Religion 101  Religions of the World  
Fall 2014

This course is restricted to freshmen and sophomores


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Teaching Associates:

Mallory Hennigar (B.A., McGill University, Religious Studies and English Literature, 2012, M.A. Syracuse University, Religion, 2014) Interests: Understanding changes in caste dynamics in modern India using spatial theory, North Indian religion, caste, spatial theory.

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Sara Swenson, (B.A., University of Minnesota/Duluth, English Literature and Women’s Studies, 2009; M.A., Iliff School of Theology, Comparative Religions, 2012) Interests: Buddhism in the United States and Vietnam, cross-cultural religious fluidity and theories of identity-formation

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Discussion Sections:

002 (30664) Friday 11:40 – 12:35 Bowne Hall 119
003 (30665) Friday 11:40 – 12:35 Hall of Languages 111
004 (30666) Thursday 5:00 – 6:20 Physics Building 104N
005 (30667) Thursday 5:00 – 6:20 Crouse-Hines 017

WEBSITE FOR THE COURSE: Is on BLACKBOARD
All paper assignment, reading assignments, reading guides will be posted on Blackboard, as well as important announcements. Please check frequently
ON TERMINOLOGY

Imagine a field where the topic itself is in question—the term Religion (or religions) has many connotations and preconceived definitions that challenge any study in the context of a college classroom. In this class, I begin with certain assumptions—think about the implications:

• Religion is not a thing but a process embodied in human life.
• Traditions are concepts and ideas that can be taught—I will use the term sampradāya
• God is not central to every tradition or to every person
• The sacred or sacrality can be located in many places, persons, and things
• Spirituality implies (for many people) an inner process; religion implies external processes—the term religiosity covers both.

Keep in mind that it is not always easy to draw the line between what is religious or sacred and what is not.

I will return to this discussion in the first week of class.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “STUDY” RELIGION?

The very phrase "to study religion" presents complex problems. The phrase can be heard in many settings: in a church, temple, and mosque; or in a late night session in a college dorm; or in a classroom. What difference do these various settings make in the way questions are posed and answered? Within the American and European-style universities, the academic study of religion has a history of methods, questions and controversies.

Remember that this course is an introduction not only to new "data" but also to a new discipline. Close attention to new methods of study will be important.

To consider religious expression and experience in global context also demands some sense of geography. In most world religions textbooks the “major religious traditions”—such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism—are associated with some geographical area. But within any of these areas, religions never occur in a “pure” state. Especially in the last centuries, people have encountered and absorbed varieties of religions often borrowing and trading in religious ideas and practices. Certainly in any given geographical area, a single religious system may be dominant but it is rarely exclusive.

The most popular way to discuss difference and similarity centers on the "Traditions" (usually called Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, etc.) assumed to define the distinctions between religious people. This is the perspective of Stephen Prothero, God is not One: Eight Rival Religions that Run the World and Why Their Differences Matter. But there are other categories to use. There is an older and very popular book by Huston Smith, The World’s Religions, which is now in its 50th anniversary edition. Smith, like Prothero, begins with the major religions but then sees an underlying commonality among them, a perennial commonality. However Ninian Smart in Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs (3rd ed.) proposes very different set of categories based “world-view analysis." Smart delineations different DIMENSIONS of religious life: doctrinal/philosophical, mythical/narrative, ethical/legal, ritual/practice, experiential/emotional, social/institutional.
Finally in the last three centuries, Europe and then the United States have dominated the world economically, often politically, and certainly culturally. The study of religion in the university system as we know it is a product of the European Enlightenment. British imperial control over the many colonies meant that British universities described and defined the religions of colonies like India and Egypt. “Islam,” “Hinduism” and “Buddhism” as defined in many popular world religions textbooks are intellectual products of this period. No contemporary study of religion can ignore the effects of colonialism. But at the same time, as the economic and culture control of “the West” wanes, the borrowing may reverse with major religious changes within the United States and Europe.

HOW IS THE COURSE DESIGNED?

Unlike many courses in the religions of the world, this course will not move week-by-week through the so-called “major religions”–Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, etc. Rather we will guide you in learning how to understand the religious life of others and towards imagining what life would be like within other religious worlds. “Religion” in this sense does not exist apart from the lives of human beings and remains grounded in history and culture.

I have organized the course into case studies in three key geographic areas in the world during a specific historical period, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I have chosen this period when an intense encounter between religions that accompanied the spread of British imperialism, and the development of new worldwide interconnections lead to new understandings of religion/s. In each case, you will meet leaders and ordinary people who lived through these changes and who helped to form the religious worlds we now inhabit. In the case of India and Egypt, the revolt against British colonialism forged new definitions of modern Muslim and Hindu life that continue today. Although Japan escaped British imperial control, a forceful nudge from Yankee gunboats open the country to world trade and to American culture.

KEEP IN MIND THAT ALL OF THESE CASES ARE ABOUT RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS: PERSONAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL.

CASE ONE will begin close to home in Boston at the turn of the century with America’s profound encounter with Japanese Zen Buddhism especially though art and artifacts. Here one woman’s leadership brought Asian perspectives to American culture. Isabella Stewart Gardner used her vast wealth to collect art and build a grand Venetian-style mansion to house her collection. She patronized many promising and later famous creative talents. Among these was Kakuzo Okakura, whose Book of Tea remains a popular introduction to Japanese aesthetics for many non-specialists. Richard Pilgrim’s Buddhism and the Arts of Japan explains exactly how and why aesthetic creations such as painting and poetry embody Zen Buddhism in the Japanese context. It was through art forms that Americans encountered and continue to be immersed in things Japanese. In turn, modern and contemporary Japanese rebuilt their national consciousness using Buddhist aesthetics especially Zen styles. The Zen center in Syracuse shares in this legacy.

CASE TWO will focus on Mohandas K Gandhi, later known as Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence from British rule in 1947. As a crucial part of the freedom struggle from 1920s to 1940s, he developed a modern understanding of religion that combined elements of his own Hindu tradition with facets of Islam and Christianity. We will read his famous autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth. Kim Knott’s, Hinduism: A Short Introduction will help to
place Gandhi within the history of Hinduism. Gandhi framed his crusade against British colonialism in the context of his own inner struggle for self-control. His quest aimed at both the ethical and the mystical aspects of religion.

INTERLUDE to highlight the personal dimensions of the study of religion with the autobiography of Diana Eck, a respected scholar of Hinduism and also a proponent of inter-faith dialogue, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*.

CASE THREE will center on modern multi-religious city of Cairo the capital of Egypt in the early 20th century, the setting for the novel *Palace Walk* by an Egyptian Nobel laureate, Naguib Mahfouz. In the novel Mahfouz describes the conflicts within a Muslim family in Cairo and highlights the important social dimension of religion especially of gender and family life. Mahfouz’s critique of the treatment of women in his novel caused controversy in Egypt. We will read online materials on women in Islam from a variety of perspectives. *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* by Malise Ruthven will provide basic background on modern Islam. With the complex events in Egypt today, this case will be provocative.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE COURSE?
- to gain literacy in religious traditions and in the basic terms in the study of religion
- to understand the difficulties of studying religions
- to discern and acknowledge your own religious or irreligious presumptions
- to learn to consider religious issues and practices from multiple points of view
- to be able to understand forms of religious practice and concepts that you may find problematic without either distorting the facts or feeling compelled to condone them.
- to find your own perspectives as a scholar within the material in the course
- to find your own perspectives as a person within the material of the course

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED BOOKS?
This is also available in many forms as an e-book.
This is also available very cheaply as an e-book as of January 2010: Available for download via Wi-Fi and 3G from Barnes and Noble for under one dollar on Mobile Reference. This appears to be from an old 1927 version but is the one translated by Desai and should be the same text but note this will not have the same pagination

Available in textbooks section of the university bookstore –there are no copies in Orange Bookstore.
WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

• The reading for each week must be completed by Wednesdays at class time. We cannot hope to have informed discussions unless each of the class members is prepared to contribute by speaking or by actively listening.

• I will prepare six topics for short paper/projects (between 2-3 pages 12 point Times Roman 600--900 words) and ask you to complete four out of the six. Papers will have different formats but will always cover the reading from the previous weeks. I will post the paper topics on Blackboard a week before the due date. **Note that the first paper is required of all freshmen; sophomore may also choose to do this as part of their four papers. There is no extra credit.**

• Three vocabulary-centered exams to test your comprehension of the basic terms and concepts. The terms/concepts will be taken from the reading and the lectures. **There is no final exam.**

• Active participation in discussion sections. Your TA will often give an in-class writing assignment to see if you have basically understood the reading assignments for the week. You may also be asked to begin a discussion or participate on a panel. These assignments will be graded on point system and will count toward your discussion grade.

• **We cannot change session assignments.**

COURSE POLICIES

*Please Read Carefully now!*

• **Attendance is required at all class sessions.** I can allow only 3 unexcused absences total. Please plan your schedule to allow for religious holidays within this allowance. Because this is a MW class discussion sections on Thursday evening and early Friday, those on sports teams should not be affected. However if you take any class days for sports events (with proper documentation), then I can allow NO unexcused absences in addition to your sports commitments.

• **Each unexcused absence over the allotted three absences will lower your final grade by 3 points** (for points see below). This requirement is important in this class because tests and papers are only part of the material in a course. Your presence assures us that you have at least heard and participated in the discussions, which will be essential for your understanding.

• An excused absence means that you have emailed both the TA and myself and received approval for absences in advance due to special circumstances. Please if you speak to me in class--confirm any conversation with an email. In case of illness, you must talk with us afterwards. The policy of the Health services is to provide a note only when the student has been advised to miss classes.

• **Common Courtesy:** *(I should not have to mention these points but sad experience makes this necessary.)* The class begins at 11:40 am. Please be on time; walking in late shows little respect for your fellow student or for me. If you have a tight connection between classes let us know and we can seat you accordingly. **All cell phones are to be turned entirely off including text messaging and all I-pods shut down.** I have also decided to exclude computers from the class--new research has shown that taking notes in class by using paper and pen or pencil is the most effective way of learning! In some cases, I will provide an outline of the
lecture. **Repeated lack of courtesy will also result in loosing points from your final grade under the participation points.**

- **Academic Integrity:** I expect the work presented in both the papers and the exams to be totally your own with all sources, which you have used, fully acknowledged. I will provide full instructions as to citation and form. Both the TAs and I are willing to help you if you have any doubts. If we find any evidence of academic dishonesty of any kind, I will report the incident to the Academic Integrity Office. The sanctions will include lowered points on the paper including minus points (i.e. -5 or -10), or failure for the entire course depended on the severity. Please check [http://academicintegrity.syr.edu](http://academicintegrity.syr.edu) for more information.

- **Disability Policy:** Any students that need accommodation because of disability should discuss it with the professor during office hours or by appointment and be prepared to provide documentation to the Office of Disability Services (ext. 4498 or 1371)

- **Paper Deadlines:** There are no extensions on papers. The papers will be due on Blackboard usually by 10:30 am on the due day. If you miss the deadline you cannot submit the paper—please take care to submit the paper before the deadline—do not wait until the last minute and be certain that you understand the Blackboard and how to submit your paper.

### Evaluation

The following is a basic guide that I will use to determine the grade that you earned in the class:

In each category it will be possible to earn the following points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four Paper/projects (10 each)</td>
<td>40 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation: active listening, speaking, courtesy in the lecture class</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 vocabulary/comprehension exams 10 points each</td>
<td>30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in Discussion section points</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL 100 points**

### HOW WILL MY WORK BE EVALUATED?

Course work and class participation will be important because interpretation will be a joint effort in class. In the large class as well as in the discussion sections, we will build opportunities for you to ask questions and engage in discussion throughout the term. Although I will "lecture" in class, I will always allow time for your questions and reflections. "Lectures" will include audio and visual material—please take these images and sounds seriously; they are part of the "vocabulary" of religious life. I will grade your papers along with the TAs.

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*PLEASE NOTE THAT BY REMAINING IN THIS CLASS YOU ARE ACCEPTING THE SYLLABUS AS DISTRIBUTED—ALONG WITH THE REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE—WELCOME ABOARD!*
WHAT IS THE GENERAL SCHEDULE FOR THE COURSE?

The reading assignments/reading guides will appear on Blackboard for each case.

INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND RELIGIONS

Week 01. Aug 25, Aug 27, [Aug 28/29]: What does it mean to study religion?
Week 02. Sept 1 (holiday), Sept 3, (Sept 4/5): How can we study religion?

**PAPER #1: Due Sept 10. [PAPER ONE IS REQUIRED FOR ALL FRESHMEN]**

CASE A: JAPAN AND AMERICA--THE WORLD IN A TEACUP

Week 03. Sept. 8, 10, [11/12]: A “New” City and a Renewed Nation--Boston and Japan, 1868-1912 and the art of collecting art.
Week 04: Sept. 15, 17, [18/19]: The Religious Roots of Japanese Aesthetics

**PAPER #2: Due Oct 1.**

Week 06. Sept. 29, Oct. 1 [2/3]: Zen and the rise of spirituality in the contemporary world (Oct 4 - Yom Kippur /Oct 4 - Eid-ul-Adha)

**EXAM #1: Oct 2/3 in discussion sections**

CASE B: GANDHI: INDIA, A CLOTH OF MANY COLORS

Week 07. Oct 6, 18, [9/10]: Who was Mohandas K. Gandhi and why is he still relevant?
Week 08. Oct 13, 15, [16/17]: Reading Gandhi in the Context of "Hinduism" (Oct 15 - Al-Hijira)
Week 09. Oct 20, 22, [23/24]: Reading Gandhi in the Contemporary World (Oct 23 – Diwali)

**EXAM #2: Oct 23/24 in Discussion sections**

**PAPER #3: Due Oct 29**


**PAPER #4: Due Nov 5**

CASE C: THE WORLD OF AMINA AND AHMAD Abd AL-JAWAD: CAIRO ISLAM AND COLONIALISM

Week 11. Nov. 3, 5 [6/7]: Meeting Naguib Mahfouz and Cairo and Egypt in the Greater Islamic World

**PAPER #5: Due Nov 19.**


THANKSGIVING Nov. 24-29

**Paper #6: Due Dec 3**

Week 14: Dec 1, 3, [4/5]: Religion in the contemporary world?

**EXAM #3 Dec 4/5 in Discussion sections**