REL-2164 | Race and Religion
Winter 2022

Professor: Leslie Ribovich, Ph.D. **Email:** lribovich@transy.edu

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

With Black Lives Matter activists stating that the movement is "working to rebuild the Black liberation movement," Muslim immigration and travel bans, and white supremacists rallying around the previous U.S. president, the stakes of understanding race and religion in America have never seemed higher. How do the movements we see today participate in a longer history of practices and ideas, in and beyond the United States? In this course, we test the hypothesis that relationships between religion and race have helped define American history, culture, and politics due to a long history of colonialism. We do this by interrogating definitions, processes, and expressions of race and religion, such as orientalism, missions, liberation theologies, representation, eugenics, and secularism. We will study sources such as a recent scholarly article on the social science of interpreting indigenous religions, a historical text that inspired the American appropriation of Zen Buddhism, and contemporary speculative fiction short stories. Throughout this course, we aim to analyze portraits and formations of religion and race to understand how and why they matter in people's lives today and in the past.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To become careful interpreters of intersections of religion and race through written and verbal analysis of primary, scholarly, and theoretical sources.
- To understand some of the myriad ways race and religion are interconnected through studying processes and expressions of religion and race from a diverse set of historical and contemporary actors.
- To learn the significance of relationships between race and religion for history, culture, and politics, in the United States and the broader colonial world.
- To develop a community of scholars by reading each other's work on the important issues of race and religion.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Free Writes: 10%** About once a week, you will respond to a prompt about the readings in class. Free writes are an opportunity to reflect on the course material and test out ideas. They are graded credit/no credit.

- **Building Blocks: 20% (4 total; 5% each)** For each of the major assignments, there will be building block assignments to help you think through your ideas and

goals for the assignment. See Canvas for individual prompts. The building blocks are due to Canvas on Sun., 1/23, 2/20, 3/6, and 4/10 at 11:59pm.

- **Peer Reviews: 10% (4 total; 2.5% each)** Throughout the term, you will be in small writing groups where you read each other's work. The peer reviews will be both written in response to a set of questions and during in class workshops. See Canvas for individual prompts. The peer reviews are due via Google Docs on Mon., 1/24, 2/21, 3/7, and 4/11 at 11:59pm.

- **Definition Paper 15% (5 double-spaced pages):** The definition paper will ask you to put sources together to make an argument about how the sources understand "race," "religion," and their intersections. See Canvas for detailed prompt. The definition paper is due to Canvas on Sun., 2/6 at 11:59pm. An OPTIONAL draft is due on Sun., 1/30 by email to lribovich@transy.edu.

- **Final Reflection (at least 750 words): 5%** The final reflection will ask you to reflect on the goals of the course and what you've learned. See Canvas for full prompt. The final reflection is due to Canvas on Tues., 4/19 at 11:59pm.

- **Context and Conversation Paper (10 double-spaced pages): 20%** This paper will ask you to analyze the relationship between race and religion in a primary source to make an argument that enters a scholarly conversation about a particular historical, political, social, or cultural context. See Canvas for detailed prompt. The paper is due to Canvas on Sun., 4/3 at 11:59pm. OPTIONAL draft due by email to lribovich@transy.edu on Sun., 3/27.

- **Creative Project + Author's Statement: 10%** The project will ask you to imagine a new arrangement of race and religion in a given context in a medium of your choosing. See Canvas for detailed prompt. The project and statement are due on Sun., 4/17 at 11:59pm to Canvas.

- **Community Building: 10%** Our class is a community that requires the continuing contributions of everyone involved in order to flourish. We each shape our shared learning experience by paying attention and care to the learning process of others, as well as of oneself. In class discussions, this means you can participate well in the course by asking questions, listening, responding, tying together ideas other students have expressed, or bringing us to a particular moment in the text. Respect of everyone in the classroom is essential. Use personal pronouns, and if you do not know, ask. See Canvas for Community Building rubric.

You must complete all of the course requirements. Failure to complete any course requirement may result in failure of the course. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus at any time. Changes will be announced in advance.

CLASS EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

For more information about University policies, please refer to the Transylvania University Student Handbook by clicking here or reaching out to the Academic Associate Dean's Office at academicassocdean@transy.edu or the Student Life Office at studentlife@transy.edu.

Attendance Policy

My expectation is that you attend all classes. If you will be absent, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can work something out. Communication is key. If you will be absent, I recommend getting notes from a classmate. Multiple absences warrant concern and may affect your final grade.

Electronic Devices

Accommodations will be provided on an individual basis for students who present documentation from the Disability Services Office.

Electronic devices may only be used for class purposes, such as accessing readings, in-class working docs, and Canvas.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to maintain the highest standard of academic honesty. Academic dishonesty by a student will not be tolerated. All students are expected to know Transylvania's policy on academic integrity as it is defined online in the college catalog. Ignorance or misunderstanding of the policy will not serve as an excuse for academic dishonesty. If you have questions about the policy you can find it at inside.transy.edu and/or ask me about it.

Citations

For all assignments, cite properly using Chicago Manual of Style or MLA Style.

Grading Scale

93-100% = A	73-76% = C
90-92% = A-	70-72% = C-
87-89% = B+	67-69% = D+
83-86% = B	63-66% D
80-82% = B-	60-62% D-
77-79% = C+	0-59% = F

Grading requirements will follow Transylvania's standard as laid out in the university catalog. The guidelines for evaluating performance in a course are:

A for excellent work
B for good work
C for satisfactory
D for minimally passing work
F for unsatisfactory/failing work

More specific expectations for each assignment will be discussed prior to the due date.

REQUIRED READINGS

- All required readings will be made available on Canvas or through Transy library e-books.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: What are Race and Religion?

Tues., 1/11:

- Read:
  - No reading.
- Write/Do:
  - No prep needed.
- In Class:
  - By Zoom; Introduction to each other and the course.

Thurs., 1/13:

- Read:
  - Read the syllabus.
  - J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (1998), 269-282. [C]
  - Barbara C. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History” (1982), 21 pages. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on how Smith defines “religion,” how Fields defines “race,” and what intersections there might be between the two definitions.
  - Note any questions you have about the syllabus to raise in class.
- In Class:
  - Discuss community building, Smith’s and Fields’s definitions of religion and race.

WEEK 2: Colonial Encounters

Tues., 1/18:

- Read:
  - Jessica Delgado and Kelsey Moss, “Religion and Race in the Early Modern Iberian Atlantic” (2018), 23 pages. [C]
  - Angelina Grimké, “Appeal to the Christian Women of the South” (1836), 34 pages. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on each source’s understanding of religion, race, and colonialism–implicit or explicit.
- In Class:
  - Introduce colonialism; introduce the first building block.

Thurs., 1/20:

- Read:
  - J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (2008), 3-36. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on what you take Carter's goals to be, words you don't understand, and what he's up to in his conversation of Christianity and Judaism.
- In Class:
  - Unpack Carter's argument; discuss intersecting contexts for his argument.

>> Definition Paper Building Block due to Canvas on Sun., 1/23 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 3: Decolonization

>> Peer Review 1 due to Canvas on Mon., 1/24 at 11:59pm.

Tues., 1/25:

- Read:
  - Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), 1-62. [C]
  - Your peer's building block.
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on key terms Fanon uses. Take a look at the definition of key terms here for further guidance.
  - Do peer review by Monday night!
- In Class
  - Peer Review Workshop; introduce decolonization.

Thurs., 1/27:

- Read:
  - J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (2008), 39-78. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on the conversations Carter is engaged in.
- In Class:
  - Discuss Carter's motive, re: Foucault and West.

>> OPTIONAL DRAFT of Definition Paper due on Sun., 1/30 at 11:59pm by email to lribovich@transy.edu.

WEEK 4: Decolonization, cont.

Tues., 2/1:

- Read:
    - Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (2003), 257-297. [C]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on what you take Wynter to mean by “unsettling” and what sources she uses to make her points.
- In Class:
    - Wynter’s sources; paper check in.

Thurs., 2/3:

- Read:
    - Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (2003), 297-337. [C]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate for how Wynter discusses the relationship between the human and religion.
- In Class:
    - Mapping activity.

>>Definition Paper due to Canvas on Sun., 2/6 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 5: Orientalism

Tues., 2/8:

- Read:
    - Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (2010), 1-62. [C]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate for Iwamura’s method–what kinds of sources is she using and why? How does this help her make her points?
- In Class:
    - From colonialism to orientalism.

Thurs., 2/10:

- Read:
    - D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (1927), 11-36. [C]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on how Suzuki illuminates/extends/challenges an element of Iwamura’s argument.
- In Class:
    - Discuss Zen Buddhism and orientalism.

WEEK 6: Secularisms

Tues., 2/15:

- Read:
  - Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934), 49-68. [C]
  - Vincent Lloyd, “Introduction: Managing Race, Managing Religion,” to *Secularism and Race in America* (2016), 1-20.
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on Lloyd’s contemporary definition of secularism; annotate/take notes on Hurston’s anthropological understanding of Black religion from the 1930s.
- In Class:
  - Introduce secularism; introduce upcoming building block.

Thurs., 2/17:

- Read:
  - “Religion, Secularism, and Black Lives Matter Forum,” *The Immanent Frame* (2016). [C]
  - Rebecca Wilcox, “Distorted Mirrors: Toward a Clear Gaze on Black Suffering,” *The Immanent Frame* (2021). [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on the relationship between state violence, Black death, Black grief, and Black joy.
- In Class:
  - Discuss religion and social movements for racial justice; check in on building block.

>> Context and Conversation Paper Building Block 1 due to Canvas on Sun., 2/20 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 7: Being Woke

>> Peer Review 2 due to Canvas on Mon., 2/21 at 11:59pm.

Tues., 2/22:

- Read:
  - Aja Romano, “A History of Wokeness” (2021). [C]
  - Your peer’s building block.
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on the key moments in the history of wokeness.
  - Do peer review by Monday night!
- In Class:
  - Peer Review Workshop; discuss the history and religious relevance of “wokeness.”

Thurs., 2/24:

- Read:
  - Adeana McNicholl, “Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2018), 883-911. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on which scholars McNicholl is in conversation with–what moves does she make in response to the scholars she cites?
- In Class:
  - Introduce scholarly conversations.

WEEK 8: (Social) Sciences

Tues., 3/1:

- Read:
  - Sermons from American Eugenics Society Sermon Contest (1920s), read at least two documents from http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/topics_fs.pl?theme=32&search=&matches=.
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on how these primary sources from the 1920s imagine religion as central to the project of eugenics. How does a religious framework shape their ideas about racial hierarchies?
- In Class:
  - Discuss intersections of eugenics and religion; introduce next building block.

Thurs., 3/3:

- Read:
  - Sarah Dees, “An Equation of Language and Spirit: Comparative Philology and the Early Study of American Indian Religions” (2015), 195-219. [C]

  OR
  - Sarah Imhoff and Hillary Kaell, “Lineage Matters: DNA, Race, and Gene Talk in Judaism and Messianic Judaism” (2017), 95-127. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on how science, religion, and race intersect in the article you read.
- In Class:
  - Discuss intersections of science, religion, and race; check in about building block.

>> Context and Conversation Paper Building Block 2 due to Canvas on Sun., 3/6 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 9: White Supremacy

>> Peer Review 3 due to Canvas on Mon., 3/7 at 11:59pm.

Tues., 3/8:

- Read:
  - Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (2011), 70-96. [C]
  - Your peer's building block.
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on Baker's argument about how Christianity shaped the Klan's views.
  - Do peer review by Monday night!
- In Class:
  - Peer Review Workshop; introduce white supremacy.

Thurs., 3/10:

- Read:
  - Eli Saslow, "The White Flight of Derek Black" *Washington Post* (2016). [C]
  - Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism" (2004). [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on the definitions of whiteness and white supremacy at play in Saslow and Ahmed.
- In Class:
  - Discuss Black's views over time and definitions of whiteness and white supremacy.

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK

Mon., 3/14-3/18: SPRING BREAK | NO CLASS

WEEK 11: Religio-Racial Identities

Tues., 3/22:

- Read:
  - Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (2016), 1-60. [available on Transy's library website by e-book]

- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on why Weisenfeld uses the term "religio-racial" to describe the groups she studied, and why the narratives she discusses are "religio-racial."
- In Class:
    - Paper check-in; introduce "religio-racial" and the groups Weisenfeld studies.

Thurs., 3/24:

- Read:
    - Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (2016), 61-127. [available on Transy's library website by e-book]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on the various mechanisms of self-fashioning Weisenfeld describes.
- In Class:
    - Discuss examples from Weisenfeld.

>> OPTIONAL DRAFT of Context and Conversation Paper due to Canvas on Sun., 3/27 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 12: Religio-Racial Identities, cont.

Tues., 3/29:

- Read:
    - Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (2016), 128-210. [available on Transy's library website by e-book]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on how ideas about community build on the notions of self-fashioning Weisenfeld describes in earlier chapters.
- In Class:
    - Check in about papers.

>>Attend Moosnick Lecture at 7pm

Thurs., 3/31:

- Read:
    - Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (2016), 210-284. [available on Transy's library website by e-book]
- Write/Do:

- Annotate/take notes on what Weisenfeld means by the “boundaries” of Black religion.
- In Class:
  - Discuss Moosnick lecture; conclude religio-racial identities.

>> Context and Conversation Paper due to Canvas on Sun., 4/3 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 13: Conflicts and Crisis

Tues., 4/5:

- Read:
  - Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (2013), 253-291. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on what the “global crisis of authority” Grewal mentions is.
- In Class:
  - Introduce Create Project and building block; discuss conflict.

Thurs., 4/7:

- Read:
  - Alisa Solomon, “*Fiddler* While Brooklyn Burns,” in *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of* Fiddler on the Roof (2013), 258-290. [C]
- Write/Do:
  - Annotate/take notes on what the performance of *Fiddler* said about relations between Black and Jewish New Yorkers in a time of crisis.
- In Class:
  - Discuss Ocean Hill-Brownsville; check-in about creative project.

>> Creative Project Building Block due to Canvas on Sun., 4/10 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 14: Reconfiguring

>> Peer Review 4 due to Canvas on Mon., 4/11 at 11:59pm.

Tues., 4/12:

- Read:
  - James Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in Mind,” 38 pages. [C]
  - You peer’s building block
- Write/Do:

    - Annotate/take notes on how Baldwin imagines changes to current formations of race and religion.
    - Do peer review by Monday night!
- In Class:
    - Peer Review Workshop; discuss reconfiguring.

Thurs., 4/14:

- Read:
    - Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha *Octavia's Brood* (2015), 3-14; 255-257. [C]
- Write/Do:
    - Annotate/take notes on how the authors practice "visionary fiction" and what "decolonizing the imagination" means.
- In Class:
    - Conclusions.

>> Creative Project due to Canvas on Sun., 4/17 at 11:59pm.

WEEK 15: Finals Week

>> Final Reflection due to Canvas on Tues., 4/19 at 11:59pm.

STUDENT RESOURCE INFORMATION

Equal Opportunity, Harassment, and Non-Discrimination

Transylvania University is committed to providing a workplace and educational environment, as well as other benefits, programs, and activities, that are free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. To ensure compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, and to affirm its commitment to promoting the goals of fairness and equity in all aspects of the educational program or activity, Transylvania University has developed internal policies and procedures that provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process for those involved in an allegation of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected class status, and for allegations of retaliation. For more information about the university's policy and grievance processes click here.

Students who have questions about accommodations, academic or otherwise, under section 504 of Americans with Disabilities Act should contact disabilityservices@transy.edu and/or click here.

For information about Title IX policies, procedures, and reporting click here. For information about the university's Pregnant and Parenting policy under Title IX, click here.

Reports of misconduct can be made to the Title IX Coordinator, Amber Morgan at titleix@transy.edu

Reports can also be made to the following individuals who have been designated as Mandated Reporters by the University: all cabinet members (with the exception of the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion), department supervisors, faculty program chairs, coaches [academic and athletic], Housing and Residence Life staff [including Area Coordinators and Resident Advisors], and all staff who work for the Department of Public Safety. These individuals are employee of Transylvania University who are obligated by policy to share knowledge, notice, and/or reports of harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation with the Title IX Coordinator.

Contact Information:
Amber D. Morgan – ADA/Title IX Coordinator
Campus Center - 238
admorgan@transy.edu
(859)233-8502

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) sets forth requirements regarding the privacy of student records. FERPA governs both the access to and release of those records, known as education records, and the information they contain. Under FERPA, faculty have a legal responsibility to protect the confidentiality of student records. Items that can never be identified as public information are a student's social security number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPA, or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class. For additional information, please see Transylvania University's FERPA policy or contact the Office of the Registrar (registrar@transy.edu or 859-233-8116).

Online Conduct

Transylvania University affirms the usage of various instructional technologies within our physical and remote learning environments. Students and faculty agree to use these technologies in order to enhance learning and will refrain from disruptive, inappropriate, or aggressive digital behavior, including, but not limited to, unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class materials, cyberbullying or online harassment both within and beyond classroom learning platforms (i.e. Learning Management Software, Social Media, Blogs, etc.), or any other technological usage that could impair a fellow student's learning or the instructor's ability to teach.

Statement of Community

Transylvania University is dedicated to creating and maintaining an environment that encourages civil academic discourse and scholarly growth. As stated in our mission, our

campus community values independent thinking, open-mindedness, and creative expression. Therefore, we aim to foster a climate of respect which is vital to ensuring that all members are treated with courtesy, dignity, and compassion. Creating a community built on these ideals is a responsibility shared by all campus members. We value a willingness to listen to those whose opinions may be different than our own and showing respect to those with differing viewpoints. Our community benefits when its members engage in discussions and activities that acknowledge the value, diverse perspectives, and unique contributions each person brings to our campus. In our conversations and through our actions, we endeavor to treat our community members with the dignity and respect to which all Pioneers are entitled.

Writing Center

The **Transylvania University Writing Center** (TUWC) is a space for our campus community to discuss writing. Our trained peer consultants help students and faculty members dream, draft, and develop texts for a variety of audiences and purposes. Our patrons range from first-years honing their skills as college writers to seniors preparing themselves for the job market or graduate research.

Students do not need to have a written product in order to have a session. In fact, some of our best and most productive sessions are process-oriented and focus on brainstorming, or understanding a writing assignment. Staffers are also well-trained in helping develop presentations and various digital texts such as podcasts.

To learn more about TUWC: https://www.transywritingcenter.com/ To learn what one can expect out of a TUWC session: https://www.transywritingcenter.com/cans-cant-s-and-expectations To learn how to set up a WC Online account (required to schedule sessions): https://www.transywritingcenter.com/scheduling If there are questions about anything TUWC-related, please feel free to email Dr. Scott Whiddon (swhiddon@transy.edu).

Religion Program Inclusive Learning Statement

The Religion Program at Transylvania University is committed to the creation and maintenance of “inclusive learning” spaces. Classrooms and other places of learning are places where you will be treated with respect and dignity and where all individuals are provided equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed.

In our courses all students are welcome regardless of race/ethnicity, gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disabilities, religion, regional background, Veteran status, citizenship status, nationality and other diverse identities that we each bring to class. Indeed, we believe that the more voices that are included and empowered in our classrooms, enhances the learning experience for everyone.

Success in our classroom and beyond is enhanced by the innovation and creativity of thought that inclusive classrooms facilitate. The success of an inclusive classroom relies

on the participation, support, and understanding of everyone. We encourage all of you to speak up and share your views, but also understand that you are doing so in a learning environment in which we all are expected to engage respectfully and with regard to the dignity of all others. The instructors in your courses are committed to the responsibility of creating and maintaining these inclusive spaces through dialogue and constructive exchange of ideas.

Adopted and Adapted from the KU Center For Teaching Excellence

Religion Program Writing Statement

Studying religion means studying writing. The following principles guide the Transylvania University Religion Program's approach to writing:

- We value writing as a community, which we build when we enter the classroom. As a community, we value being open to revision, feedback, and conversation.
- Revision goes beyond the sentence level to clarifying our ideas and how we structure them. Revision sometimes feels like "rewriting," but no writing is ever wasted. The old adage "writing is rewriting" rings true.
- Though writing is often personal, feedback on a piece of writing is a commitment to its ideas and to the author. It is not a criticism of the author as a person but encouragement for more clearly discovering and articulating the author's voice, which has value.
- No writing is ever wasted because writing is a process. It involves reading, taking notes, having conversations, mapping ideas, gathering evidence, reading aloud, drafting, getting feedback, incorporating the feedback with attention to local and large-scale claims, and more.
- Writing is a practice; cultivating a routine around writing—whatever that looks like for us—can help it from becoming an intimidating experience.
- Racism, gender-bias, and other forms of injustice exist, including in the English language and in approaches to teaching and practicing writing. By focusing on features of academic writing that allow us to develop our own voices, we aim to decolonize the notion that there is a "correct" way to write.
- Writing is a way to communicate, to express oneself, to learn. Writing is a space for articulating our own ideas and engaging with the ideas of others.
- Everyone has something to communicate and learn, so anyone can write effective, transformative work.
- Writing can create the possibility for change.

Effective essays communicate the author's ideas clearly. The following are not rules; they are suggested tools for successfully communicating the author's ideas to the reader. Although each professor will develop rubrics for individual classes and assignments, in general, we value the following features of academic writing:

Motive: the intellectual context that makes the thesis interesting. The question, tension, puzzle, contradiction, gap, or something else in the evidence that *motivates* the thesis, usually early on in the essay.

Thesis: the paper's central claim, an original argument about the evidence. The thesis is arguable, meaning that someone could argue against it. It extends, critiques, or clarifies other arguments. The thesis arises from a reading of sources. As a result, the more specific the thesis, the better. This can feel counterintuitive—often the big claim about "society" can feel more effective. However, explicating how a particular dynamic is at play in a specific source or sources leads to a much more effective claim. The thesis usually appears early in the essay.

Evidence: the source material the paper draws on to make its claims. This may be a quotation from a text, the music in a television episode, or numbers from a dataset. We are open to diverse kinds of evidence. Authors choose evidence carefully. The evidence genuinely leads to the author's point (no cherry-picking), and goes beyond summary.

Analysis: what the paper does with the evidence to reach the thesis. Analysis may be the act of assembling pieces of evidence to reach a new conclusion, or unraveling the meaning of a key term. Analysis involves explanation and interpretation in the author's own voice. There is usually more analysis than evidence in any given paragraph.

Structure: the way the paper develops its reasoning. Papers develop the motive and thesis, step by step. Paragraphs are the logical unfolding of the thesis. Depending on what the thesis is, the structure may vary. The structure serves the reader's understanding of the author's ideas. Authors walk the reader through the thesis step by step, with strong topic sentences based in the author's original claims, not a summary of what a source says or does.

An author can effectively use these features of academic writing across diverse genres and prompts. The features of writing are here to help you communicate your ideas, not limit you. Creativity is encouraged! We want to know what you have to say! We have developed these features of academic writing from Gordon Harvey's "Elements of the Academic Essay" and the Princeton Writing Programs "A Writing Lexicon," which we encourage you to read as you write an essay in a Religion course. These sources include more important features of academic writing, which we also value.