Introduction to World Religions  [REL 1103.29209]  |  Spring 2021

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Days and Time: M, W, F 12:30 – 1:15 pm
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Course Description: This survey course begins with an introduction to the field of Religious Studies, which as an interdisciplinary academic endeavor, continues to encourage and invites analysis, questions and exploration from multiple perspectives, commitments and cultural locations. From the wide range of beliefs, practices, customs, rituals to politics, science, economics, the arts, bodies, language and popular culture, indeed, just about all aspects of life are inflected by what may be called the religious. On the one hand, religious traditions and actors who have competed against scientific, political and other spheres of authority and influence; whereas, on the other hand, religious communities and their leaders have cooperated and developed alongside each of the above and other networks of discourse. Following an overview of the nature of religion and its academic study, we will be introduced to five of the major world religions in the following sequential 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 religious traditions emerged, then transitions to an overview of the sacred writings, teachings, rituals and practices within and across the given religious tradition. In this introductory course, we will evaluate how religious traditions established (and are establishing) ways of belonging, believing and becoming related to the sacred and profane, the divine and humane, the transcendent and immanent. We will conclude this survey course with an introduction to New Religious Movements that focuses on The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints and The Nation of Islam. Recognizing that religious traditions continue to diversify as they are proliferated across channels of transmission, we will seek to evaluate how religious traditions are colored and textured by, within and through historical and cultural contexts. The underlying goal of this course will be to encourage practicing the interrelated disciplines of listening, reading, writing, synthesizing and acquiring 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 and Discussion Questions (50 points each; 100 points): Attendance and Discussion Questions (to be posted on Canvas) will be both weighed equally (50 points each) when considering this part of the evaluation and overall grade. Generally, OSU would like to encourage students to attend class in person, it surely is a better educational experience, however, I will make an attempt made to record lectures for those students who miss class.

You will be asked to locate our class on I-clicker and mark yourself as present at the start of each class once we begin our time together. [https://www.iclicker.com/](https://www.iclicker.com/) If you have not signed up, follow the instructions to do so, and then search for our course: Introduction to World Religions, and/or search for my last name: Pereira. Make certain to enroll for the correct class number and time as well: REL 1103.29209. Note: if you have issues marking yourself present, please let me or Christopher Tucker know within 48 hours of the class where the issue occurred, and we will rectify the issue. After 48 hours from the given class, the one point will be considered lost.
Grade Breakdown for Attendance will be as follows: each unexcused absence (generally excused absences are provided for university related events) will lead to a 1 point reduction from the 50 possible points available, so if a student missed 3 classes, the student would be rewarded 47 points for attendance.

Discussion Questions will focus on the five major world religions covered in the course, e.g., Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions, etc. Each response should address the question(s) provided. Each response should be 1–3 paragraphs long. Each discussion question will be evaluated from 1 – 10 points. Discussion responses that show a solid engagement the provided prompt(s) will receive 9 – 10 points, then those responses that could have used more care will be marked down accordingly.

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 of false; and/or essay and reflections. The quizzes will focus on the identifications and the primary source readings for each of the units. The quizzes will be provided on Canvas.

Interpretive Essay (200 points): In this analytical essay, students will integrate two or more secondary sources in the process of writing an interpretive essay on The Martyrdom of Perpetua, an early second century martyrology from the Christian tradition.

2 Exams (200 points each; 400 points total): The Mid-Term Exam will cover the following units: Studying Religion; Hindu traditions; Buddhist traditions. The Final Exam covers the following: Jewish traditions; Christian traditions; Muslim traditions; and New Religious Movements.

Extra Credit (Reflections on Primary Source Readings | up to 10 points each): For each of the seven units, there will be one primary source reading assigned. Excluding The Martyrdom of Perpetua (= assigned in the Christian traditions), students may write reflections on the primary source readings assigned (see below). Each reflection will be awarded up to ten points, depending on the quality of the writing and demonstration of a clear understanding of the primary source reading. To earn the full ten points, the student 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. Each of these reflections should be 1–2 pages, single-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman.

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

COVID-19 Rules and Guidelines: The following list of guidelines, which have been established by OSU (with a couple extra notes provided by myself), will be followed throughout this course:

Mandatory Mask Wearing in Classroom: Students are expected to wear masks at all times while in the classroom. Likewise, the instructor is expected to wear a mask or face shields or both in classrooms, labs
and studio spaces. Please do not attend class if you are unable or unwilling to wear a mask at all times. I greatly appreciate your cooperation.

**Social Distance Meetings between Students and Instructor:** Rather than meeting in person, please reach out to me via zoom, email, facetime, or another medium, during office hours, or by appointment.

**Recording Lectures and Course Materials Online:** As long as the technology is working correctly, an effort will be made to record the lectures via zoom. All the course materials (outside of the textbook) will be provided on Canvas.

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

- Attendance and Discussion: 100 points (50 Points each)
- Quizzes: 300 points (50 points each)
- Interpretive Essay: 200 points
- Mid-Term Exam: 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** (January 20th – January 29th)

- 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 (February 1st – February 12th)

Origins and Overview

Sacred Texts (*Vedas* and *Upanishads*)

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

Classical Teachings

The Varna System

The Stages of Life

Schools and Communities of Theology

Rituals, Practices and Festivals

**Primary Source Reading:** The *Ramayana*

Quiz 2: Hindu Traditions

Weeks 5–6 | Buddhist Traditions (February 15th – February 26th)

Overview & Origins

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, Rituals & Practices

**Primary Source Reading:** Dalai Lama, “The Source of Happiness,” in *The Art of Happiness*
Quiz 3: Buddhist Traditions

Midterm Exam: Studying Religions, Hindu Traditions, Buddhist Traditions

Weeks 7–8 | Jewish Traditions (March 1st – March 12th)

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

Weeks 9–10 | Christian Traditions (March 15th – April 2nd)

Origins & Overview

New Testament & Early Church

Monasticism

Medieval Christianity

The European Reformation

Roman Catholicism

Eastern Orthodoxy

Liberation Christianities
Global Christianities

**Primary Source Reading:** *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* (excerpts)

**Quiz 5:** Christian Traditions

**Weeks 11–12 | Muslim Traditions** (April 5th – April 23rd)

- Origins and Overview
- The Qur’an
- Muhammad and the Hadith
- The Five Pillars
- Sharia (Islamic Law)
- Sunnis and Shi’ites
- Philosophy and Science
- Sufism

Art and Architecture

Islam in the Contemporary World

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

**Quiz 6:** Muslim Traditions

**Weeks 13–14 | New Religious Movements** (April 26th – April 30th)

- 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 Exam:** Jewish, Christian, Muslim Traditions
Final Grades Due: May 14th

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.

Note: February 3rd is a designated Wellness Day, which means there will be no class or assignments on that day (or the day before and the day after as well).