Introduction to World Religions

Syllabus

About the Instructor

Instructor: Adam Soltani
Office: 263 Social Sciences & Humanities Building
Office hours: By appointment only
Contact information:
For fastest response call or text on my cell. If no immediate response is needed, you can reach me by email.
(c) 405-248-5853
(e) adam.soltani@okstate.edu

About the Course

Class meeting days and times: Tuesday and Thursday 1:30 pm - 2:45 pm
Class location: Morrill Hall 206
Required texts and materials:


Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Course description:
The purpose of this course is to study major world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with a view to understanding the general nature of religion and its various dimensions.

Learning outcomes:
Upon successfully completing this course, the following outcomes will have been met:

1. Students will be able to identify the varied religions of the world and how they are similar, different, and interconnected.
2. Students will be able to understand the chronology of religions and their evolution over time.
3. Students will have an overview of ongoing challenges of coexistence amongst religions in the world throughout history.
4. Students will improve upon their interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion by asking a range of questions across the theological, economic, racial, gendered, political and cultural spheres.
5. Students will have improved upon their analytical writing and research skills.
6. Students, in writing and class discussions, will learn how to critically engage in discussions as it relates to religion.
7. Students will practice developing their own sense of critical self-awareness as the evaluator of religious traditions.

**Structure and Method of the Course:**

In this course, we will connect to the key themes and issues discussed in the textbook by engaging additional content and media. This course will be a mixture of lectures with small and large group discussions.

**Grading**

**Course expectations and the final course grade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>3/3/2022</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Reflection Paper</td>
<td>3/29/2022</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam Paper</td>
<td>5/5/2022</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**Attendance and Participation (15%)**: Attendance is mandatory. With the proper documentation, absences will be excused for school related activities, illness, and/or COVID positive exposure or test. Students will be expected to participate in classroom discussions on topics related to world religions.

**Weekly Quizzes (20%)**: There will be weekly quizzes posted to Canvas that will cover assigned readings and handouts.

**Midterm Exam (25%)**: The mid-term is multiple choice, true or false, short answer, and essay. The assessment covers all the material discussed with the class and the textbook prior to the day of the exam, which is scheduled to take place on March 3rd.

**Cultural Reflection Paper (15%)**: See details in the Cultural Reflection Paper portion of the syllabus.

**Final Exam (25%)**: See details in the Final Exam Essay portion of the syllabus.
Course Policies

Attendance: You will be expected to attend class sessions and engage in classroom discussion. Attendance is a part of your final grade and you will not be able to succeed in this course without attending class or alternatively engaging in Canvas and keeping in touch with the instructor on a regular basis. If you cannot attend in-person, you may attend virtually for attendance credit, however please get instructor approval first.

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.

Use of electronic devices in class: In order to cultivate an engaged classroom culture, thank you for refraining from the use of your cell phone during class time. If you must use your phone, please step outside of class. Laptops and tablets will be permitted for the purpose of note taking. Negative consequences for violating this policy could include a reduction in the student’s grade.

Late Work: Late work will not be accepted past the due date unless prior approval has been given by the instructor for extenuating circumstances.

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities will be discussed in class and details posted to Canvas.

Academic Integrity: OSU is committed to maintain 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 violate academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, 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 notion of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript, and being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal the charge. 101 Whitehurst | Phone: (405) 744-5627 | Website: http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu

Students with 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 | Phone: (405) 744 – 7116 | Website: https://sds.okstate.edu
## Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>To Prepare for Class</th>
<th>In-Class Activities and Topics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 8 – 20</td>
<td>Introduction to course, Overview of Syllabus, Understanding Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/11 – 1/13</td>
<td>Read Zoroaster and his teachings PDF</td>
<td>Introduction to Zoroastrianism</td>
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<td>Read Establish of Mazda Worship PDF</td>
<td>Zoroastrianism in Modern Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 35 – 50, 55 – 59</td>
<td>Introduction to Indigenous Religions Traditions</td>
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<td>1/18 – 1/20</td>
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<td>Focus on Native American Traditions of North America</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 67 – 70, 73 – 87</td>
<td>Introduction to Judaism, History of Judaism in the World</td>
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<td>1/25 – 1/27</td>
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<td>The Major Branches of Judaism</td>
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<td>Read Esposito Pages 96 – 103</td>
<td>Judaism in Oklahoma</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 125 – 130, 132 – 136</td>
<td>Introduction and History of Christianity</td>
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<td>2/1 – 2/3</td>
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<td>Fundamentals of Christianity</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Read Articles Posted to Canvas</td>
<td>The Coptic Christian Tradition</td>
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<td>2/8 – 2/10</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 171 – 178</td>
<td>Modern Day Christianity in America</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>See Study Guide on Canvas</td>
<td>Review for Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>2/15 – 2/17</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 191 – 204</td>
<td>Introduction to Islam</td>
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<td>3/1 – 3/3</td>
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<td>The Five Pillars and Six Articles of Faith</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<td>3/14 – 3/18</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 245 - 249</td>
<td>The Qur’an, Hadith, and Shariah Law</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Introduction to Hinduism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Read Esposito Pages 261 - 273</td>
<td>Focus on Hindu Practices and Beliefs</td>
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<td>3/29 – 3/31</td>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Overview of Sikhism</td>
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<td>Read Esposito Pages 287 - 291</td>
<td>Overview of Jainism</td>
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<td>4/5 – 4/7</td>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Introduction to Buddhism</td>
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<td>Read Esposito Pages 342 - 355</td>
<td>Buddhism in Oklahoma</td>
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<td>4/12 – 4/14</td>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>East Asian Religions: Confucianism &amp; Daoism</td>
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<td>Will be posted to Canvas</td>
<td>East Asian Religions: Shinto</td>
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<td>4/19 – 4/21</td>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>The Bahai Faith</td>
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<td>Will be posted to Canvas</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalism</td>
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<td>4/26 – 4/28</td>
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<td>5/25</td>
<td>Final Exam Due</td>
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Cultural Reflection Paper

Description of assignment or project:

Students will visit a local Mosque and write a 1 – 2 page reflection paper on their experience and what they learn from the visit. If you are unable to attend the Mosque visit on the assigned day, contact your instructor to arrange a separate time to visit or alternative cultural experience.

In your reflection, consider the following:

- How does a Mosque compare to religious institutions you may be more familiar with (for example, a church).
- What surprised you most when you visited a Mosque?
- What are some of the highlights of your visit?
- What unanswered questions linger in your mind from the Mosque visit?

This paper must be double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman or Arial.

Due Date:

The cultural reflection paper is due on or before March 29th.

Final Exam Essay

Description of assignment or project:

Students will complete a 4 - 5 page paper on one of the following topics for the final exam. Please choose Option A, B, or C and make sure to include which option you chose.

A) Create your own religion or way of life, be creative! Use the information you have learned in class about religions of the world and construct your own from the ground up. When designing your religion (or way of life) consider the following:
   a. What will be the name.
   b. What are the core beliefs and practices.
   c. What rituals will it have including holidays.
   d. What things will be allowed, what things will be forbidden.
   e. What does the power structure look like within the religion.
   f. Can people convert to or join the religion.
   g. How will this religion interact with other religions.
   h. For help, check out this link: https://www.instructables.com/How-To-Start-Your-Own-Religion/

B) Explain one of the following religions that you have learned about in class to an alien. You can choose from the following: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism. Imagine an alien crash landed on earth and wants to learn more about one of the major
belief systems. This alien knows absolutely nothing about religion in general, let alone the specific religion you choose to explain to them. Give a comprehensive overview and explanation of the religion you choose, from the list provided, in such a way that would leave no questions unanswered. When writing your explanation, consider the following:

- The name of your religion.
- The core beliefs and practices.
- The rituals and holidays.
- The followers of the religion and what they look like (their cultural, racial, and/or ethnic background).
- Things that are allowed and things that are forbidden in the religion.
- The hierarchical or power structure in your religion.
- How can people convert or join your religion, if they can at all.
- And more… be creative!

C) **Three religious leaders or notable figures in history go out to a meal.** Pick any three notable religious leaders or figures in history and give a detailed description of what it would be like for them to have a meal together. Examples of religious leaders and/or figures you could choose from: Abraham, Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Mother Theresa, Malcolm X, etc. *Be creative with the individuals you decide to choose from, and ensure that they are not all from the same religions tradition.*

When writing your description and overview of their meeting, consider to following:

- Who are the figures, what religious tradition are they from, and why did you choose them.
- Where did they go to eat and why.
- What did they order to eat and why (consider dietary restrictions).
- What did they talk about or discuss over dinner.
- Where there any major disagreements.
- What things did they find in common with one another.
- What faith-based perspectives do they have on current events in our world today such as the COVID pandemic, police brutality, politics, etc.
- What faith-based perspectives do they have on modern-day challenges such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobic, the military-industrial complex, poverty, the welfare system, access to healthcare, etc.
- What advice to they have for humanity.

Use your course textbooks and in-class presentations as a foundation for your understanding of the topic. This topic will require further research on the topic. If you struggle with approaching the topic, reach out to your instructor for assistance.

**The paper will consist of the following:**

- Cover Page
- 4 - 5 page written paper to be completed in MLA or APA format. Font must be double-spaced, 12 pt, Times New Roman or Arial.
- Reference Page including a minimum of 4 references, one of which can be your textbook.
Due Date:

The entire paper including the cover page, paper, and references is due no later than May 5th.

Grading criteria:

Your paper will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Did you cover the topic?
- Did you follow the proper format?
- Did you include the appropriate number of references?

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus:

If necessary, the syllabus and its contents are subject to revision. Students will be held responsible for any changes or modifications distributed in class time, or communicated by an email correspondence, or on Canvas. Usually, all three of these mediums will be employed to communicate any changes.