RELS490: Comps Proposal

DUE: First day of Fall semester by noon for first class meeting

- Upload to the RELS 490: Senior Seminar Moodle Assessment Portal
- Bring 2 hard copies to class and be ready to present a brief overview of it (under 5 minutes, informal with no Powerpoint needed)

Preliminary work

For instructions on how to identify an appropriate topic, to focus your topic, and to conduct preliminary bibliographic research, please refer to the RELS website: http://www.oxy.edu/religious-studies/senior-comps/selecting-your-comps-topic

Purpose of the proposal

The purpose the comps proposal is to force you to identify a manageable comps topic, a set of focused research questions, a body of primary and/or secondary sources to consult, and a plan of attack. We want you to complete the proposal by the first day of the Senior Seminar so that you are prepared and able to conduct your research and writing in an efficient and timely manner during the Fall semester.

Keep in mind that the more you can focus your comps topic and sources, the richer your analysis and the more streamlined your research process will be. It is always possible to broaden your area of research, but it is hard to get started on an impossibly broad topic with an endless number of potential sources. So please be sure to give sufficient thought to your topic, conduct the necessary preliminary research, and consult with your Comps Research Advisor in order to refine your topic and sources before the start of the semester.

Format of the proposal

~1-2 page single-spaced + bibliography

The comps proposal should explain in detail (in any order/structure you deem appropriate):

- your focused topic, including the main themes or issues you expect to address
- how this topic builds on work you have already begun in coursework, study or research abroad, summer research, etc.
- the driving questions of your research

   NOTE: While a good FINAL version of the comps will have a sophisticated thesis, you should start the research process with a research question or set of questions rather than a thesis or hypothesis. With a question/set of questions, you will be open to discover surprising answers and you will not be forcing your sources to “fit” a pre-conceived thesis.

- which scholars or scholarly conversations you will be using and/or engaging with
- the methodological or theoretical approach that will structure your analysis
- why this topic? why does it interest you? what do you hope to achieve (broadly or specifically)?

At the end of the proposal, you are to attach a bibliography of primary and secondary sources you plan to consult (properly formatted using Chicago Manual of Style—if you don’t know CMS
rules, consult this Quick Guide). Be sure to conduct a thorough search of scholarly databases to devise your preliminary list of sources. Consult the RELS website for instructions on searching for sources: http://www.oxy.edu/religious-studies/senior-comps/resources.

We strongly recommend that you share your proposal and preliminary bibliography to your Comps Research Advisor well before the first day of class to get their feedback on your approach and on your sources.

**Final words**

1. **DO NOT LEAVE THIS PRELIMINARY WORK UNTIL THE END OF THE SUMMER!** It will surely take longer than you expect to hone your topic and to identify sources. Nor should you expect your Comps Research Advisor to be on call in the weeks and days before school starts (since they will surely be busy wrapping up their research and finalizing their syllabi)!

2. We are well aware that the best laid out research plans may go awry and/or that your topic may shift as you conduct research. Sometimes final comps projects bear only little resemblance to the proposal. We can tell from the comps proposal, however, if you have a clear handle on the *process* and *structure* of your research project. If you can identify an interesting topic to study, if you can present a clear and reasonable research question, if you can clearly relate it to other scholarship, if you can describe a method for investigating it, and if you can construct a sequence of steps that lead toward a reasonable conclusion, then the comps proposal is a success regardless of whether you modify your initial idea somewhere down the line. In other words, a successful comps proposal demonstrates that you know how to embark on research in the field of Religious Studies (*this* is what you’ll be graded on for this assignment).