Introduction to World Religions
REL 1103.71933
Oklahoma State University

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Class Time: TR 12:00-1:15
Class Location: CLBN 213

Course Description and Objectives:
This introductory survey course is designed to offer an introduction to various religious traditions and acquaint students with the academic study of religion. A variety of objects that have been classed as “religion” (Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) will be examined from a variety of perspectives and we will look at the various methodological issues that are hallmarks of Religious Studies, such as the problem of defining religion, in both theory and in practice. By the end of the course, students should:

1) Have an understanding of the history of the broad spectrum of human artifacts and constructions generally understood as “religion.”
2) Develop a critical and scholarly attitude in discussions of the various “religions” covered in-class.
3) Be able to critically think about not just the various “religions” covered, but the process of what makes something “religious” or not, and what discursive tidbits can be smuggled in with this kind of classification.

Required Text Book:
A Concise Introduction to World Religions: Fourth Edition. Edited by Willard G. Oxtoby, Roy C. Amore, Amir Hussain, and Alan F. Segal.1

Required Supplemental Readings for Topic 1. (links/pdf will be provided):

Assignment Notes and Grading:
Participation: Participation points will be based on journal entries. Each journal entry needs to be at least one (1) page long, but no more than two (2) pages. You will need to write

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1 However, if you can get your hands on a 3rd edition of this book, that would be fine as well.
4 total entries (each worth 5% for a total for all 4 equaling 20% of your final grade). Journal questions will be provided for each topic (except for Topic 1) and you may pick which 4 of the 9 to write on.

**Pop Quizzes:** There will be eight (8) in-class pop quizzes throughout the semester. Each is worth 2.5% for a total of 20% of your final grade (8 x 2.5%=20%). These quizzes will primarily be based on the readings assigned up to the date of the quiz. So for instance if a quiz is held on September 2, it will cover the readings Arnal & McCutcheon, Lincoln, and Chapter 7: Hindu Traditions. If the next one is held on September 9, it will cover the readings you should have read from the last quiz to the current topic. In this instance that will mean only Chapter 3: Religions of Antiquity, and Chapter 4: Jewish Traditions. If there is any confusion, please don’t hesitate to let me know.

**Midterm Exam:** The midterm examination will be based on your readings and lectures from the beginning of the course up to the midterm. It will include definition and essay style questions and is worth 20% of your final grade. The midterm will be held on October 12.

**Written Assignment:** See attached paper instructions at the bottom. This assignment will be worth 20% of your final grade and will be due on November 9.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will have the same form as the midterm. While the exam itself is comprehensive, the questions will have a higher focus on the material after the midterm. The Final exam will be worth 20% of your final grade. The exam is TBA but will be during finals week (Monday-Friday, December 6-10).

**Course Outline:**

The following schedule/outline is tentative. Time constraints, unforeseen events, and class interest may result in slight alterations. Nonetheless, please note that all readings should be done before the beginning of the topic covered as listed. So for instance, the readings for Hinduism(s) should be done before August 23.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Journal Questions &amp; Due Dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 17-19</td>
<td>What makes a “religion” religious?</td>
<td>Arnal &amp; McCutcheon. Lincoln. (Please read by August 20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 24-Sept 2</td>
<td>Hinduism(s).</td>
<td>Chapter 7: Hindu Traditions</td>
<td>Is Hinduism(s) the oldest tradition? (Sept 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 7-16</td>
<td>Judaism(s).</td>
<td>Chapter 3: Religions of Antiquity. Chapter 4: Jewish Traditions.</td>
<td>Is Judaism(s) the first monotheism? (Sept 21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 21-28</td>
<td>Buddhism(s). Religion or Philosophy?</td>
<td>Chapter 10. Buddhist Traditions.</td>
<td>Is Buddhism(s) a religion or philosophy? (Sept 30)</td>
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Policy for Late Assignments:
Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Otherwise, assignments may be handed in one class-day after the stated deadline without penalty, with a 10%-per-class-day penalty assessed for each subsequent class-day of lateness.

Paper Guide:
Please follow these directions to the letter. These are not difficult to do, but deviations will unfortunately cost you. Keep in mind there will be NO EXCEPTIONS to these requirements. Your term paper will need to be:

2) Double spaced with 1 inch (or 2.5 cm) margins all the way around. Please use APA, MLA or Chicago style for your paper (including all in-text citations, foot or end notes, and bibliography). I do not care which one but just be consistent. When all else fails check the SBL style sheet provided.
3) Each paper must be at least five (5) pages but no more than seven (7). This does not include a bibliography.
4) Bibliography. You will need a minimum of 4 "peer reviewed" or “academic” sources beyond the textbook or provided readings. So stuff you find in the library. And I mean not just “found” in Google Scholar...that doesn’t count. Or Wikipedia. You have to go to, or use the resources of, the library. Don’t worry...it’s nice there. It is where the
books live. Finally, 4 is only the minimum. You can certainly go over that. In fact, it might be preferred.

I usually get folks asking if this is an “opinion” or a “research / facts-based” paper. The thing is, it is neither. While I certainly want your opinion, I want your opinion as it has been formed through the lens of our textbooks, and/or by researching what others have said about a given topic. So what does this mean? Well, I DON’T want a list or a précis of what other folks have said with none of your own analysis. On the other hand I also DO NOT want you to just say something like “I feel that religion is bad / good / evil / stupid because that is how I feel or that is what I believe or what I was taught by my church / temple / mosque / synagogue / druid grove.”

Sigh. Don’t do that.

While opinions are required, one also needs evidence in a university. Personal beliefs or gut feelings just cannot be cited or footnoted. This is particularly true of claiming “facts” that are simply positions of religious belief (which for some might seem weird since this is a religious studies class). While one can argue from a religious POV, simply stating something like “such and such is bad cause God(s) says so” has no place in this kind of class. So…what I want (and what any university prof wants, really) is your idea / opinion, but based around or grounded in the work of others which is then employed to provide analysis of a given topic or question.

As for topics for the paper…the thing is, given the broad nature of the class it is kind of hard to assign a topic or even a list of topics. And to be frank if you are going to write a paper it is always better to pick something you want to write as opposed to what you have to write. But… if you want a suggestion, I would say (along with the minimum 4 sources) you can compare aspects from two traditions from our textbook. This could be a rituals, texts, cosmology, etc. You will have to still have 4 sources, but that is a good way to get started. And if you go that route I will get you started with an article by a scholar name Jonathan Z. Smith. His work on comparison is incredibly helpful. And no…this Smith article will not count as one of your 4 sources.

Please also find the official OSU “syllabus attachment.”

Also, please note. “OSU encourages you to wear a mask indoors in public settings regardless of whether you are fully vaccinated, consistent with the current CDC recommendations. This is especially important in classrooms and laboratories because people are together for long periods of time. Wearing a mask during class not only protects you but also helps protect those around you who may be more vulnerable. This is a simple way we can look out for all members of the Cowboy family. If you feel sick, do not attend class. Contact University Health Services at 405-744-7665 immediately and communicate with me as soon as possible about any work you miss.”