REL 1103-30232: Introduction to World Religions
Instructor: Dr. Ryan M. Armstrong

Email: ryan.armstrong@okstate.edu
Office: 269 SSH
(405) 744-9243
Class time: Tues/Thurs noon–1:15pm; CLB 319
Office Hour: Mon 1:30-2pm
T.A.’s:
Ellyn Brashear (ellyn.brashear@okstate.edu)
Harrison Gimpell (harrison.w.gimpel@okstate.edu)
Liv Rice (liv.rice@okstate.edu)

Course Description: This course is designed as an introduction for students interested in the academic study of religion and wish to build an understanding of major Eastern and Western religious traditions. The method employed by this course will entail engagement with a mix of direct sources and scholarly analysis. Attention will be given to the basic teachings and practices of religious traditions as well as to the historical, geographical, social, and political settings in which they have arisen and developed. As much as possible, the course will attempt to understand religions academically, as social-historical phenomena, without promoting or rejecting any particular religious or non-religious viewpoints.

Note: The syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Goals: This is not a course on theology. The goal of this course is to better understand people—in particular, their beliefs, traditions, and behaviors, as they shape and are shaped by religions and religious systems. At the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Identify key aspects of various religious traditions and their interactions with social and political environments.
2. Engage critically with primary texts and secondary scholarship on religions of the world.
3. Place themselves within the context of the diversity of religious life both in the US and around the world.
4. Critically assess religious beliefs and perspectives.

Required Texts:
Additional Selected Readings will be made available on Canvas or online.

Course Requirements:
Attendance and In-Class Participation, 20%: This is a course about understanding different kinds of people. Let’s come to class and learn from each other. You may miss 3 classes in a semester with no questions asked, including sick days. You are still responsible for any information and announcements missed during class time.

Weekly Reading and Discussion Forum, 20%: Each week, students are responsible for reading the assigned material and posting a question, comment, or reply (100-200 words) and at least two additional replies to someone else’s post (50-150 words) from the previous week. Discussion will focus
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on the weekly reading. Please make posts and responses thoughtful and intellectual, not emotional or inflammatory. Also be sensitive to other students and refrain from offensive posts. Note: the instructor reserves the right to give pop quizzes if posts are not reflecting thoughtful engagement with the reading material. Posts and replies should be uploaded before noon every Tuesday. At the end of the semester, the student should have posted/replied at least 39 times regarding reading assignments.

Site Visit and Personal Reflection Essay, 20%: On April 6 at noon, we will meet at the Mosque on campus (616 N Washington St, Stillwater) together as a class. Afterward, students are to write a reflection essay of 900–1,500 words (12pt Calibri font, double spaced, 1” margins). Any student unable to attend on April 6 must make alternative arrangements with the professor at least one week in advance or receive a 50% deduction. The essay is due before class on April 28. It should be a cohesive essay centered on your primary takeaway from the visit. For grading, see the rubric below. Along the way, try to address the following questions:

- What sets a Mosque apart from other religious sites?
- What feelings were invoked in you by the art and architecture of the Mosque? What thoughts does the Mosque inspire about God or community?
- In what ways is the Mosque influenced by American culture, or differs from mainstream American culture? How does this compare to institutions with which you’re most familiar?
- What surprised you from your visit?
- What were some highlights from your visit?
- In what ways did your visit reinforce or contradict the course’s reading materials and lectures?
- What questions do you have as you reflect on your visit?

Two Exams, 40%: Exams will cover material from the lectures. They will be available on Canvas for 24 hours, from 12am-11:59pm. Once you begin an exam, you will have one hour to complete it. If you require accommodations, please contact me or the TAs two weeks in advance. The first exam is March 23, covering Ancient, Indigenous American, African, Indian, Chinese, and Jewish religious traditions. The final exam is on May 9 and will cover everything in the entire semester, but it will primarily focus on Christianity, Islam, New Religious Movements, Science and Religion, and Atheism. If you miss an exam, you will have five days to make it up, each day with a 20% reduction in your grade. You cannot make up a missed exam after five days.
# Introduction to World Religions

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## Grading Rubric for Reflection Essay

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Reflection Essay for REL 1103: World Religions Dr. Ryan M. Armstrong</th>
<th>OSU Fall 2022</th>
<th>Text:</th>
<th>Overall Grade: Average score from each category: A, B, C, D, F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITERIA</strong></td>
<td><strong>C or below</strong></td>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td><strong>GRADE FOR EACH CATEGORY</strong></td>
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<td>a) Writing Style: Presented in an organized fashion, progression of thought, concepts are fully explained</td>
<td>Difficult to follow. Little to no preparation was put into method of communicating. Either exceeds or falls far under the word requirements (900–1500). Careless errors were made in spelling, syntax, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Articulately communicated and easy to follow. Very few concepts remain unclear. Falls within the word requirements (900–1500). Effort was made to stick to form without mechanical errors in spelling and syntax.</td>
<td>Clear progression of thought with good explanations of ideas. There is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Easy to understand. Falls within the word requirements (900–1500). Writing is articulate with no mechanical mistakes.</td>
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<td>b) Observations</td>
<td>It is clear the student did not visit the Mosque or paid little attention. Very little effort was made to remember what was learned or discussed at the Mosque.</td>
<td>The paper demonstrates a high retention from discussing and observations made at the Mosque. Some details make their way into the paper.</td>
<td>The paper demonstrates a detailed retention from discussions and observations made at the Mosque. Many details are referenced in the paper, and it is clear that the student was engaged during the visit.</td>
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<td>c) Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>The paper offers little thought about the student’s experience at the Mosque. The student simply regurgitates information from elsewhere and has very little to say that is original.</td>
<td>The paper offers some original thought about the student’s experience at the Mosque. The student’s own voice comes through, and the student has reflected heavily on the visit.</td>
<td>The paper is steeped in a thoughtful reflection of the student’s experience at the Mosque. The paper contributes interesting questions and comments on the experience that demonstrate deep contemplation of the experience.</td>
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<td>d) Prompts from the Syllabus:</td>
<td>Little or no effort was made to address the questions in the syllabus.</td>
<td>Care is taken to address some of the questions in the syllabus.</td>
<td>Excellent use of the prompt from the syllabus to think through the visit to the Mosque.</td>
<td>-What sets a Mosque apart? -What feelings were invoked in you by the art and architecture of the Mosque? What thoughts does the Mosque inspire about God or community? -In what ways is the Mosque influenced by American culture, or differs from mainstream American culture? How does this compare to institutions with which you’re most familiar? -What surprised you? -What were some highlights? -In what ways did your visit reinforce or contradict the course’s reading materials and lectures? -What lingering questions do you have?</td>
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**Reading Schedule**

Selections from texts other than *IWR* will be made available on Canvas.

**Week of Jan 16.** Introduction, Methodology, Definitions

**Week of Jan 23.** What is the academic Study of Religion?  
**Reading assignment:** Sam Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion”; *IWR* 2–30

**Week of Jan 30.** Religion in Antiquity  
**Reading assignment:** Enuma Elish

**Week of Feb 6.** Indigenous and North American and African Religious Traditions  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 32–98

**Week of Feb 13.** Hinduism and Buddhism  
**Reading assignment:** Katha Upanishad; *IWR* 101–108; 139–152; 189–202

**Week of Feb 20.** Chinese Religions (Confucianism and Daoism)  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 266–317; *Analects* Book I and *Dao De Jing* 1–13

**Week of Feb 27.** Judaism  
**Reading assignment:** Exodus 4–20, *Brief History of the Jewish Community in Stillwater, OK*

**Week of March 6.** Judaism, Continued  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 383–439

**Week of March 13: Spring Break**

**March 21. Midterm Review** (optional attendance)  
**March 23. Exam 1** (on Canvas)

**Week of March 20.** Christianity  
**Reading assignment:** The Gospel of Mark 1–8, 15–16

**Week of March 27.** Christianity, Continued  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 444–502

**Week of April 3.** Islam  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 504–566; Qur’an: Sūrah 38, Ṣād

**April 6. Mosque Visit.**

**Week of April 10.** New Religious Movements: Keep America Interesting  
**Reading assignment:** *IWR* 568–612
Week of April 17. Science and Religion, Atheism and Religious Atheists
Mosque Visit Reflection Essay Due before class April 27.
Reading Assignment: Galileo Galilei’s Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany (1615)

Week of May 1. Reflections and Final Review
Discussion posts are welcome, but not required. Post missed discussions by May 1 for ½ credit! Email the TA’s if you submit late posts.

May 9: Final Exam will be available to take on Canvas 12am-11:59pm.

Additional Policies

Late Submissions: 20% will be deducted for each day that an assignment is turned in after the deadline. Papers more than 5 days late will receive a 0. Don’t let this happen to you! An exception will be made for discussion posts, which will be accepted any time before May 1 for 50% credit if you email the TAs after submitting it late. You may not take an exam after the deadline—so mark them in your calendars right now.

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  |  (405) 744-5627|  http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu

**Students with Physical or Learning Disabilities**: If you need special accommodations the University will make appropriate arrangements. These arrangements will need to be made ahead of time through the Student Disability Services Office, and then set up with me and the TAs: 315 Student Union | (405) 744–7116|  https://sds.okstate.edu/

**Equal Opportunity**: 409 General Academic Building/405-744-7607  
https://1is2many.okstate.edu/  
OSU is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, age or protected veteran status. OSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its educational programs and activities. Examples of sexual misconduct and/or sex discrimination include: sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic and intimate partner violence, stalking, or gender-based discrimination. Please conduct yourselves in a way that is welcoming to each other. We want each of you to be respected and listened to.