REL 1103-67010: Introduction to World Religions
Instructor: Dr. Ryan M. Armstrong

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Office: 269 SSH
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Class time: Tues/Thurs 10:30–11:15am
Office Hour: Tues Noon–1:00pm
T.A.’s:
Chandler Dean (chandler.dean@okstate.edu)
Ellyn Brashear (ellyn.brashear@okstate.edu)

Course Description: This course is designed as an introduction for students interested in the academic study of religion and wish to build an understanding of major Eastern and Western religious traditions. The method employed by this course will entail engagement with a mix of direct sources and scholarly analysis. Attention will be given to the basic teachings and practices of religious traditions as well as to the historical, geographical, social, and political settings in which they have arisen and developed. As much as possible, the course will attempt to understand religions academically, as social-historical phenomena, without promoting or rejecting any particular religious or non-religious viewpoints.

Note: The syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Goals: This is not a course on theology. The goal of this course is to better understand people—in particular, their beliefs, traditions, and behaviors, as they shape and are shaped by religions and religious systems. At the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Identify key aspects of various religious traditions and their interactions with social and political environments.
2. Engage critically with primary texts and secondary scholarship on religions of the world.
3. Place themselves within the context of the diversity of religious life both in the US and around the world.
4. Critically assess religious beliefs and perspectives.

Required Texts:
Additional Selected Readings will be made available on Canvas.

Course Requirements:
Weekly Reading and Discussion Forum, 25%: Each week, students are responsible for reading the assigned material and posting a question, comment, or reply (100-200 words) and at least two additional replies to someone else’s post (50-150 words) from the previous week. Discussion will focus on the weekly reading. Please make posts and responses thoughtful and intellectual, not emotional or inflammatory. Also be sensitive to other students and refrain from offensive posts. Note: the instructor reserves the right to give pop quizzes if posts are not reflecting thoughtful engagement with the reading material. One post is sufficient before class Aug 30. But starting Sep 6, posts and replies should be uploaded before class every Tuesday. At the
end of the semester, the student should have posted/replied at least 37 times regarding reading assignments.

*Site Visit and Personal Reflection Essay, 25%: On Nov 10, we will meet at the Mosque on campus (616 N Washington St, Stillwater) together at 10:30am as a class. Afterward, students are to write a reflection essay of 1,200–1,700 words (12pt Calibri font, double spaced, 1” margins). Any student who is unable to attend the visit on Nov 10 is expected to make an alternative arrangement with the professor. The essay is due before class on Dec 1. It should be a cohesive essay centered on your primary takeaway from the visit. For grading, see the rubric below. Along the way, try to address the following questions:

-What sets a Mosque apart from other religious sites?
-What feelings were invoked in you by the art and architecture of the Mosque? What thoughts does the Mosque inspire about God or community?
-In what ways is the Mosque influenced by American culture, or differs from mainstream American culture? How does this compare to institutions with which you’re most familiar?
-What surprised you from your visit?
-What were some highlights from your visit?
-In what ways did your visit reinforce or contradict the course’s reading materials and lectures?
-What questions do you have as you reflect on your visit?

*Two Exams, 50%: The first exam is Oct 20, covering Ancient, Indigenous American, African, Indian, Chinese, and Jewish religious traditions. The final exam is on Dec 15 and will be comprehensive with a focus on religions discussed in the second half of the semester. Exams will cover material from both lectures and readings.*
# Grading Rubric for Reflection Essay

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<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>C or below</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>GRADE FOR EACH CATEGORY</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<td>a) Writing Style: Presented in an organized fashion, progression of thought, concepts are fully explained</td>
<td>Difficult to follow. Little to no preparation was put into method of communicating. Either exceeds or falls far under the word requirements (800–1600). Careless errors were made in spelling, syntax, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Articulately communicated and easy to follow. Very few concepts remain unclear. Falls within the word requirements (800–1600). Effort was made to stick to form without mechanical errors in spelling and syntax.</td>
<td>Clear progression of thought with good explanations of ideas. There is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Easy to understand. Falls within the word requirements (800–1600). Writing is articulate with no mechanical mistakes.</td>
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<td>b) Observations</td>
<td>It is clear the student did not visit the Mosque or paid little attention. Very little effort was made to remember what was learned or discussed at the Mosque.</td>
<td>The paper demonstrates a high retention from discussions and observations made at the Mosque. Some details make their way into the paper.</td>
<td>The paper demonstrates a detailed retention from discussions and observations made at the Mosque. Many details are referenced in the paper, and it is clear that the student was engaged during the visit.</td>
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<td>c) Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>The paper offers little thought about the student’s experience at the Mosque. The student simply regurgitates information from elsewhere and has very little to say that is original.</td>
<td>The paper offers some original thought about the student’s experience at the Mosque. The student’s own voice comes through, and the student has reflected heavily on the visit.</td>
<td>The paper is steeped in a thoughtful reflection of the student’s experience at the Mosque. The paper contributes interesting questions and comments on the experience that demonstrate deep contemplation of the experience.</td>
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<td>d) Prompts from the Syllabus:</td>
<td>Little or no effort was made to address the questions in the syllabus.</td>
<td>Care is taken to address some of the questions in the syllabus</td>
<td>Excellent use of the prompt from the syllabus to think through the visit to the Mosque.</td>
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- What sets a Mosque apart?
- What feelings were invoked in you by the art and architecture of the Mosque? What thoughts does the Mosque inspire about God or community?
- In what ways is the Mosque influenced by American culture, or differs from mainstream American culture? How does this compare to institutions with which you’re most familiar?
- What surprised you?
- What were some highlights?
- In what ways did your visit reinforce or contradict the course’s reading materials and lectures?
- What lingering questions do you have?
Reading Schedule

Selections from texts other than *IWR* will be made available on Canvas.

*Aug 23, 26.* Introduction, Resources, Methodology

*Aug 30, Sep 1.* What is the academic Study of Religion?
**Reading assignment:** Sam Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion”; *IWR* 2–30

*Sep 6, 8.* Religion in Antiquity (Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Greek, Norse)
**Reading assignment:** Enuma Elish

*Sep 13, 15.* Indigenous and North American and African Religious Traditions
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 32–98

*Sep 20, 22.* Hinduism and Buddhism
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 100–203; Mandala 6 of Rig Veda, Hymns 1–5

*Sep 27, 29.* Chinese Religions (Confucianism and Daoism)
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 266–317

*Oct 4, 6.* Judaism
**Reading assignment:** Exodus 4–20

*Oct 11, 13.* Judaism, Continued
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 382–441; *Brief History of the Jewish Community in Stillwater, OK*

*Oct 18.* Midterm Review

*Oct 20.* Exam 1

*Oct 25, 27.* Christianity
**Reading assignment:** The Gospel of Mark 1–8, 15–16

*Nov 1, 3.* Christianity, Continued
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 444–502

*Nov 8.* Islam
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 504–566; Qur’an: Sürah 14, ‘Ibrāhīm

*Nov 10.* Mosque Visit.

*Nov 15, 17.* Baha’i, Alternative Christianities and Syncretism, Religious Pluralism
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 568–612

*Nov 19–27:* Fall Break
Nov 29, Dec 1. Atheism, Religious Atheists, Science and Religion
Mosque Visit Reflection Essay Due before class Dec 1.
No Reading Assignment this week. Discussion posts and replies should consider any topic on your mind from the entire semester.

Dec 6, 8. Reflections and Final Review
Discussion posts are welcome, but not required. Make sure you haven’t missed any this semester!

Dec 15, 10:00am: Final Exam

Additional Policies

Late Submissions: 20% will be deducted for each day that an assignment is turned in after the deadline. Papers more than 5 days late will receive a 0. Don't let this happen to you!

Electronic Devices: Please place all phones away and out of site once class has begun. If you absolutely must use your phone, please step out of the classroom to do so. You are welcome to use laptops for taking notes, but not for social media. Violation of this policy will result in point deductions from the discussion board.

Academic Integrity: OSU is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct. This level of ethical behavior and integrity will be maintained in this course. Participating in a behavior that violates academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, helping another person cheat, unauthorized advance access to
examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, and altering academic records) will result in an official academic sanction. Violations may subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript, and being suspended from the University. To appeal any charge: 101 Whitehurst | (405) 744-5627 | http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu

Students with Physical or Learning Disabilities: If you need special accommodations the University will try to make appropriate arrangements. These arrangements will need to be made ahead of time through the Student Disability Services Office: 315 Student Union | (405) 744–7116 | https://sds.okstate.edu/

Equal Opportunity: 409 General Academic Building/405-744-7607 https://1is2many.okstate.edu/ OSU is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, age or protected veteran status. OSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its educational programs and activities. Examples of sexual misconduct and/or sex discrimination include: sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic and intimate partner violence, stalking, or gender-based discrimination. Please conduct yourselves in a way that is welcoming to each other. We want each of you to be respected and listened to.