**INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS [REL 1103.29952] | WEB SPRING 2023**

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Days and Time: M, W, F 11:30 – 12:20 pm
Location: SSH 035
Office Hours: SSH 160; W & F: 2:30–3:15 PM; TH 3:00-4:30, or by appointment:
Zoom Address: https://zoom.us/j/8690502942
Zoom ID: 869 050 2942

**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 in lectures. For the purpose of evaluation, students will respond to discussion questions, complete six quizzes, one analytical essay, and a final exam.

COMPUTER REQUIREMENT: Students must have access to a desktop or laptop computer, equipped with an internet browser, and connectivity, in order 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 (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.
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: Martyrdom of Perpetua (250 Points):** Students are invited to write an analytical essay that draws from at least one secondary (scholarly) source, to be provided by the instructor, on the Martyrdom of Perpetua. This essay should be no less than five complete pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font. Guidelines will be provided at least two weeks before the due date of the essay. **Due Date:** April 10th, 2023

**Final Exam (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. **Due date:** May 12th, 2023

**Extra Credit (Reflections on Primary Source Readings | up to 20 points each):** For each unit except the first one on Studying Religions, there will be a primary source reading provided as an Extra Credit opportunity. Each reflection could be awarded up to twenty points, however, please note these are not free points, indeed, I intend to personally evaluate all extra credit reflections and am glad to reward 20 points when the student demonstrates strong engagement with the primary source reading. Lesser points will be rewarded if there is a lack of strong engagement. 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 no more than three pages), single-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 (Attendance at Religious Studies Student Organization Meetings; 10 Points Each Meeting):** There will be Religious Studies Student Organization (RSSO) meetings convened throughout the semester (dates and location to be announced on our Canvas course page). Students must sign in to the meeting (a sheet will be provided) in order to receive the ten points extra credit. Announcements will be made throughout the semester with details regarding the topic and meeting place for each meeting. Here is the OSU link for RSSO: [https://campuslink.okstate.edu/organization/rsso](https://campuslink.okstate.edu/organization/rsso)

**Extra Credit (1–2 Page Reflections on Public Lectures in Religious Studies; up to 20 points):** Up to 20 points extra credit could be earned by attending and then writing a 1–2 page reflection(s) on the invited public lectures sponsored by the Religious Studies program. More details will be provided as the dates and locations of the public lectures become solidified throughout the semester.

**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, zero (0) grade will be submitted for all missing work. If you have any issues or concerns regarding assignments, please reach out to myself and/or Trent and Chris. We will do our best to support each of you throughout the semester, but it is important, that you remain in contact with us if any issues arise. Thank you.
DISTRIBUTION OF THE GRADED POINTS (COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION):

- Discussion Posts: 200 points
- Quizzes: 300 points (50 points each)
- Essay: Martyrdom of Perpetua: 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. To appeal any charge: 101 Whitehurst Phone (405) 744-5627 | 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 (JANUARY 18TH – JANUARY 27TH)

- What is Religion? Methodological & Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religions
- Basic Human Religion: Origins of Faith
- Basic Human Religion: Patterns of Faith
- Why Are People Religious?

Quiz 1: Studying Religions
Weeks 3–4 | Hindu Traditions

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

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**

(February 27th – March 10th)

Overview & Origins

The Hebrew Bible

The Second Temple Period

Rabbinical Judaism

Jewish Life under Christianity and Islam

Haskalah and 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

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**Week 9: Spring Break, 3/13–3/17**

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**Weeks 10–12 | Christian Tradition**

(March 20th – April 7th)

Origins & Overview

New Testament & Early Church

Monasticism

Medieval Christianity

The European Reformation

Roman Catholicism

Eastern Orthodoxy

Christianity in Colonial America

Primary Source Reading: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*

Quiz 5: Christian Traditions
WEEKS 13–14 | MUSLIM TRADITIONS

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

Islam in the Contemporary World

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

Quiz 6: Muslim Traditions

Due: April 10th: Essay on the Martyrdom of Perpetua

WEEK 15 | NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

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

Due: November 28th: Essay on the Martyrdom of Perpetua

WEEK 16 | PRE-FINALS WEEK

TBD (Open space for if time is needed to catch up on the last couple of lectures on New Religious Movements)

WEEK 17 | FINALS WEEK

(MAY 1ST – MAY 12TH)
Tentative Nature of Course 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.