Course Description

This course is an introductory exploration of a diversity of religious traditions and the meaning of religion.

To narrow our focus in such a large field, we will look primarily at world religions in a contemporary American context - though we will also be exploring the historical and global dimensions of these traditions. Religion (and how we understand and define what religion is and what it means) plays a crucial role in modern America. Whether one is religious or not, the wide diversity of religious traditions, practices and perspectives that exist in America are actively and continuously shaping both the country as a whole and our individual lives. Because of this fact, it is essential that 1) we think critically about religion and that 2) we attempt to broaden and deepen our understanding of the great diversity of religious views and practices in our world and in our nation.

Though we will endeavor to gain a rudimentary understanding of the history, practices, and tenets of a wide range of traditions, none of the traditions we touch upon will be covered comprehensively - nor could they be in such a limited space or time! Perhaps many of you signed up for this course envisioning that it would entail a tidy categorization of six to ten religious groups, each allotted a week or two for study - i.e., a week on Hinduism, a week on Judaism - and memorizing sheets of vocabulary terms or lists of condensed beliefs. Here is fair warning - that is not what we will be doing in this class.

Instead, we will approach the subject of world religions in America through three material lenses: food, the arts, and architecture/landscape. For each lens, we will take three or four weeks to look at a variety of case studies which highlight various issues in different traditions.
Course Goals and Objectives

As a class we will be continuously engaged in:

- critically examining what religion means, both on group and individual levels
- exploring the diversity of religious expression and experience, particularly as evidenced in the American context
- investigating the inevitable interweaving of religion with other aspects of life, including geography, politics, economics, technology, and the arts
- familiarizing ourselves with basic vocabulary and concepts that will aid us in studying a broad range of religious traditions and orientations context

Our ongoing questions and concerns will be:

- What is "religion" and why study it?
- How do different definitions or understandings of religion impact people's lives?
- What does a multiplicity of religious and cultural orientations mean in the American context?
- How do individuals and groups create and sustain a religious identity in America?
- What is the relationship between religion and other aspects of life and culture?

Course Texts and Resources

- Texts available in the University Bookstore or online
- Blackboard – You MUST check Blackboard regularly. I will use Blackboard to post all of the case study readings and to post paper topics and announcements

NOTE ON READINGS IN CLASS: Typically you will not be required to bring the Markham text to class (I will let you know in advance if I would like you to have it with you the next week). You will not ever be expected to have the Hammond Atlas with you, but you will be expected to use it as a resource for papers and class discussions. **You must always have access to the Blackboard readings.** Either you can print them out and bring a hard copy or you may bring your laptop and access them electronically. If too many students seem to be abusing the laptop privilege, I will be forced to prohibit the use of laptops and require that all students bring hard copies of all readings to class each week.

Course Expectations and Requirements

I expect to learn a great deal from you and with you over the course of our semester together. I am starting from the assumption that each of you deserves the respect of myself and your fellow students – do not abuse that respect. This course is going to be challenging, but not unreasonably so. Each and every one of you can succeed if you are willing to put forth the effort.

In this class, you will begin the semester with zero points and work to earn points through attendance, participation in class activities and discussions, quizzes, and papers. There will be a total of 112 points available throughout the semester, but in order to earn an A for the course, you need only earn 93 points, as per a typical grading scale. Thus, you will be able to make choices about where and how to focus your energies.
The grading system will be as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A:</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<td>A-:</td>
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<td>D:</td>
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<td>&lt;60</td>
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Points will be possible from the following sources:

**Participation (14 class periods, up to 3 points each):**
In this class, I will not be taking formal attendance (though I will call roll for the first two or three class sessions to make sure I know everyone’s name). Rather, you will have the opportunity to earn up to 3 participation points during each class period. These points come through various means, such as (but not limited to) participation in games, discussions, creative projects, and debates. At the beginning of each class I will let you know how you can earn the points for that day.

Successful participation requires that you keep up with the readings, listen attentively during lectures, and join in class discussions. You will have plenty of opportunities for speaking up and sharing your views, insights, and questions. When you do so, you should always maintain a respectful, thoughtful manner. Religion can be a sensitive and controversial topic. You are welcome to hold whatever views you like, but you MUST grant others the right to do so as well. Remember this is not a Sunday school or theology class; we are not trying to prove or disprove any big “Truths” but rather explore the meanings and effects of religion in our contemporary world.

As our class is three hours long, during each class we will have a break that will afford you the opportunity to stretch your legs, use the bathroom, or catch up on your missed calls. Please do not come in and out of class at other times. **Texting is NEVER allowed in class.** If I see you texting, I will ask you to leave class and you will lose participation points for that day. If you miss one of the opportunities for participation points because you arrive in class late or leave class early, you will not be allowed to make up those points.

I understand that sometimes life gets in the way of school. Accordingly, you will each be granted one flex day – an absence that will count as 3 points. This means that once during the semester you can miss class but still earn the points for that day. You may miss class for any reason: religious holidays, athletics absences, sick days, personal days, your car broke down, etc. The only requirement is that you contact me BEFORE class time letting me know that you will be taking your flex day that week.

Participation points for class periods when you are absent can only be made up in cases of the death of a family member or a medical emergency. You must provide documentation for both.

**Reading Quizzes (6 throughout the semester; up to 5 points each):**
Throughout the semester I will give a few short quizzes meant to help ensure that you stay on top of the reading and familiar with key terms. Though the course is not focused exclusively on memorizing names, facts and figures, knowledge of at least a few basic facts is invaluable in being able to discuss religion articulately.

Missed quizzes can only be made up in cases of the death of a family member or a medical emergency OR in cases of school-related absences (such as athletics, mock trial, drama, etc). You must provide documentation in any of these cases.
Introductory Reflection Paper (Once in the semester, up to 5 points):
For the third week of class, you will be assigned a short reflection paper (2-3 pages in length). This paper is designed to give me a sense of your writing and you a sense of my grading. I will discuss the topic during the second week.

Connection Papers (3 throughout the semester; up to 10 points each):
You will each be responsible for three papers throughout the semester, one for each thematic section of the course. Each paper must be 4-5 pages in length. The assignments for each paper will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class at least one week before the due date. Each paper is worth ten points – taken together, as you might notice, they can make up a third of your grade for the course. I hope that over the course of the semester every one of you can see your writing abilities improve. If I do see significant improvement throughout the term, I will take that into account as I am calculating the final grades.

Food & Identity Assignment (Once in the semester; up to 5 points):
A special assignment related to the section on food and religion will be due in the twelfth week of class. For this assignment, you will need to choose a food that has significance in your own cultural-religious heritage. You will then 1) write a short essay (2-3 pages in length) describing why you chose the food you did and what it means to you personally (formatting as with connection papers!), 2) bring a small amount of food to class to share, and 3) give a short verbal presentation about your chosen food to the class.

Be creative – but please do not bring anything that might be offensive to other students or to a particular religious tradition.

Notes on Submission and Formatting for all written work:
You may email papers as a Word attachment, but if I do not receive it before class on Monday, whether cyberspace eats your paper or not, I will not accept it as being on time. I would advise giving me a paper copy at the beginning of class in order to be safe. Late papers will be accepted for up to 24 hours past their due date. After that point I will not accept them. Late papers will automatically receive a penalty of 1 full point.

Formatting for initial reflection paper: Each paper should be 1.5 or double-spaced, 11-12 pt. Times New Roman font OR 12-13 pt Garamond font, 1 inch margins. I am very serious about the formatting and I will notice if you turn in a 2 page paper with 1.25 margins and 14 pt font or 3 pages of 1.25 spaced 10 pt. font. Any paper that fails to meet the basic formatting requirements will receive a 1 point penalty.

During the second week of class, we will have a writing workshop wherein I will go over guidelines and grading rubrics in detail. This workshop is required; if you miss class that day, you will need to contact me and set up a time to meet, either during my office hours or at another time.
THREE FINAL NOTES:

On Plagiarism:
I take plagiarism extremely seriously. Under no circumstances is it acceptable for you to copy work from another student, a book, or the internet without properly citing your sources. If you do not know how to properly cite quotes and references, come to see me. I will also be going over some basic rules in class. If I catch you cheating, you will fail this class and you will be subject to disciplinary consequences from the university (refer to your student handbook for the university’s policy on plagiarism). There should be no reason for this to ever even become an issue, since all of you are capable of doing creative, quality work without resorting to dishonest means.

On Wikipedia and Internet Sources:
The Internet is a fantastic resource and we will be making use of many online sources throughout the semester. However, you must always be very cautious about the sources you find online. Some are more reputable than others. Before using a site as a source in an academic paper, you should always examine the content and origin of the site critically.

NEVER USE WIKIPEDIA AS A CITED SOURCE FOR A PAPER.

For Students with Disabilities and/or Chronic Illness:
Some students experience physical or learning disabilities that might make some aspects of this course more difficult. Others have chronic illnesses which could similarly affect their performance. If you are a student with a documented disability or chronic illness, please contact the Office of Disability Services (http://disabilityservices.syr.edu) to discuss your needs and how the university can help accommodate them. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and are generally not provided retroactively, contact ODS as soon as possible. In addition to contacting ODS, please also see me as soon as possible to let me know of your situation. I am more than happy to work with you and ODS.

Course Schedule
NOTE: The readings listed for a given class period should be completed for that day. Each article should be read in its entirety unless otherwise noted.

I. RELIGION?

WEEK ONE (August 30)
Introductions and Conundrums

SEPTEMBER 6: NO CLASS - LABOR DAY

WEEK TWO (September 13)
Religion in America; Religion in the Palm of Your Hand

Diana Eck
“Introduction to a New America” pages 1-11
Stephen Prothero
“Separate Truths”
Colleen McDannell,
“Interpreting Things: Material Culture Studies and American Religion”
Monday, September 20: Financial Drop Deadline

WEEK THREE (September 20)
Many Trees, Many Branches: A Short History of World Religions

- Introductory reflection paper due
- Selections from *A World Religions Reader* and the Hammond Atlas (No one will be reading ALL of the selections below. You will be assigned sections of this reading in class during week two.) – NOTE: Today you MUST bring the Hammond Atlas to class with you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Abrahamic&quot; Religion</th>
<th><em>A World Religions Reader</em></th>
<th>Hammond Atlas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>(Chapter 9) 164-175, 181-188</td>
<td>100-101, 168-173, 250-255</td>
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<td>Islam</td>
<td>(Chapter 11) 214-215, 219-224, 233-234</td>
<td>192-203</td>
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<td>Mormonism</td>
<td>(Chapter 13) 262-266, 270</td>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>(Chapter 3) 32-33, 36-37, 51-54, 64-65</td>
<td>136-137</td>
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<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>(Chapter 5) 78, 85-87, 91, 98-101</td>
<td>142-149</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daoism &amp; Confucianism</td>
<td>(Chapter 6) 106-107, 110-111, 114-116, 128-129</td>
<td>156-157, 162-163</td>
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<td>Shintoism</td>
<td>(Chapter 7) 132-138, 147-151</td>
<td>164-165</td>
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<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>(Chapter 12) 238, 250-253, 258-259</td>
<td>152-155</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous Religions</td>
<td>(Chapter 2) 14-17, 21-22, 24-28</td>
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II. ARCHITECTURE/LANDSCAPE

WEEK FOUR (September 27)
Brick by Brick (If You Build it, They Will Come)

- Jeanne Halgren Kilde
  "Reading Megachurches: Investigating the Religious and Cultural Work of Church Architecture"
- Joanne Punzo Waghorne
  "Spaces for a New Public Presence: The Sri Siva Vishnu and Murugan Temples in Metropolitan Washington, D.C."
- Hammond Atlas, pages 138-139, 304-305 and 374-377

WEEK FIVE (October 4)
This Land is Whose Land?: Struggling for Space

- Bron Taylor
  "Resacralizing Earth" pages 119-140
- Elta Smith and Courtney Bender
  "The Creation of Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City"
- Hammond Atlas, pages 288-293 and 340-343

WEEK SIX (October 11)
Place and Pilgrimage

- Juan Eduardo Campo
  "American Pilgrimage Landscapes"
III. CULTURE AND THE ARTS

WEEK SEVEN (October 18)
Snap, Crackle, Pop-ular Culture: Entertainment and Expression

- First connection paper due

- Bruce David Forbes
  "Introduction: Finding Religion in Unexpected Places"

- News articles on religion-art controversy (I will hand these out in class)

- Hammond Atlas, pages 274-275, 329

WEEK EIGHT (October 25)
Negotiating Identities through Music

- Visit the Mormon Tabernacle Choir website (www.mormontabernaclechoir.org)
  Pay particular attention to the process for joining the choir and the types of music the choir produces

- Kimberly Powell
  "The Apprenticeship of Embodied Knowledge in a Taiko Drumming Ensemble"

- Hammond Atlas, pages 268-269, 336-337

Tuesday, October 26: Academic Drop Deadline

WEEK NINE (November 1)
Lights . . . Camera . . . Religion: Religion in Film and Film as Religion

- Clive Marsh
  "Cinema-Going as Religious Practice"

- Watch a film from the list provided. Be prepared to talk in class about the film you choose!

IV. FOOD AND EATING

WEEK TEN (November 8)
You Are What You Eat (Or Don’t)

- Second connection paper due

- E. N. Anderson
  "Me, Myself, and Others: Food as Social Marker"
  "Food and Religion"

- Hub Zwart
  "A Short History of Food Ethics"

- Sharon R. Sherman
  "The Passover Seder: Ritual Dynamics, Foodways, and Family Folklore"

- Hammond Atlas, pages 326-327
WEEK ELEVEN (November 15)
Not Quite as American as Apple Pie: Difference and Distinction

Saleem Peeradina  
"Erasing God"

William K. Powers and Marla M.N. Powers  
"Metaphysical Aspects of an Oglala Food System"

News articles on Ramadan (I will hand these out in class)

Friday, November 19: Withdrawal Deadline

WEEK TWELVE (November 22)
Let’s Eat!: Thanksgiving and American Civil Religion

Robert Bellah  
"Civil Religion in America"

Janet Siskind  
"The Invention of Thanksgiving, A Ritual of American Nationality"

News articles immigrants and Thanksgiving (I will hand these out in class)

Food & Identity Assignment

V. EPILOGUE

WEEK THIRTEEN (November 29)
Weaving Diversity . . . Unraveling Religion?

Third connection paper due

Vinay Lal  
"Sikh Kirpans in California Schools: The Social Construction of Symbols, the Cultural Politics of Identity, and the Limits of Multiculturalism"

Hammond Atlas, pages 240-241, 316-317

WEEK FOURTEEN (December 6)
Back Into the World

TBA