

TEACHING A JUNIOR TUTORIAL IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

A Guide for Tutorial Leaders

2021-22

I. OVERVIEW

Harvard College Tutorials

Originally based on the British model of one-on-one instruction, tutorials in the College have evolved into various kinds of instructional models. Tutorials' structure and purpose vary depending on the field, and the stage of a student's program of study. The sophomore tutorial is ordinarily designed to introduce students to a field's foundational texts and methods of inquiry. The junior tutorial focuses on student interests, with structures ranging from individual reading and writing instruction, to small-group seminars on individualized topics. The senior year tutorial is the course devoted to the research and writing of a senior thesis.

Tutorial Sequence in the Comparative Study of Religion

Tutorials in the Comparative Study of Religion naturally reflect this College-wide sequence. The **sophomore** tutorial (Religion 97, ordinarily taken in the spring term of the second year) is a seminar style course that introduces students to foundational texts, theories and approaches to scholarship in religion. Led by advanced doctoral students in the field, the **junior** tutorial (Religion 98) invites students to focus their research on a topic of special interest to them. Though the sophomore and junior tutorials are required of all concentrators, the **senior** tutorial (Religion 99) is required only of students who choose to write a Senior Honors Thesis, which is optional in the Comparative Study of Religion.

II. JUNIOR TUTORIALS IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

Junior tutorials are designed to help students develop and practice skills of scholarship, and to research a topic of special interest in the study of religion. To this end, the course should be designed to cultivate students' skills in three areas:

1. **Reading.** Tutorials should develop and refine students' ability to understand, to analyze and to critique the arguments, assumptions and implications of primary and secondary texts within the field (and subfields) of religious studies. It may be productive at the very beginning of the term to discuss efficient best practices of annotating texts as they complete their reading each week (how to take helpful notes, what kind of notations to make in the margins, how to manage or avoid too much "highlighting," etc.)
2. **Discussion.** The practice of articulating the argument of a text, of posing analytic questions back to that text, and of engaging in civil discussion are fundamental goals of the tutorial experience.
3. **Writing.** Writing assignments should require students to compose papers of varying lengths and types, and should include structured drafts and revising in response to a tutor's feedback

on style, content, and argument. I will hand out copies of our writing guide to you in the fall, but in the meantime its content is available on the Study of Religion website under Undergraduate/Resources for Undergraduates/Guides and Handbooks.

4. **The Junior Paper.** The tutorial culminates in a research paper of 20-25 pages which provides an opportunity to engage in an extended research project leading to a substantial piece of scholarship. The paper should address a significant question or problem in the study of religion. It must engage both primary and secondary sources and be explicit regarding the methodology utilized. The final product should be the polished result of multiple drafts and rewriting. Students are encouraged to use this project as a starting point for the senior thesis.

III. DRAFTING THE SYLLABUS

For many tutorial leaders, this is the first opportunity of to design a full course syllabus. I am available to answer questions and to work with you on any aspect of your syllabus over the summer, and during the course of the year. Please submit a full draft of your syllabus by **Monday, August 16, 2021** if you are teaching a Fall Term tutorial, and if you are teaching in the spring, please send your syllabus draft by **Monday, January 10, 2022**. We'll then schedule time to discuss the draft before the first tutorial meeting.

General Framework

Think through the following questions as you work on the elements of the syllabus and contact me if you have any questions or would like to meet to talk things through. Also, the Derek Bok Center workshops and training sessions provide excellent support for tutors interested in teaching strategies. I highly recommend that you explore their programs (see their web site for more information: <https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/>)

- How will the first two weeks set up the course as a whole?
- What thematic threads will wind through the entire course? What key question(s) does the course address?
- How do you expect students to prepare for tutorial meetings? What kind of strategies can you offer students, so they get the most out of their reading assignments? Should they be expected to read the text more than once? Be explicit about expectations, including how much time you expect them to spend on reading. (Weekly writing assignments can be helpful tools and we can discuss the many options for this.)
- How will the writing assignments advance the goals of the course? How will they be sequenced to help the student work toward the junior paper? You'll want to have several graded shorter assignments (close reading assignments or other analytic exercises) over the course of the term; some of these should be designed to build toward the longer final paper.

The following elements **must** be included in your syllabus:

1. Reading Assignments

Reading assignments should be chosen with two things in mind: the nature of the materials themselves (historical, narrative, theoretical, philosophical, etc.), and the time required to think and write about them. In general, we recommend that tutors assign no more than 200 pages per week,

unless the material is quite easy to read. In the case of dense philosophical or theoretical writing, assigning less is preferable. We also recommend no more than three sources per week, as it is usually difficult to have a thorough discussion of more than that. In the case of philosophical and theological tutorials, one or two texts per week is recommended.

Tutors may order books through the COOP and may place books on reserve in Lamont and/or the Andover Harvard Library or in the Study of Religion offices. Tutors may also make photocopies (on the department copier) of relevant articles or book sections and leave these copies on the file cabinet in the Study of Religion offices (Barker Center 302) for students to pick up and copy for themselves.

2. Writing Assignments

Writing assignments are to be designed to help students work on a junior paper, the final version of which must be handed in no later than the last day of exam period. Syllabi should include some sequence of short writing assignments *over the course of the semester* that ultimately result in a research paper approximately 20-25 pages in length. Such a sequence might include the following assignments over the course of the term: one or two exercises in close reading and analysis of texts; summary and analysis of a fundamental argument or debate; drafting of two or three analytic essay questions; a short essay that responds to a tutorial leader's prompt and requires the student to argue for a clear, original thesis; assignments that require students to develop a topic as well as a bibliography; the composition of a draft of the paper. An important resource for students and tutors is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources: <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do> Tutors should browse this resource and use it in developing exercises, discussing proper citation practices, and engaging all aspects of the writing process.

3. Library Research Tutorial(s)

To prepare tutorial students for the challenge of producing a quality piece of scholarship at the end of the term, each junior tutorial leader is expected to coordinate a library research tutorial with a research librarian in the Harvard College Library. The librarians can help students build the fundamental research skills they'll need to research their topics. We are fortunate to have two Harvard Library Liaisons to the Study of Religion, Reed Lowrie (lowrie@fas.harvard.edu). I encourage you to be in touch with Reed over the summer or in the fall to discuss plans for your course's tutorial, which is often scheduled sometime in the middle of the term, as students are refining the topic of and sources for their junior papers.

4. Course Policies and Academic Calendar

The syllabus must state clearly policies on late work, collaboration, academic honesty and grading. The course website for Religion 98ab, to which you will have instructor access, has a tool that allows you to see options for text on collaboration. Note that Harvard College is in the process of creating a student honor code.

Sample text:

Late/Extension Policy: Requests for extensions will be considered up to 24 hours *before* the deadline for submission of work. If no extension is requested or granted, the following penalties apply: 1/3 grade taken off for each day late (e.g.: if a paper is due on Wednesday and is handed in on Thursday a B+ paper will become a B paper).

Collaboration and Academic Integrity: The course follows Harvard College's policies on plagiarism and collaboration. Specifically, any material submitted to meet course requirements—homework assignments, papers, projects, posted comments, examinations—is expected to be a student's own work. I ask all students to bookmark and consult regularly the Harvard Guide to Using Sources website at <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>. You are urged to take great care in distinguishing your own ideas and thoughts from information and analysis derived from printed and electronic sources, and you are responsible knowing and following the College's policy on proper use of source. These policies are stated clearly at the Harvard Guide to Using Sources website.

Your syllabus should follow FAS's academic calendar ([tentative 2021-22 calendar](#) here). Please note:

- No regular instruction may take place during Reading Period (see legislation for exceptions).
- Courses may not assign new material during Reading Period.
- Short assignments covering material from the last two weeks of the course may be due during the first three days of Reading Period.

5. Evaluation & Grading

Your syllabus should clearly state the means of assessing student progress and calculating grades. Unlike many graduate level seminars, the grade of the final paper in the junior tutorial should not count for more than 40% of the final grade, but rather weekly assignments, participation and shorter assignments leading up to the final paper (for example, annotated bibliography, crafting of a good question) should be part of the calculus. Students should be assigned a substantial writing assignment that is evaluated and returned by the middle of the term so that they have a sense of how they are doing in the course. Because all College students have taken Expository Writing, they are familiar with the elements of academic writing used in that course. You should use this vocabulary in your written and oral comments about student writing. See the end of these materials for a standard set of criteria for evaluating the junior paper. We will discuss grading throughout the term, but please submit your students' final grades directly to me. I will submit your grades for Religion 98 to the Registrar's Office.

6. Class Meetings

Tutorials meet every week for a period of two hours at a time convenient to all participants in the tutorial. Tutorial meetings must take place on campus. You may reserve meeting rooms in Barker by contacting the Study of Religion Office at 5-5781. Tutorials are small, between one and three students, to allow for in depth conversation and ample time for each student to talk. Experience has shown that most students work hard and come to tutorial prepared. If they have not done so before hand, tutors and students will meet to decide upon their first meeting time immediately following the concentration meeting that occurs at the beginning of each semester.

During weekly meetings, tutors are encouraged to strive for equal participation among the members of a tutorial. Strategies for encouraging participation include: providing though-provoking study questions; asking students to select and comment upon their favorite passage(s); asking students to initiate discussion on a given reading; assigning short weekly response papers; and directing the students to query and respond to one another rather than only to the tutor. These kinds of reading and discussion exercises should be included in the syllabus, but they can also be handed out and modified during the term as needed.

While aiming to maximize discussion, tutorial leaders may also decide at various points during the semester to provide mini-lectures (15-30 minutes) to summarize progress, make connections between ideas, or give needed background information -- always with the goal of empowering the students to engage in further discussion.

7. Academic Integrity and Honor Code

The College's Honor Code should be referenced on your syllabus and I encourage you to talk with your student about what academic integrity means and why it is important. This is more than articulating rules about cheating but extends to the core values of an academic community. Information about the Honor Code and the College's guidelines for implementation is viewable here: <http://honor.fas.harvard.edu/honor-code> Please read the site's section entitled [What Faculty and Instructional Support Staff Need to Know](#) as it is helpful.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT & DISCUSSION

Junior Tutorial Lunches

Tutorial leaders meet once a month for lunch (or sometimes breakfast) as a group with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to discuss pedagogical issues such as writing topics and any problems or challenges that tutors are facing. These lunches are a required part of the job. At these meetings tutors will think through how to respond to specific challenges in the classroom and share best practices about how to make tutorials more effective. Topics will include: how to teach close reading skills, discussion of imaginative writing exercises, how to give good feedback and

Workshop on Responding to Student Writing

One time over the course of the term, we will meet as a group with an experienced Preceptor from the Harvard College Writing Program for a workshop on "Responding to Student Writing." The section below offers a summary of the elements of academic writing and some sample exercises on coming up with a good analytic question.

V. OTHER RESOURCES

ELEMENTS OF ACADEMIC ARGUMENT

adapted by Zachary Sifuentes and Karen Heath from Gordon Harvey's original list, Harvard College Writing Program

What the essay is about:

1. Thesis: your main insight or idea about a text or topic, and the *main* proposition that your essay demonstrates. It should: be true but arguable; be limited enough in scope to be argued with available evidence; and get to the heart of the text or topic being analyzed (that is, not be peripheral). It should be stated early (within the first paragraph in a short paper) and it should govern the whole essay.

Why it matters:

2. Question, Problem, or What's at Stake: the context or situation that you establish for your argument at the start of your essay, making clear why someone might want to read an essay on this topic or need to hear your particular thesis argued (why your thesis isn't just obvious to all, why other theses might be less persuasive). In the introduction, it's the moment where you establish "what's at stake" in the essay, setting up a genuine problem, question, difficulty, over-simplification, misapprehension, dilemma or violated expectation that an intelligent reader would really have. (See also the attached list of intellectual moves that can help generate a good question.)

What the thesis is based on:

3. Evidence: the data – facts, examples, or details – that you refer to, quote, or summarize to support your thesis. There needs to be *enough* evidence to be persuasive; the right *kind* of evidence to support the thesis; a *thorough* consideration of evidence (with no obvious pieces of evidence overlooked); and sufficiently *concrete* evidence for the reader to trust.

What you do with the evidence:

4. Analysis: the work of interpretation, of saying what the evidence means. Analysis is what you do with data when you go beyond observing or summarizing it: taking it apart, grappling with its details, drawing out the significance or implication not apparent to a superficial view. Analysis is what makes the writer feel present, as a thinking individual, in the essay.

Evidence and analysis add up to . . .

5. Argument: the series of ideas that the essay lays out which, taken together, support the essay's thesis. A successful argument will do more than *reiterate* the thesis, but rather make clear how each idea develops from the one before it (see "Structure," #7 below). The argument should show you not only analyzing the evidence, but also reflecting on the ideas in other important ways: *defining your terms* (see #8 below) or assumptions; considering *counter-argument* – possible alternative arguments, or objections or problems, that a skeptical or resistant reader might raise; offering a *qualification* or limitation to the case you've made; incorporating any *complications* that arise, a way in which the case isn't quite so simple as you've made it seem; drawing out an *implication*, often in the conclusion.

Where the evidence comes from:

6. Sources: texts (or persons), referred to, summarized, or quoted, that help a writer demonstrate the truth of his or her argument. In some arguments, there will be one central primary source. In others, sources can offer (a) factual information or data, (b) opinions or interpretation on your topic, (c) comparable versions of the things you are discussing, or (d) applicable general concepts.

How to organize the argument:

7. Structure: the sequence of an argument's main sections or sub-topics, and the turning points between them. The sections should follow a logical order which is apparent to the reader. But it should also be a progressive order -- they should have a direction of development or complication, not be simply a list of examples or series of restatements of the thesis ("Macbeth is ambitious: he's ambitious here; and he's ambitious here; and he's ambitious here, too; therefore, Macbeth is ambitious"). In some arguments, especially longer ones, structure may be briefly announced or hinted at after the thesis, in a "road-map" or plan sentence.

The argument is articulated in part through:

8. Key terms: the recurring terms or basic oppositions that an argument rests upon. An essay's key terms should be clear in their meaning and appear throughout; they should be appropriate for the subject (not unfair or too simple -- a false or constraining opposition); and they should not be clichés or abstractions (e.g. "the evils of society"). These terms can imply certain *assumptions* -- unstated beliefs about life, history, literature, reasoning, etc. The assumptions should bear logical inspection, and if arguable they should be explicitly acknowledged.

You keep the reader clear along the way through:

9. Transitions and signposts: words that tie together the parts of an argument, by indicating how a new section, paragraph, or sentence follows from the one immediately previous (transitional words and phrases); and by offering "signposts" that recollect an earlier idea or section or the thesis itself, referring back to it either by explicit statement or by echoing earlier key words or resonant phrases. For example, if you have come to the end of a paragraph on Augustine's notion of the will, and you are transitioning to a new paragraph that will consider his view of grace, don't begin the new paragraph with: "Next we need to consider Augustine's view of grace." Rather, introduce the new paragraph with a transition that acknowledges or makes the connection between what you've just shown your reader about the will, and how it leads to the question of grace: "Augustine's ambivalence about the will in this section of *Confessions* can be illuminated if we consider his view of the role of grace in the will." (Note that the key term "will" is stitching the new paragraph to the one before, while furthering the argument.)

. . . and through:

10. Orienting: brief bits of information, explanation, and summary that orient readers who aren't expert in the subject, enabling them to follow the argument, such as: necessary introductory information about the text, author, or event; a brief summary of a text or passage about to be analyzed; pieces of information given along the way about passages, people, or events mentioned.

Addressing your readers involves:

11. Stance: the implied relationship of you, the writer, to your readers and subject. Stance is defined by such features as style and tone (e.g. familiar or formal); the presence or absence of specialized language and knowledge; the amount of time spent orienting a general, non-expert reader; the use of scholarly conventions of format and style. Your stance should be established within the first few paragraphs of your essay, and should stay consistent.

. . . and:

12. Style: choices made at the word and sentence level that determine *how* an idea is stated. Besides adhering to the grammatical conventions of standard English, an essay's style needs to be clear and readable (not confusing, verbose, cryptic, etc.), expressive of the writer's intelligence and energetic interest in the subject (not bureaucratic or clichéd), and appropriate for its subject and audience.

And last (or first):

13. Title: should both interest and inform, by giving the subject and focus of the essay as well as by helping readers see why this essay might be interesting to read.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

A list of intellectual "moves" that can help produce good essay questions (adapted from P. Kain's "Problem, Motive, and Generating an Argument")

1. The truth about a text, issue, or topic is not what one would expect or what it would appear to be on a first reading.
2. The standard view or a published view about a text, issue, or topic needs challenging or qualifying.
3. The text, issue, or topic has: an interesting wrinkle or complexity that requires an explanation; an inconsistency or contradiction that requires a resolution; a gap or mystery that requires a solution; an ambiguity or obscurity—something that has two or more possible meanings—that needs an interpretation.
4. A simple, common, or apparently obvious approach to a text, issue, or topic has more complex, unexpected, or unobvious implications—and perhaps explains more—than it may initially seem.
5. A critical debate exists on this text, issue, or topic, about which scholars hold conflicting views.
6. The analysis of this smaller text, issue, or topic explains something of significance about a larger text, issue, or topic.

7. A seemingly tangential or insignificant matter is actually central or essential.
8. The critical knowledge thus far accumulated about a text, issue, or idea remains limited or blinded in some significant way.
9. A feature or element of a text, issue, or topic that everyone accepts as unproblematic actually has significant problems.

JUNIOR PAPER GRADING STANDARDS

A/A-

- **Thesis:** interesting, arguable, incisive; sufficiently limited in scope; stated early on and present throughout
- **Structure:** logical, progressive (not just a list), supple (invites complications, consideration of counter-arguments) with strong and obvious links between points; coherent, well-organized sections
- **Evidence:** sufficient, appropriate, and well-chosen; presented in an accessible and understandable way; deployed to motivate as well as support the argument; quoted correctly
- **Analysis:** insightful and fresh; more than summary or paraphrase; shows how evidence supports thesis; dwells in depth on key examples
- **Style:** clear and smooth; diction level sophisticated but not stuffy

B+/B

- **Thesis:** arguable but may be vague or uninteresting, or feature unintegrated parts; may be only implied, not stated early on; may not be argued throughout, disappears in places
- **Structure:** generally logical but either confusing in places (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable and undeveloped; few complications or considerations of counter-arguments; some disorganized paragraphs (either bloated or skimpy)
- **Evidence:** generally solid but may be scanty or presented as undigested quotations; quoted correctly (for the most part) but deployed in limited ways, often as a straw dummy or simply as affirmation of a single viewpoint
- **Analysis:** at times insightful but sometimes missing or mere summary; makes inconsistent connections between evidence and thesis
- **Style:** generally clear; may be weighed down by stuffy diction; may exhibit some errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling

B-/C+

- **Thesis:** vague, descriptive, or confusing; parts unintegrated; only implied or not stated early on; not argued throughout, disappears in places

- **Structure:** confusing (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable; few complications or considerations of counter-arguments; disorganized paragraphs (usually skimpy), often headed with descriptive (versus argumentative) topic sentences
- **Evidence:** either missing or presented as undigested quotations (plopped in); may be taken out of context; may be quoted incorrectly; used merely as filler or affirmation of a single viewpoint
- **Analysis:** some insightful moments but generally either missing or mere summary; may present some misreadings
- **Style:** may be unclear and hard to read; may evince many technical errors

C/C-

- **Thesis:** missing or purely descriptive (an observation or statement of fact), or may be a total misreading
- **Structure:** confusing; little focused development (usually short but may be rambling); disorganized paragraphs (also usually short)
- **Evidence:** very few examples; undigested quotations (plopped in); taken out of context; incorrectly quoted; used as filler
- **Analysis:** missing or based on misinterpretations or mere summary
- **Style:** difficult to read; riddled with many technical errors

Note: The research paper guidelines are adapted from Gordon Harvey, while the research paper grading standards are adapted from Kerry Walk. Both the guidelines and grading standards are based on resources distributed by the Harvard Writing Project.

EVALUATIONS

1. **Tutor's Evaluation of Students:** At the end of the term, Tutorial Leaders will fill out the form below and submit it to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. The form does not have to be submitted at the same time as the final grade, but should come in within a week after the submission of grades.

JUNIOR TUTORIAL EVALUATION

Student:

Tutorial Title:

Leader:

Semester:

Grade:

TUTORIAL DESCRIPTION

COMMENTS ON STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE

Please continue on another page.

This evaluation should be given to the Director of Undergraduate Studies and will be included in the student's file.

Can be used for a letter of recommendation.

For advising purposes only.

signature

2. **Student Evaluation of Tutorial:** Because tutorials are so small, students' evaluations of their Religion 98 are obviously not anonymous. They fill out a tutorial evaluation and submit it to me, and I then forward it to the tutorial leaders after the term is over. Last year's evaluation is below.

**Religion 98: Junior Tutorial in the Comparative Study of Religion
Harvard University ~ Spring 2017**

STUDENT EVALUATION FORM

Title of Junior Tutorial:

Name of Junior Tutor:

Please offer your reflections on each of the following.

1. Reading Assignments

Please comment on the choice of reading assignments, the cohesion of the assignments, and the amount of reading assigned.

2. Writing Assignments

How would you evaluate the overall usefulness of the writing assignments to the project of understanding the subject matter, the format of the assignments, the comments you received on those assignments, and the relevance of these assignments to other work in the study of religion?

3. Discussion

Please comment on the way discussion was generated in the tutorial. We are interested in your thoughts about the quality of discussions and the role that discussion played in helping you to grasp the material. Can you give an example of a discussion that you think went particularly well and comment on what made it successful? What about a session that was less helpful—in retrospect, what would have strengthened it?

4. Tutor leader

Please offer comments on the tutorial's leaders ability to: present material; facilitate discussion; offer helpful comments on written and oral work; respond to questions concerning the course materials; and support you in the ways you felt important to your participation in the tutorial.

5. Overall

Did the tutorial meet your expectations? How would you characterize the value of this tutorial experience for you in the context of your studies in the concentration? What aspects of the tutorial were most valuable? Are there ways in which this experience could be improved for concentrators in the future?

6. Tutorial sequence (for students who took Religion 97 prior to Religion 98):

In what ways did the Religion 97 (the sophomore tutorial) prepare you for your work in Religion 98? Are there ways sophomore tutorial could have better prepared you for your junior tutorial? If you are currently a junior, how did the junior tutorial influence your thinking about writing a Senior Honors Thesis? If you are a senior taking the tutorial as an elective, how did your work in the tutorial fit in with your course of study in the Study of Religion?

7. Additional comments: