**Course Description:** This survey course begins with an introduction to the field of Religious Studies, which as an academic endeavor, continues to encourage and invites analysis, questions and exploration from multiple perspectives, commitments and cultural locations. From the distribution of a wide range of beliefs, practices, customs, rituals to politics, science, economics, the arts, our bodies, language and popular culture – just about all aspects of our lives – are inflected by what may be called the religious. On the one hand, religious traditions and their actors who have competed against scientific, political and other spheres of authority and influence; then, on the other hand, religious traditions have cooperated and developed alongside other institutions of power and influence. Following an introduction to the nature of religion and its academic study, we will survey five of the major world religions in the following order: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each section of this course begins with an overview of the historical, geographical and cultural background in which the respective religious tradition first emerged, then each unit transitions to an overview of the sacred writings, teachings, rituals and practices within, throughout and across the aforementioned religious traditions. In this introductory course in Religious Studies, we will evaluate how religious traditions have established (and continue to establish) ways of belonging, believing and becoming related to what may be known as the sacred and the profane, the divine and the humane, the transcendent and the immanent. We will conclude this survey course with an introduction to New Religious Movements with special attention afforded to The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints and The Nation of Islam. Recognizing that religious traditions continue to diversify when proliferated and transmitted, we shall seek to evaluate how these religious traditions are colored and textured within historical contexts. The underlying goal of this course is to encourage greater curiosity, appreciation, and cultivation of the interrelated disciplines of listening, reading, reflecting and writing to demonstrate an informed, nuanced and empathetic understanding of world religions.

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

- Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1962.

ADDITIONAL READINGS: See Files Folder in Canvas Homepage.

“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 is a lecture intensive course. There will be 30 terms (identifications) or less provided for each unit covered within this course, which will be highlighted throughout lectures. For the purposes of evaluation, students will respond to discussion questions, complete six quizzes, one analytical essay, and two exams.

**ATTENDANCE (100 POINTS):** Attendance counts as 10% of the overall grade. Grading Attendance: Each absence will lead to a two point reduction from 100 possible points. By way of example, if a student missed 3 classes in the semester, the student would be deducted 6 points, and thus earn 94 points for their attendance grade. To account for your attendance, register for our course on I-clicker. Here is the link to sign up: [https://www.iclicker.com/](https://www.iclicker.com/).

The ITLE has instructional videos -- [https://itle.okstate.edu/iclicker.html](https://itle.okstate.edu/iclicker.html) Once you have created an account with your OSU email, search for our class under Oklahoma State University. **I teach two sections of Introductions to World Religions. Register for the following section: REL 1103.62409, which is held between 1:30-2:20 pm.** You may search for our course by my last name: Pereira. If you have any issues setting up or accessing I-Clicker during our class time, please let our Teaching Assistant Christopher Tucker know, and we will do our best to rectify the issue. From the time of the given class where an issue with attendance has occurred, students will have 48 hours to inform Christopher there was a problem with using I-Clicker. After 48 hours, all of the recorded absences will remain locked in place.
On Excused Absences: It is up to the discretion of the professor as to whether an absence is to be excused or not. If you miss a class due to an university related commitment (e.g., athletic competitions and academic conferences), please make sure to provide proper documentation to have these absences excused.

**OSU’s Policy on Wearing Masks:** The following two statements have been provided by OSU legal counsel with regards to wearing masks inside the classroom and office: “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.”

"This semester you can choose for office hours and/or advising appointments to be in-person or by zoom. For in-person appointments, you are strongly encouraged to wear a mask, as social-distancing is not possible in my office. I will be wearing a mask."

**Seating Chart:** OSU has instructed professors to use a seating chart throughout the semester. We will design a seating chart in the first week of the semester. Students will be asked to sit in the same seat throughout the semester. Attendance will be taken with I-clicker. The seating chart will solely be used for contact tracing.

**6 Quizzes (50 points each; 300 points total):** There will be six quizzes throughout this semester. There will be one quiz for each of the units covered throughout this semester except for the final section on the New Religious Movements. Quizzes may be in the form of multiple choice questions; true or false; and/or essay and reflections. Quizzes focus on identifications, lectures, and readings. All quizzes will be provided on Canvas. Students will have up to one week to complete the quiz from the date of its publication on Canvas.

**Essay: Bhagavad Gita (Amar Chitra Katha) (200 Points):** In this essay, students will be required to summarize the key points from the *Amar Chitra Katha*, a popular comic book version of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and address a series of prompts raised within the Guidelines document. Length of essay should be five pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font. Guidelines to be provided by September 21st. **Due date: October 1st.**

**Essay: What is Religious about the Centennial Homecoming (200 Points)?** The 100th Homecoming for Oklahoma State University is scheduled to take place from October 24–30th, 2021. Here is the official website: [https://www.orangeconnection.org/s/860/18/he-home.aspx?sid=860&gid=1&pgid=9658](https://www.orangeconnection.org/s/860/18/he-home.aspx?sid=860&gid=1&pgid=9658). In this creative and analytical essay, the student is to provide a reflection on what elements of the Centennial Homecoming may be described as religious? The student may draw from their experiences participating in the Centennial Homecoming, or other material, including reports from media sources, or perspectives learned from others (whether through an interview or informal conversation). Essay should be five pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font. Guidelines will be provided by October 15th. **Due date: November 7th.**
**Final Exam (200 points):** The Final Exam will be a comprehensive exam consisting of identifications and essays. Students will be required to write two essays from five options provided. One of the essays will be on either the Hindu or Buddhist tradition, and the other essay, will be on either the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim tradition. Study guide will be provided. **Final Exam is scheduled to take place on December 10th between 2:00–3:50pm.** Please bring an unmarked Blue Book to class on the day of the Final Exam. We will collect and redistribute the Blue Books prior to administering the Final Exam.

**Extra Credit (Reflections on Primary Source Readings | Up to 20 Points Each):** For each of the seven units, there will be a primary source reading assigned as an Extra Credit opportunity. Each reflection could be awarded up to twenty points, however, these are not free points by any stretch, indeed, I personally evaluate all extra credit reflections and generally am glad to reward 20 points when the student demonstrates strong engagement with the primary source reading, which makes it clear time was taken to read the document and reflect upon it carefully. To earn twenty points, the student should first summarize the reading and thereafter reflect upon what they learned, found interesting, significant, and what questions were generated by reading the document. The student should also cite select passages from the Primary Source Document. Each reflection should be at least two pages (and up to three), singed-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman. Each primary source document is located in a folder in the Files titled “Primary Source Documents” within our Canvas Homepage.

**Extra Credit | RSSO (Religious Studies Student Organization):** Students can earn 5 extra credit points for each Religious Studies Student Organization meeting they attend this semester. Students will be required to check in with me (Matt Pereira) in order to receive credit and must attend the entire event. Religious Studies Student Meetings are held every other Thursday night, between 6:00 –7:30 pm. The first RSSO meeting will be held on August 19th, 6:00 – 7:30 pm, location to be announced.

**Late Work Assignments:** Late work will be accepted up to one week after the due date. Late work may be penalized up to 20% prior to evaluating the work. After one week, the grade of zero (0) will be submitted for missing work. If you have issues or concerns regarding assignments, please let Trent or me know.

**Electronic Devices:** Please place all of your electronic devices, including laptops, cell phones, away and out of sight once the class has started. If you need to make a phone call or send a text, please feel free to step out of class and return when ready to be present. Points could be deducted from the attendance grade if a student is disruptive or distracting due to the use of electronics in class (I do not anticipate any issues). Thank you in advance.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>300 (50 points each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay: Bhagavad Gita (Amar Chitra Katha)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Essay: OSU Homecoming 200 points

Final Exam 200 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. To appeal any charge: 101 Whitehurst Phone (405) 744-5627 | [http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu](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/](https://sds.okstate.edu/).

**Weeks 1–2 | Studying Religions**

(AUGUST 16TH – AUGUST 27TH)

What is Religion? Methodological & Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religions

Basic Human Religion: Origins of Faith

Basic Human Religion: Patterns of Faith

**Primary Source Reading:** Jack Miles, *Religion as We Know It: An Origin Story*

**Quiz 1:** Studying Religions

**Weeks 3–4 | Hindu Traditions**

(AUGUST 30TH – SEPTEMBER 10TH)

Origins and Overview

Sacred Texts (*Vedas* and *Upanishads*)

Hindu Epics (*Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita*)

Classical Teachings

The Varna System

The Stages of Life

Schools of Theology

Rituals, Practices and Festivals
Primary Source Reading: *The Bhagavad Gita*

**Quiz 2: Hindu Traditions**

**WEEKS 5–6 | BUDDHIST TRADITIONS** *(SEPTEMBER 13TH–SEPTEMBER 24TH)*

- Overview & Origins
- The First Gem (The Buddha)
- The Second Gem (Dharma)
- The Sacred Texts
- The Third Gem (The Sangha)
- Theravada (First Vehicle)
- Mahayana (Second Vehicle)
- Vajrayana (Third Vehicle)

Primary Source Reading: Dalai Lama, “The Source of Happiness,” in *The Art of Happiness*

**Quiz 3: Buddhist Traditions**

**WEEKS 7–8 | JEWISH TRADITIONS** *(SEPTEMBER 27TH–OCTOBER 8TH)*

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

The Haskalah and Modern 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**

Due by October 1: Essay: Bhagavad Gita (Amar Chitra Katha)
Primary Source Reading: The Martyrdom of Perpetua

Quiz 5: Christian Traditions

Primary Source Reading: Selections from the Sufi (Mystical) Tradition

Quiz 6: Muslim Traditions

Due on November 7th: Essay on What is Religious about the OSU Centennial Homecoming?
Weeks 15 | No Classes | Student Fall Break and University Holiday (November 21st – 26th)

Weeks 16 | New Religious Movements [Pre-Finals Exam Week] (November 29th – December 3rd)

New Religions, Sects & Cults

New Religions (Eastern traditions)

New Religions (Abrahamic Religions)

Wicca, Raëlians, Scientology

The New Age Movement

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

Final: December 10th, 2:00–3:50 pm

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.