

Introduction to World Religions

REL 1103.69587

Oklahoma State University

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-3:00 or by appointment.

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Class Time: MWF 2:30-3:20

Class Location: CLBN 314

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):

“Thesis on Method.” by Bruce Lincoln. <https://religion.ua.edu/links/theses-on-method/>

“On the Definition of Religion.” Chapter 1 of William E. Arnal & Russell T. McCutcheon’s *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of “Religion.”* (2012).

Assignment Notes:

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 there is a quiz on August 23, the quiz will only cover the readings by Lincoln and also Arnal &

¹ However, if you can get your hands on a 3rd edition of this book, that would be fine as well.

McCutcheon. If the next quiz is held on Sept 15 it will cover the readings you should have read from the last quiz to the current topic. In this instance that will mean Chapters 7, 3, and 4 of your text book.

Also, the idea of the pop quizzes is to—pardon the pun—pop them on you. This is essentially a way to gauge your participation/attendance. So I won't be warning you ahead of time when we have a quiz, and if you miss a quiz there will be no mechanism to make it up.

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 short answer style questions and is worth 20% of your final grade. The Midterm will be held on Sept 30.

Written Assignment: See paper instructions at the bottom of the syllabus and also the guidelines on our canvas page. This assignment will be worth 40% of your final grade. The paper involves 2 components: an outline/draft of your paper in which I will give you feedback (worth 10%) and the actual final paper (worth 30%). The paper draft is on Oct 31 (but can and SHOULD be handed in earlier so more feedback can be given) with the final paper handed in by Nov 30. The outline/draft will need to be 2-3 pages long, with a clear thesis statement/introduction, 2-3 points that are the “body” of the paper (which is generally the argument that you are making), and finally a conclusion (see the Paper Guide on canvas). Your outline needs to also include a short annotated bibliography of 2-3 of your sources that you will be using in your paper. An annotated bibliography basically means providing a properly cited source (MLA, APA, Chicago, SBL, etc.) and short two to three line summary of the source and why it is relevant for your paper. These are sources that you have found yourself (not provided by me) and are “peer” reviewed. If you are unsure of what this means, please see the following links to get you started.

<https://www.lib.sfu.ca/find/journals-articles/what-peer-reviewed-journal> or
<https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/articles>

Each paper must be a minimum of 5 (five) pages but no more than 7 (seven) pages long, double-spaced. This does not include a bibliography or a title page.

Final Exam: The final exam will have the same form as the midterm but will be based on the readings assigned in the second half of the semester (i.e., the readings assigned after the midterm). The Final exam will be worth 20% of your final grade. The Final is Dec 12 at 2:00 pm, but please check the OSU exam schedule.

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 January 18th as the lectures will assume that you have done the readings.

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Due Dates</i>
DATE August 22-24	What makes a “religion” religious?	Arnal & McCutcheon. Lincoln.	
August 26- Sept 5	Hinduism(s).	Chapter 7: Hindu Traditions	
Sept 6-19	Judaism(s).	Chapter 3: Religions of Antiquity. Chapter 4: Jewish Traditions.	
Sept 21-30	Buddhism(s). Religion or Philosophy?	Chapter 10. Buddhist Traditions.	Midterm: Sept 30
Oct 1-12	Christianities.	Chapter 5. Christian Traditions	
Oct14-26	Shinto(s), Confucianism(s) and Daoism(s).	Chapter 11: Chinese and Korean Traditions. Chapter 12: Japanese Traditions.	
Oct 27-Nov7	Islam(s). Eastern or Western?	Chapter 6: Muslim Traditions	Paper Outline: Oct 31 at the latest. Sooner is better.
Nov 8-18	New Religious Movements Wicca. New to who?	Chapter 13: New Religions and Movements	
Nov 28-Dec 9	Religions of North America: Mormonism and Native American traditions.	Chapter 1: Studying Religions Chapter 2: Indigenous Traditions	Paper Due: Nov 30 Final Exam: Dec 12 at 2:00 pm.

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:

- 1) Typed with a 12 pt. Times New Roman font.
- 2) Double spaced with 1 inch 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 or title page.
- 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 (physically or online).

Don’t worry...it’s nice there. It is where the books live.

Finally, 4 is only the bare minimum. You can certainly can and SHOULD go over that.

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.

Also, please...PLEASE...PLEASE read the full paper guidelines I have put up on canvas.