**Introduction to World Religions [REL 1103.32228] Web Fall 2022**

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**Course Description:** This course begins with an introduction to Religious Studies, which is a rigorous and interdisciplinary endeavor that invites questions, reflection and explorations from our perspectives, commitments, and locations. From beliefs, practices, customs, rituals, politics to cultures, sciences, economics, art, identities, sports, bodies, language, music, movies, and popular culture, indeed, almost all aspects of life, seem to be inflected by the religious. On the one hand, religious traditions and their actors have competed against culture, science, political and other spheres of authority; then, on the other hand, religious communities have cooperated and developed alongside science, politics, culture, etc. Following our overview of the academic study of religion, we will be introduced to five world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each section of this course begins with an overview of the historical origins and general background, then moves to sacred writings, classic teachings, and rituals of the given religious tradition. In the process of our explorations, we will evaluate how religious traditions establish ways of belonging, believing, and becoming related to the sacred and profane, divine and humane, transcendent and immanent. This course concludes with an introduction to New Religious Movements, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints and Nation of Islam. Recognizing that religious traditions develop and diversify over time as they are proliferated across various locations, we will seek to evaluate how these traditions have been colored and textured by and within historical and cultural contexts. The goal of this course is to encourage students to acquire an informed, nuanced, and empathetic understanding of world religions.


**Additional Course Readings:** All other course readings, will be made available on our Canvas homepage.

“Normally persons talk about other people’s religions as they are, and about their own as it ought to be.”

- Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1962.
“Religions are treasure chests of stories, songs, rituals, and ways of life that have been handed down for millennia - not covered in dust but evolving all the way - so that each new generation has something to choose from when it is time to ask the big questions in life. Where did we come from? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who is my neighbor? Where do we go from here? No one should have to start from scratch with questions like these. Overhearing the answers of the world's great religions can help anyone improve his or her own answers. Without a religion, these questions often do not get asked.”


**Learning Objectives:** Upon successfully completing this course, the following objectives will have been met:

1. Students will gain an understanding of methods and issues in the study of religion.
2. Students will learn how to engage in an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion.
3. Students will identify, summarize, compare, and contrast the beliefs, rituals and practices across the world religions.
4. Students will have improved upon their analytical reading of historical and religious texts.
5. Students will have improved upon their critical and empathetic interpretation of a range of beliefs and practices across the religious traditions.
6. Students will practice being self-reflexive and reflective as part of developing critical self-awareness as the evaluator (and possible practitioner) of a religious tradition.

**Course Structure:** This course will be completely online. There will be 30 terms (identifications) or less provided for each unit covered within this course, which will be highlighted throughout the lectures. For evaluation, students will respond complete six quizzes, one analytical essay, and two exams. I will provide recordings of lectures and Keynote presentations for each class session. I will also provide some of the lectures (depending on the class and my own schedule) live for students who may be interested in attending and asking any questions or checking in throughout the semester.

**Computer Requirement:** Students must have access to a desktop or laptop computer, equipped with an internet browser, and connectivity, to engage the course materials and turn in assignments throughout the semester.

**Discussion Posts (200 Points/50 Points Each):** Students will respond to four of the five discussion questions provided on Canvas throughout the semester for each of the five units on the five World Religions.

**6 Quizzes (300 points total; 50 points each):** There will be six quizzes throughout the semester. There will be one quiz for each unit covered except for the final section on the New Religious Movements. Quizzes are in the form of multiple-choice questions. The quizzes will focus on the identifications and the primary source readings for each of the units. The quizzes will be provided on Canvas. Once the quiz is provided (after each unit), the students will be notified and then have one week to complete the given quiz.

**Essay on the Martyrdom of Perpetua (250 points):** In this analytical essay, students will use two or more secondary sources for writing an interpretive essay of The Martyrdom of Perpetua. Due: November 28th, 2022
**Final Exams (250 Points):** The Final Exam will consist of five essay options (one for each of the World Religions covered during the semester). Students will be required to write responses to two of the five essay prompts. The exam will be submitted on Canvas during and will be due by 5 pm on the Friday of Final Exam week.

**Extra Credit (Reflections on Primary Source Readings | up to 20 points each):** For each of the six units covered after the first unit on Studying Religions within this course, there will be one primary source reading assigned as an extra credit opportunity. Each reflection will be evaluated and awarded up to 20 points. To earn the total 20 points, reflections should be 1-2 pages, single-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman. In each reflection, one should summarize the reading and reflect on what they learned, and/or found interesting, significant, and/or what questions were generated by reading the given document.

**Distribution of the Graded Points (Comprehensive Evaluation):**

- Discussion Posts: 200 Points (50 points each)
- Quizzes: 300 Points (50 points each)
- Martyrdom of Perpetua Essay: 250 Points
- Final Exam: 250 Points

**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. You have the right to appeal any charge: 101 Whitehurst Phone (405) 744-5627|Website: 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| Website: https://sds.okstate.edu/.

**WEEKS 1 – 2 | STUDYING RELIGIONS (AUGUST 22ND – SEPTEMBER 2ND)**

What is Religion?

Methodological & Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religions

Basic Human Religion: Origins of Faith

Basic Human Religion: Patterns of Faith
Quiz 1: Studying Religions (Opens September 3rd, due by September 11th)

Weeks 3 - 4 | Hindu Traditions

(Sep 5th – Sep 16th)

Sacred Texts (Vedas and Upanishads)
Hindu Epics (Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita)
Classical Teachings
Caste System and Stages of Life
Schools and Communities of Theology

Primary Source Reading: Selections from the Ramayana

Quiz 2: Hindu Traditions (Opens September 17th, due by September 25th)

Weeks 5 – 6 | Buddhist Traditions

(Sep 19th – Sep 30th)

Origins and Overview
The First Gem (The Buddha)
The Second Gem (Dharma)
Sacred Texts
The Third Gem (The Sangha)
Theravada (First Vehicle)
Mahayana (Second Vehicle)
Vajrayana (Third Vehicle)
Architecture and Rituals

Primary Source Reading: Dalai Lama,

“The Source of Happiness,” The Art of Happiness

Quiz 3: Buddhist Traditions (Opens October 1st, due by October 9th)
WEEKS 7 – 8 | JEWISH TRADITIONS (OCTOBER 3rd – OCTOBER 14th)

Origins and Overview
The Hebrew Bible
The Second Temple Period
Jewish Life & Roman Rule
Rabbinical Judaism
Jewish Life under Christianity & Islam
Branches of Judaism

Jewish Life in the 20th century

Primary Source Reading: Primo Levi, “The Down and the Saved,” in Survival in Auschwitz

Quiz 4: Jewish Traditions (Opens October 15th, due by October 23rd)

WEEKS 9 – 11 | CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (OCTOBER 17th – NOVEMBER 4th)

Origins and Overview
New Testament & Early Church
Monasticism
Medieval Christianity
The European Reformation
Roman Catholicism
Eastern Orthodoxy
Liberation Theologies
Christianity in Colonial America

Quiz 5: Christian Traditions (Opens November 5th, due by November 13th)
WEEKS 12 – 13 | MUSLIM TRADITIONS (NOVEMBER 7TH – NOVEMBER 18TH)

Origins and Overview
The Qur’an
Muhammad and the Hadith
The Five Pillars
Sharia (Islamic Law)
Sunnis and Shi’ites
Philosophy and Sufism
Art and Architecture
Islam in the Contemporary World

Primary Source Reading: Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an

Quiz 6: Muslim Traditions (Opens November 19th, due by November 27th)

WEEK 14 | NO CLASSES: FALL BREAK & UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY (NOVEMBER 21ST – NOVEMBER 25TH)

NOVEMBER 28TH: DUE ASSIGNMENT: ESSAY ON THE MARTYRDOM OF PERPETUA

WEEK 15 | NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NOVEMBER 28TH – DECEMBER 2ND)

Defining New Religions, Sects, & Cults
New Religions inspired from the Eastern traditions.
New Religions inspired by Abrahamic Religions
Nation of Islam
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
The New Age Movement
Wicca, Raëlians, Scientology

Primary Source Reading: “Mecca” in The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Final Exam: Due by Midnight, December 16th, Submit via Canvas

ALL COURSEWORK DUE BY MIDNIGHT, DECEMBER 16TH, 2022 (ABSOLUTE FINAL DAY TO SUBMIT COURSEWORK)

Tentative Nature of Syllabus: If necessary, this syllabus is subject to revision. Students will be held responsible for modifications distributed in class time, and/or communicated by an email correspondence, and/or provided on Canvas. Usually, all three of these mediums will be employed to communicate any changes.