

**Course Syllabus - UF Honors - Uncommon Read**  
**Remixing Religion: The Unusual Entwinement of the Sacred and the Profane**  
**IDH 2930 - 25983, section 3130 - Remixing Religion - Spring 2025**

**Instructor:** Todd Best  
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Office Hours: by appointment

**Meeting time:** Tuesday, Period 9 (4:05-4:55), LIT 119

**Required Text:** Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*.  
PublicAffairs.

**Course Description:**

While many aspects of societal life have been moving away from traditional forms of religion, it seems that humans just can't refrain from seeking meaning-making experiences. Through a close read of Tara Isabella Burton's book *Strange Rites: New Religions in a Godless World* and supplemental materials, this 1-credit seminar style class will seek to gain clarity on what we actually mean by the concept of religion, and to understand the various remixed forms of meaning-making that have emerged. Additionally, we will look at how adherents in some traditional religious forms are re-examining and reimagining their religious experience. Is religion making a comeback in a world that has mostly gone secular? Or are we remaking religion in new forms of spirituality? Is there room for the sacred in the midst of the profane? Turns out with the fading of traditional religion, space has been made for what might best be called the "remixing of religion".

**Course Objectives:**

1. Read *Strange Rites* (and related material) carefully and reflectively
2. Understand and articulate authors' ideas, placing in context of our own experience
3. Engage the text/content \*critically and respond \*personally
4. Discuss the text in a thoughtful way that includes both careful reading and careful listening.

*\*Reading critically* does not mean to offer merely negative response. It means to read in an actively thoughtful way, mentally distancing yourself enough to fairly and reflectively analyze the content, evaluating the ideas in ways that allow you to offer your own nuanced response and not merely agree or disagree. This critical stance should be framed by a generous posture on your part. For further guidance on critical reading, [see this article](#). Also be sure to read "Reading Charitably" in Canvas.

\**Personally* means two things: 1) as you read you are not merely seeking to find what you like and dislike about the book; more than that, you are entering into a conversation with the book/author, as you would any seriously engaged conversation, allowing yourself to form ideas in response. 2) As you interact with the reading, consider how the content relates to your own lived experiences and thoughts.

### **Class Structure and Flow:**

The class' structure will be quite simple: reading and in-depth conversation. Each week, students will come to class having read and entered a brief reflection of the content for the week. During class, we will discuss the reading. There will be no lecturing by the instructor, though sometimes a side bar at the white board will be used to enhance the conversation. Periodically, there will be additional assignments in the form of short written assignments or essays.

### Reading and Conversation

Each week we will read one or more chapters plus a supplemental article, video, podcast or poem. Students will be responsible to read and actively discuss the material each week, as well as write a reflection of personal engagement. *Depending on class size, students may have rotating responsibility to lead part of the discussion.* In-class discussions will sometimes be led by the instructor, sometimes by class members, sometimes by the collective class. Each class member should come to class ready to contribute every week, and not merely to listen.

\*Each week, students should come with 1-2 discussion questions that you would want to ask if you were leading a discussion on the assigned reading. As much as possible, questions should reference specific passages in the text. Questions should be included in the reflections (see below).

### *A Word About Academic and Human Discourse: Going Beyond Civility*

*This is a humanities class that raises existential questions related to the human experience. It probes issues that are sometimes thorny, don't always have clear answers and includes ones in which people can have strong differences of opinion. One way to think of the class is to see it as a big conversation about big issues. Optimal participation comes from the ability to be fully engaged: observant, reflective, and imaginative as we enter into conversation. In order for us to have a successful class, we need to be able to talk to and with each other well. That involves a conversation in which members are humble, respectful, thoughtfully engaged, and still free to critique (offer friendly push-back). We want to see the articulation and discussion of individual perspectives, while leaving room for disagreement and friendly critique. All of us should respectfully listen to the author's views as well as each other's, without becoming dismissive or defensive, a common default when disagreement is detected; and after listening, we need to be able to converse about what we hear. As these ideals are upheld we hope to create an environment where we all sense that, fundamentally, we are in this together in spite of our*

differences. (Please see article in Canvas: "Reading Charitably".)

*All in all, it will be useful to grant ourselves a freedom to think in large terms about life - at the deepest levels of personal conviction. This is not a facts and information class, although we certainly hope to be learning something; this is a class in which we will think about the topics through a lens: pondering and learning about what it means to be human by processing, thinking well about, and interacting over the big ideas that come to us through our reading and discussion.*

### Weekly Reflections

Students will write weekly brief reflections (roughly 100 words) in response to the reading assignments. Each weekly reflection should include 1-2 thoughtful questions that could lead to discussion in class. Reflection assignment details will be posted in Canvas.

\*\*Reflections will be submitted weekly **AT MIDNIGHT THE DAY BEFORE CLASS**, with instructor response periodically. Details will be provided in class. See assignment sheet in Canvas - Assignments.

### Attendance and Participation

Since this is a discussion-based class that meets only once a week, attendance is vital and assumed/mandatory. Except for emergencies, absences must be cleared with the instructor prior to class. Students will be permitted **one** absence over the course of the semester. A second absence will lower the course grade by ½ a letter grade, and a third or fourth absence by an additional full letter grade each. Students cannot receive credit for the class if there are more than four absences.

In addition to attendance, each student is expected to contribute to classroom discussions weekly. Participation will be measured by verbal contribution in class. Regarding online Discussion, the instructor will monitor and note both the frequency of comments and the quality of engagement.

### Film/Creative/Experiential Reviews (3)

There will be four film/art review essays - 250-500 words. Details will be given in class.

### Final Reflection Essay/Project

The final assignment will be a culmination of each student's engagement in the class. While it will take some effort, it should be enjoyable to do. 1000-1250 words. Details given in class.

### Film Nights

Film and other art forms are excellent avenues for gaining insight into the kinds of issues and questions we will encounter in this class. Discussing film with others can nurture deeper understanding as well as forge connections with our fellow viewers. In this spirit, we will seek to watch one film together in which we will view a film and have a short follow-up discussion. If you

cannot make a film, it will be your responsibility to view the selected film on your own.

**Assignments and Grades:**

Attendance and Participation 15%

Weekly Reflections 25%

Film/Creative/Experiential Review 30% (3)

Final Essay/Project 30%

\*Note: your own writing and how well you can communicate your own ideas is the primary way you will be evaluated. Writing and speaking will be the culmination of our reading and conversation.

All assignments will be submitted through Canvas/e-learning as directed. Students will receive ½ credit for all late assignments up to one week from the due date. Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted without prior permission by instructor. Grading for assignments will be based on 1) the accuracy of your understanding of the material; 2) the organization and clarity of your writing; 3) the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, 4) not least, your focus on responding to questions as asked.

**Grading Scale:**

93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C); 70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 60-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); Below 59 (E)

Honors Grading Policy: A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Milestone / Completion credit.

UF Grading Policies: [link to the university grades and grading policies](#)

**Classroom Decorum:**

In a sense, the classroom culture we will work to cultivate is a form of conversation that will probably take some effort to settle into. We will need to work to overcome technological distraction, free our minds to be more imaginative in our thinking, and to intentionally build mental and verbal responses to the ideas of others. Therefore, your full attention is expected while in class. Please turn off and store out of sight all phones, laptops, tablets, and electronic devices prior to class. No electronic devices should be turned on in class, unless you are using a device for navigating course material but please minimize your activity only to what is necessary.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to act in accordance with the University of Florida policy on academic integrity. Cheating, lying, misrepresentation, or plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and inexcusable behavior. For more information, visit:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

### **Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

### **Honors Resources**

Honors Program, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email [advisor@honors.ufl.edu](mailto:advisor@honors.ufl.edu)

Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings:

<https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>

### **Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/). [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)

### **A brief note about reading in community:**

#### *Late Request*

With love's confidence I'm asking,  
if you should offer this book  
to another, ask of him  
as now I ask of you  
to read slowly,  
and thoroughly, tasting  
each word's trouble.  
Without doubt, certain passages  
should never stand alone,

but will require assistance  
 offered by others to further  
 endow their meaning. I fear  
 for the reader who dabbles,  
 who gleans, who hurries to take  
 and flee, and who by doing so acquires  
 nothing but a novel form  
 of his current poverty and error.

—Anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing

**weekly schedule for reading/assignment details  
 (Check weekly for changes/updates)**

Date	Reading/Content	Written Assignment
January 14	Cover syllabus, intro. class	
January 21	Week 1: Religion, Religions, Religious Burton, Intro: "Notes from a So-Called Secular Age" +J. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" + tba??	reflection 1
January 28	Week 2: Burton Ch. 1: +tba	reflection 2 <b>Announce: Review Essay</b>
February 4	Week 3: Burton Ch. 2 +tba	reflection 3
February 11	Week 4: Burton Ch. 3 +tba	reflection 4 <b>Review Essay 1 due</b>
February 18	Week 5: Burton Ch. 4 +tba	reflection 5
February 25	Week 6:	reflection 6

	Burton Ch. 5 +tba	
March 4	Week 7: Burton Ch. 6 +tba	reflection 7
March 11	Week 8: Burton Ch. 7 +tba	reflection 8 <b>Review Essay 2 due</b>
March 18	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
March 25	Week 9: Burton Ch. 8 +tba	reflection 9
April 1	Week 10: Burton Ch. 9 +tba	reflection 10
April 8	Week 11: Burton Conclusion: "Clash of the Titans" +tba	reflection 11 <b>Review Essay 3 due</b>
April 15	Week 12: Poss: Traditional religion looking differently Christianity Deconstructed?	reflection 12
April 22	Week 13: LAST CLASS SESSION Poss: Entering the fray: is everything potentially meaningful?	
April 27 (approximately)		<b>Final Assignment Due</b>