



Midterm & Final Exam

RGST 3 Essay Assignments

Overview

A portion of your Midterm Exam and Final Exam will consist of take home essays. The Midterm Exam essay will function as a *conceptual* rough draft for your Final Exam essay which will represent the culmination of your reflection upon overarching themes of this course. In effect, the Final Exam essay represents a final paper for the course and this structure of “staging and scaffolding” is meant to help you develop your ideas over a longer period of time and hopefully craft a more informed and compelling argument. Please note, there are slightly different requirements for each of these two essay writing phases.

Final Exam Essay (Due Sunday, September 17th, 11:59PM)

This is the final product you are going to produce. Create your own working definition of “religion” based on examples drawn from the Asian religious traditions discussed in our course. Specifically, I want you to include at least two “threshold concepts” in your definition or as elements of your overarching argument. In other words, you will have to analyze and discuss at least two threshold concepts in your final paper, perhaps more depending on your definition of “religion” or depth of analysis. Your argument must be supported by specific (and relevant) examples from the Asian religious traditions we’ve examined. At a minimum, each threshold concept should be illustrated by two different Asian traditions.

Citations, in the form of quotations, paraphrasing, or summarizing, from our class readings, lectures/slides, and possibly individual research, will be expected as evidence when you are discussing the different traditions. You will need to use a specific citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago), but the choice is ultimately up to you. There is no minimum number of bibliographic references.

This essay will comprise 50% of your Final Exam grade. Use 12-point font in Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around. The final paper needs to be approximately 1500 words, or roughly 6 pages. Short papers will be deducted points. Just type your name, date, and class information at the top of the page, no title pages are necessary.

Midterm Exam Essay (Due Monday, August 28th)

In preparation for your Final Exam essay you will draft an argument along similar lines. Using one of the scholarly definitions of religion we looked at during our first class or that was crafted by one of the class groups (consult our class slides and our Gauchospace), I want you to select at least one “threshold concept” and argue how your understanding of that concept either reinforces or challenges the definition of religion you selected. Your argument must be supported by specific (and relevant) examples from the Asian religious traditions we’ve examined. At a minimum, the threshold concept should be illustrated by examples from two different traditions.

Citations, in the form of quotations, paraphrasing, or summarizing, from our class readings, lectures/slides, and possibly individual research, will be expected as evidence when you are discussing the different traditions. You will need to use a specific citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago), but the choice is ultimately up to you. There is no minimum number of bibliographic references.

This essay will comprise 25% of your Midterm Exam grade. Use 12-point font in Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around. The final paper needs to be approximately 750 words, or roughly 3 pages. Short papers will be deducted points. Just type your name, date, and class information at the top of the page, no title pages are necessary. (more on reverse...)

Please bring *two printed copied* of your Midterm essay to class during the Midterm Exam. After the in-class midterm exam we will convene to have a short reader review period where you will read and comment on your peer's paper. The second printed copy will be handed in to me for further comments.

Development Process

This summer course is short, but intense. You will have to start thinking about your final paper very early! The work in this class is designed to help you achieve this goal. The developments of your ideas will occur over three distinct but inter-related “staged” phases. First, your daily reflections on Gauchospace will prepare you to gain a basic understanding of each threshold concept and how it is exemplified in a specific religious tradition. This will prepare you to think about how a religion may be constructed and defined using comparative categories. Ideas will also be generated through reading posts from your peers and through classroom discussion. The second stage is represented by the midterm essay assignment where you will draft an early version of your argument using *one* definition of religion and *one* threshold concept. You will receive feedback on your writing from your peers and from me. This essay will comprise part of your Midterm Exam and will also function as a conceptual draft for your final product. The last stage is the Final Exam essay, where you will craft a stronger and more polished argument using two threshold concepts to support your definition of religion.

Research

While it is not required, it is likely you will have to do your own independent research to build the strongest argument. There are three immediate areas of potential further inquiry. The first involves the definition of religion you select and later create. For example, you may find it valuable to track down the original book in which the definition appeared to gain a better contextual understanding of what the author meant, or you may want to explore specific dimensions of the definition in more detail. The second involves deepening your understanding of individual threshold concepts. The readings I provide on Guachospace for each concept should be sufficient, but if you seek more information you can consult the bibliographic entries at the end of each reading or consult with me. The final area involves exploring individual traditions and coming up with the necessary examples to support your argument. This is likely where you may have to do the most research since our assigned reading may not cover the terrain your comparisons need. I strongly suggest you start with the “Research Guides” tab of the UCSB library (<http://bit.ly/2uaeX6H>) and scroll down to the Religious Studies section. (These Guides are helpful for any research you would need to do at UCSB.)

Helpful Hints

- ★ Your job is not to craft the perfect definition of “religion” (as if that’s even possible!). Your job is to use that definition as a starting point for your argument. Spend most of your time deciding on important threshold concepts and developing the individual examples of religious traditions to show how your definition is suitable (and to show your mastery of the material).
- ★ Modern definitions of religion often reflect Western religious biases, you can reflect on whether a definition of religion solely based on Eastern religions would look any different.
- ★ While there is no “right” answer to this assignment, there are certainly better and worse arguments. A better argument will be rooted in specific examples (evidence) that work in coordination with one another to form a logical conclusion (thesis). Building a strong argument requires a good selection of evidence.
- ★ While this is formally an argumentative paper, your evidence is based on your ability to find points of comparison between diverse religious traditions. Thus, generalizations will be necessary.
- ★ If you are in the library doing research and cannot find a resource, ask for help at the help desk. They are unimaginably helpful and will certainly assist you in your research!
- ★ If you are looking for research recommendations, or are feeling lost, talk to me, I’m here to advise you and push your analysis to a deeper level!
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