

Religions of the World (REL 101)
Online Course Description

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Religion Department Goals

The Department of Religion has articulated three goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses and programs may expect to gain from this study:

1. to understand better the nature and diversity of religious expressions in the contemporary world and in history, and their power in peoples' personal and collective lives;
2. to think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation;
3. to recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities in a disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of a diversity of approaches and methods within that study.

Introduction

After September 11, 2001 we have all been changed. Now more than ever it is important that each American, as well as other citizens of the world, learn about religious traditions other than their own. This is a complicated journey with many twists and turns. Clearly it is impossible to learn about all aspects of every religious tradition in a single semester. This course is designed to be the first step in what, for some, is a life long process. For others who are less personally invested in the topic of religion this course will be useful in identifying key concepts of other religions. Anyone who works in today's public environment, however, needs to have a basic knowledge of the religions of the world in order to carry on basic relationships with people who have distinctive traditions from ones own.

The phenomenon of religion throughout the world presents itself in a vast diversity of human expressions. Most traditions have a long history of development in places now foreign to the United States. This class will introduce students to the variety of ways people have articulated their connection with the sacred. Organizing these materials is an essential feature of the academic study of religion and so we will be

utilizing two methods for understanding world religions. The first method is to emphasize the inner dimensions of the 'great' religious traditions, including Indigenous (i.e. Primal), Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic religions. We will use Houston Smith's book *The World's Religions*. Professor Smith was once a member of the Department of Religion at Syracuse and was recently interviewed by Bill Moyers of PBS in a multipart series called "The World's Wisdom Traditions."

Our second method for examining this vast amount of data will be to reflect on those various traditions, mentioned above, in the context of the United States. Important questions in this section of the class are how the religious traditions have changed to adapt to American culture? Is the U.S. a "religious" country? If so which religion is most American? How is religiousness variously expressed in U.S. culture? Etc. The freedom of religion is a central tenet of the American Constitution. Our reflections of the issues of religious diversity will be directly related to what many regard as our most fundamental freedom. To explore this aspect of religion we will read the second text for the class: *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, (2nd or 3rd edition) edited by Jacob Neusner. In addition to these resources, students will make their own investigations of religious communities OTHER than their own and report their experiences to the rest of the class. They will come away from this class with a rich sense of the diversity of religious expression by integrating various methods, reading, and personal experiences.

Biography

The teacher of this class is Philip P. Arnold (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1992) who is Associate Professor of Religion at Syracuse University. Professor Arnold was trained in the History of Religions, or in Comparative Religion. He specializes in Native American traditions of the Americas with special emphasis on contact between Europeans and pre-Columbian Mesoamerican civilizations and Iroquois traditions. His work in Aztec Nahuatl texts and archaeological materials from central Mexico has focused on connections between indigenous rituals and their material world. His articles have included topics on the ritual symbolism of food, cultural contact in the development of religion in the Americas, and 'book culture' in Native communities. His current work highlights the local history and religious landscape of the Erie Canal and of New York State, utilizing the issues and insights of Haudenosaunee (i.e., Longhouse, or Traditional Iroquois). His books include *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan* (University of Colorado Press, 1999) and *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree* (Ashgate, 2001), which he co-edited with Ann Grodzins Gold.

Required Texts: Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (WR)
 Jacob Neusner, editor, *World Religions in America* (WRA), 3rd
 Edition.

Both of these texts are widely available at bookstores, libraries and on the web, from Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) for example. If you prefer you can purchase these texts directly from Syracuse University Bookstore. The bookstore has several copies on their shelves. For those of you who live in the Syracuse area it is a simple matter of visiting the bookstore on the SU campus. For those of you who live at some distance you can visit their website (<http://www.syr.edu/bkst/>) or email Kathleen Bradley, the textbook manager, directly (kbradley@syr.edu), or call 315-443-9901. They accept credit card orders over the web and have a secure server. Kathleen told me that they usually ship on the same day they receive the order.

Grading

Final grades will be based on 12 weekly discussion topic papers, and a final paper/project to the rest of the class on a religion OTHER than your own.

Discussion Topic Papers: You are required to post a 250 word essay on the topic for each week's reading in the discussion folder on the course website. Consult the Course Schedule for weekly topics and reading assignments. Discussion topic papers will not be accepted late. In addition to doing the required reading also consult Professor Arnold's mini lecture/comments on each topic. These mini-lectures are in each of the weekly folders in the Discussion section. It is very important that you read my lectures before reading the text as they will help focus your reading and also I will ask additional questions for you to consider while writing your papers. For most papers you will be asked to answer specific questions that appear at the end of each of the chapters of *World Religions in America*, but all the questions should be used as guides for you to write a paper. The papers are intended to generate discussion so **you are required to read the papers of other students and respond to at least one other paper each week.**

Your papers will be graded on a sliding scale. Papers equivalent to the letter grade 'A' are worth 4 points each; 'B' papers are worth 3 points; 'C' papers are worth 2 points; and 'D' papers are worth 1 point. You will receive a failing grade, worth 0 points, if you do not hand the papers in on time or if your paper fails to address the issues presented in the reading. In addition, if you respond to someone else's paper on the discussion board you will receive an additional 2 points. You can receive up to 6 points for each paper submitted per week for a possible semester total of up to 72 points for 12 papers (up to 48 for the paper and 24 for responses to the papers of other students). There is a specific due date and time for the paper. Responses are due a week after the papers for a given discussion topic have been posted.

Consult the Course Schedule to find out when your papers are due. Write your Introduction to the class as soon as possible. It counts as your first paper and is due the Friday after class begins. Each paper after the Introduction is due the Monday after it is assigned unless it is otherwise noted on the Schedule. Remember to read my comments for each week's assignment **before** you write your paper and then post a

copy of it on each week's Discussion Board. You need not answer questions in World Religions in America verbatim but instead use the questions as a guide to write your paper. It is best to cut and paste your paper into the Discussion Board since many people cannot access attachments. I will respond to many of the papers on the Discussion Board and make a general announcement each week.

Final papers/projects and the outline: For your final paper/project you are asked to investigate a religion **other than their own**. This can be on an aspect of another religion, a whole tradition you are curious about, or a tradition that wasn't covered in the class reading. There are several useful resources for this task. In my on-campus version of this class I use the CD ROM *On Common Ground*, which is available to you at the Media Services in Bird Library. There are several useful reference works like the *Encyclopedia of Religion* and websites that can be accessed through the Pluralism Project webpage at Harvard University (<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/>).

In addition to investigating sources online and in the library students should visit different religious communities in their area and/or interview someone from another religion. You may already have an idea of what religious group you would like to visit or who you would like to interview. For those of you in Syracuse the "Interreligious Council Directory" lists contact people from diverse religious communities in this area and is available to the class at Hendricks Chapel on the SU campus. You can also visit the InterFaith Works website (<http://www.interfaithworkscny.org/>) for more information of contacts in the Syracuse area.

Outlines for your final papers/projects, which are primarily planning documents, must be posted to the Discussion Board about half way through the course (consult the Schedule for the precise date). At the same time you post your Outline of the final project you will be asked to comment on another student's project. Good outlines should include a brief explanation of your topic, including how you intend on investigating that religious tradition (who you will interview and/or where you will visit and when). As with Discussion Topic Papers you are required to give a response to other student's outlines. The Outline is intended to give each student feedback from their peers on the effectiveness of their paper/project. It would behoove you to decide the subject of the final paper/project as early in the semester as possible. You may contact me directly, through the course website, to discuss your possible options. Your project outline will be graded on a sliding scale similar to the weekly Discussion Topic Papers. An 'A' outline will get 8 points; a 'B' outline will receive 6 points; a 'C' outline will receive 4 points; and a 'D' paper will receive 2 point. Failing to post an outline or putting little or no work into your outline will result in 0 points. In addition you will receive 4 additional points for responding to at least one other student's project outline. A total of 12 points are possible for the outline of your final project.

The best final papers/projects incorporate ones own experience of another tradition, through photos taken during a visit or captured from other websites, as well as individual research in the library or on the web. All materials should be appropriately arranged and cited at the end of the paper. Most students find that the final

paper/project gives other students a chance to learn through each other's experience making it a rich and important component of the class. The paper should be from 500 to 1000 words in length and include other photographic or graphic material where it is appropriate. Consult the Schedule to learn when it should be posted on the Discussion Board. You can receive up to 16 points for an 'A' project; 12 points for a 'B' project; 8 points for a 'C' project; and 4 points for a 'D' project. Projects that are not posted on time or which exhibit little or no effort will receive 0 points.

I will record your grade each week on the website in an online grade-book. Your grades will only be available for you to view throughout the semester and you can check your grade as often as you wish. In fact, each time you log onto Blackboard your grade for the class will come into view.

The criteria listed below are used when assessing your 12 Discussion Topic Papers, Outline and Final Paper/Project. Percentages are only to demonstrate the relative weight of each of the criteria in any given assignment.

- **Clarity.** The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset. (40%)
- **Engagement with the material.** Entries are to be related to the reading material. They are *not reviews* of what has been stated in the book but are your *critical analysis* of the reading. Avoid direct quotes. Instead seriously take-up what you consider to be the 'key' issues for the study of religion in the reading. Your analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing refers to the texts used in the class. (40%)
- **Creativity.** The 'work' of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of religion, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself. (20%)

Final grades will be determined as follows:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Discussion Topic Papers (12 @ 4 points each) | 48 points |
| Weekly responses to student papers | 24 points |

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Final paper/project outline | 12 points |
| Final paper/project | <u>16 points</u> |
| TOTAL | 100 points |

Final grades will be assessed in the following way:

| | |
|----|---------------------|
| A | 91-100 points |
| A- | 88-90 points |
| B+ | 84-87 points |
| B | 81-83 points |
| B- | 78-80 points |
| C+ | 74-77 points |
| C | 71-73 points |
| C- | 68-70 points |
| D+ | 64-67 points |
| D | 61-63 points |
| D- | 58-60 points |
| F | 57 points and below |

Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services, see <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>

Academic Integrity Statement

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD—REL 101-online
SCHEDULE FOR SPRING 2009

WR=THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, by Huston Smith
WRA=WORLD RELIGIONS IN AMERICA, 3rd edition, edited by Jacob Neusner

You should write your Introduction to the class as soon as possible. It counts as your first paper and is due Tuesday 20 January (Monday 19 January is MLK Day). Each paper after the Introduction is due the Monday after it is assigned—unless noted otherwise (e.g. paper #2 is due Monday 26 January, paper #3 is due on Monday 2 February, etc.). Remember to read my mini-lectures (“PPA’s comments”) for each week’s assignment **before** you write your paper **off-line** and then post a copy of it in each week’s Discussion Board folder. You need not answer questions in World Religions in America verbatim but instead use the questions as a guide to write your paper. **Please** cut and paste your paper into the Discussion Board window since many people cannot access attachments. Each week I will respond to your papers on the Announcements page. Your responses to other student papers are worth 2 points each week. They must be posted within the week following the date the papers are due. In other words paper #1 is due on Tuesday 20 January and responses are due for paper #1 on or before Monday 26 January.

Make sure you choose a topic for your final project as early as possible. The deadline for outlines/plans of action regarding your final project is on **16 March (after Spring Break)** and comes up quickly. The deadline for posting your final paper/project is **27 April**.

| WEEK/DUE DATE | TOPIC | READING |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| #1/20 January [Tuesday] | Introduction | |
| #2/26 January | What is Religion? | Definitions of religion (In the Course Documents section of website) |
| #3/2 February | American Religions | WRA Intro, 20 (ques. 1, 3) & “Spirituality of Congress” in Course Documents |
| #4/9 February | Native/Nature Religions | WR IX; WRA 1 (ques. 3, 6); WRA 15 (ques. 4, 7) |
| #5/16 February | Hinduism | WR II; WRA 8 (ques. 3, 5, 7) |
| #6/23 February | Buddhism | WR III: WRA 9 (ques. 2, 7, 8) |
| #7/2 March | Confucianism | WR IV; WR V; |

Taoism

WRA 10 (ques. 1, 3, 6)

9 March—SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

16 March—FINAL PAPER/PROJECT OUTLINES ARE DUE

#8/23 March

Judaism

WR VII;
WRA 7 (ques. 1, 3, 5)

#9/30 March

Christianity

WR VIII;
WRA 2 (ques.1, 3, 8);
WRA 4 (ques. 3, 4)

#10/6 April

Islam

WR VI;
WRA 11 (ques. 1, 4 & 6)

#11/13 April

Cultural Contact, Race and Ethnicity

Civil Religion, Politics, Gender

WRA 3 (ques. 1, 2, 5);
WRA 5 (ques. 3, 4)
WRA 18 (ques. 1, 6);
WRA 19 (ques. 1, 2)

#12/20 April

New Religions in America

Understanding Religion

WRA 12 (ques. 2, 6);
WRA 13 (ques. 3, 8);
WRA 17 (ques. 1, 7)
WR X

27 April—FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS DUE