participate in this online course, students must have basic computer and digital information literacy skills and meet the following technology requirements:

- Computer: Up-to-date web browser that supports the Canvas learning management system; please refer to the system requirements for compatibility and information on using the Canvas app on mobile devices.
- Internet Speed: Minimum bandwidth of 8 Mbps upload/download speed to effectively engage in online activities and access multimedia.
- Office 365 software: Available for free download through GCSC Information Technology Services (ITS).
- If you need technical support, contact the ITS Help Desk, available 24/7 at (850) 913-3303.