REL 120 Introduction to the Study of Religion
Fall 2015
Monday/Wednesday 5:15-6:35pm School of Management 203
Instructor: Courtney O’Dell-Chaib
HL 514 Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 3:30pm-4:30pm and by appointment
cedell@syr.edu

What do we talk about when we talk about religion? In this course we will explore this question through a variety of texts, traditions, and theories. As a class we will think critically about what religion is and how it is engaged in the multifaceted lives of humans around the world.

This course will consider diverse ways of being in the world, of which religious beliefs/traditions/practices/experiences/ethics are intrinsically significant, through different kinds of written expression and media. Together we will consider an ethnography, a novel, a film, and a non-fiction nature writing piece to ask how our authors/film-makers speak to complex questions such as: what does it mean to be human? How might humans find meaning in their lives? How should humans interact with the material world within which we are enmeshed? What do some religious experiences convey about how to live a good, ethical, or valuable life? Following these primary sources, we will consider pieces of theory that demonstrate how religion scholars might reflect upon the themes and questions posed by our primary authors/film-makers.

Since our class is an exercise in openness towards learning about different ways of being in the world, some of which at times might make us uncomfortable, it is important that we cultivate empathy and patience in our classroom. We all come to the course with personal beliefs, experiences, and traditions. Considering this inherent diversity, inclusive and respectful language is essential to our course.

Learning Objectives:

Through our reading assignments, provocative exams, and class discussion it is my hope that this course will engage you in these objectives:

1) to understand better the nature, diversity, and power of individual and collective religious expressions in historical and contemporary contexts;
2) develop an understanding of religious traditions, practices, and spiritualties as dynamic and evolving;
3) to think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation;
4) to improve your abilities to read actively, to think analytically, and to write compellingly
Required Texts:

Stephanie Wellen Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls*
Louise Erdrich, *The Painted Drum*
Ellen Meloy, *Eating Stone: Imagination and the Loss of the Wild*
Additional readings found on Blackboard

Assignments and Grading:

Text Engagement and Participation

This is a reading intensive course that will only function well if you come to class having read the material and ready to engage in discussion. Your physical presence in class is not enough. A significant portion of your grade will be based on how you prepare and participate in communal discussion. Coming to class without closely reading our assigned texts is unacceptable. Read the texts carefully and come with your questions, concerns, and connections.

Reading Journal

Each Monday I will post to Blackboard a question for you to reflect on in a journal-style response. These journals will give you the opportunity to do some thinking on themes in the course as well as your experiences reading the material.

Post your response to the weekly question on Blackboard by 5pm on Fridays.

Exams

You will have three in-class written exams that will give you the opportunity to practice and improve your critical reading, thinking, and writing abilities by articulating your understandings of and responses to texts, concepts, and cases we examine. I will provide study questions leading into the exams.

Our final exam will be comprehensive and will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your cumulative understandings of our course themes as a whole.

Absences

You will be allowed two unexcused absences and any absences after two (that are not related to critical emergencies, documented cases of religious holiday, and official university business) will drop your final grade by three points (ex. from 100-97).
Participation 15%
Journals 25%
Exams 30%
Final Exam 30%

Please Note: No late work will be accepted.

College Course Expectations

For many of you, this will be one of your first college courses. Thus, for some it will also serve as an introduction to college-level material and interactions.

No laptop, tablet, or smartphone use during our class time. Bring material copies of our reading to class.

Make sure to maintain respectful interactions with me through email. When sending an email, include your full name in the message and refrain from using “chat speak” (for example: lol, btw, mfw, brt.)

I expect that you will be on time to class and will stay for the entirety of our class time.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity forms the foundation of any learning community, so it is imperative that you exhibit honesty and integrity as a member of this community. Cheating, in any form and to any degree, is an affront to this community that will not be tolerated. Cheating includes giving or receiving aid when prohibited, plagiarism, fraud, falsification, collusion, or any related act of deception or dishonesty. If you commit such an act, you will receive an XF grade for this course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. For more information, see the Academic Integrity Politics and Procedures available at (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu).

Learning Accommodations

If you think you might need accommodations for a learning disability, please contact the Office of Disability Studies (http://disabilityservices.syr.edu) to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. The Office of Disability Services is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will, as appropriate, issue accommodation authorization letters to students with documented disabilities. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, contact the Office of Disability Services and discuss your situation with me as soon as possible.
Inclusive Language Policy

It is expected in this course that all participants use inclusive language in all verbal and written assignments especially with respect to humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and religions, with regard to characteristics such as sex, gender, sexual identities, social class, age, and dis/abilities. We are all a part of creating a space for dialogue and engagement where the importance of differences within relationships are engaged in a substantive manner. One of the goals of this class is to think carefully about the words we use and the images, metaphors, and linguistic ideas that we are invoking. In keeping the vision of thinking thoughtfully about language, here are some resources for further reflection on the importance of inclusive language:

Related Links:

Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language, from the website of National Council of Teachers of English.
http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

August 31st - Introduction
September 2nd - Malory Nye, “Religion” and “Gender”

September 7th - Labor Day No Classes
Stephanie Levine, Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers
September 9th - Levine, Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers

September 14th - Levine, Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers
September 16th - Rita M. Gross, “No Girls Allowed? Are the World’s Religions Inevitably Sexist?” (BB)

September 21st - Luce Irigaray, “Divine Women” (BB)
September 23rd - Exam

September 28th - Nye, “Culture” Film Clips, Jesus Camp
September 30th - Nye, “Power” Film Clips, Jesus Camp

October 5th - Louise Erdrich, The Painted Drum
October 7th - Erdrich, The Painted Drum

October 12th - Erdrich, The Painted Drum
October 14th - Erdrich, The Painted Drum, Film clips- In the Light of Reverence
October 19th – Selections from *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide*, Film clips- *In the Light of Reverence*

**October 21st - Exam**

October 26th - Nye, “Ritual”
October 28th – Nye, “Belief”

**November 2nd** – Colleen McDannell, “Piety, Art, Fashion: The Religious Object,” and Neil MacGregor selections from *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. (BB)

**November 4th** – David Morgan, “The Material Culture of Lived Religions: Visuality and Embodiment”

**November 9th.** Film: *Mana: Beyond Belief*

**November 11th.** Film: *Mana: Beyond Belief*

**November 16th** - S. Brent Plate, “The Skin of Religion: Aesthetic Mediations of the Sacred”

**November 18th** - Exam

**November 23rd** – Thanksgiving Break No Classes

**November 25th** - Thanksgiving Break No Classes

**November 30th** - Nye, “Contemporary Religions”

**December 2nd** - Ellen Meloy, *Eating Stone: Imagination and the Loss of the Wild*

**December 7th** - Meloy, *Eating Stone*

**December 9th – Last Day of Class** Meloy, *Eating Stone*

**Final Exam: December 14th 5:15-7:15pm School of Management 203**