

REL 2011: Religious Analysis and Interpretation

Department of Religious Studies

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Course Description

This course is a foundational courses offered by the Religious Studies Department. The course incorporates the study of scripture, belief and practices, and the historical and social context of religion. This course introduces the field of Religious Studies by looking at topics and themes such as doctrine, ritual, scripture, mysticism, pilgrimage, and myth across two or more religions while also introducing methodological approaches to the comparative study of religion. In all, by studying the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religion, students will gain insights into similarities across religions as well as the most salient elements of religious traditions such as scripture, rituals, and institutions.

Course Objectives

- 1) To analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in personal, social, and global contexts.
- 2) To understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth claims and meaning making practices.
- 3) To develop proficiency in analyzing texts, rituals, behaviors, beliefs and practices of a variety of religious traditions. Because the student will be constantly utilizing various theoretical discourses he/she will be able to analyze the many ways in which concepts, statements, beliefs, and judgments relate to practice, action, and other concepts and beliefs, as clarified through theoretical discourse. Thus the student will develop the skill of evaluating how plural theoretical structures may work together to create an adequate understanding of religion.

4) To better understand religious belief and practice within various religious traditions and areas of the world it will contribute to a richer understanding and appreciation of the diversity of religious activities throughout the world.

Course Requirements/Assessments

Attendance: 20%
Participation: 10%
Quizzes: 10%
Exams: 25%
Three Essays: 20%
Presentation: 15%

Essays

Essay One – Write an essay discussing the arguments presented in Appiah’s “Case for Contamination”. Do not merely rehash and represent the arguments presented, but critically engage the argument present. This means tell me if you agree with what the author is presenting and why or why not. You also need to engage whatever counterargument there is to your position. So, for example, if you agree with Appiah, then you must the argument against his position or vice versa. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.0 - inch margins.

Essay Two – Choose one of the films we watched in class and apply the Smart’s six dimensions of religion to the analysis. The emphasis of the paper should be on how all six dimensions of a religion reinforce each other. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 –12 inch font, and 1.0 - inch margins.

Essay Three – Describe the religion you created with your group and demonstrate how all six of Smart’s dimensions of religions are incorporated. There should be a logical reinforcement of each dimension to each other so to structure the religion into a cohesive whole. The

religion should also be rational, understandable, and meaningful. The paper should be no more than 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.0 - inch margins.

Quizzes and Exams

Throughout the course, quizzes will be administered at the professor's discretion. The aim of the quizzes is to assess the level of engagement by the students of the assigned reading. Also, there will be a midterm and a final exam that will assess all of the materials discussed in class. The final exam will not be cumulative.

Group Project/Presentation

Students' will form into groups at the beginning of the semester with the intent of constructing their own religion by the end of the semester and will present their religion to the rest of the class. The group must show a mastery of the six dimensions of religion as discussed in class. There must be a rationale for the religion and each element of the religion must be reinforced somehow across the different dimensions.

Grading Scale:

94 - 100 A
90 - 93 A-
87 - 89 B+
84 - 86 B
80 - 83 B –
77 - 79 C+
74 - 76 C
70 - 73 C-
67 - 69 D+
64 - 66 D
60 - 63 D -
0 - 59 F

Academic Integrity

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate the truth. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating, helping another student to cheat, plagiarism, turning in the same paper for two different courses (including those in two different semesters), purchasing papers written by others, manipulating attendance records, and falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines.

Course Materials

Smart, Ninian. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. Pearson, 1999, 3rd Edition. ISBN-13: 978-0130209801, ISBN-10:0130209805.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's "The Case for Contamination" available here: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/magazine/01cosmopolitan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Weekly Schedule

Week of August 24th: Introduction
Reading: Appiah – "The Case for Contamination"

Weeks of August 31st and September 7th: Theological Dimension
Reading: Smart – "Doctrinal Dimension"

Weeks of September 14th and 21st: Ethical Dimension
Reading: Smart – "Ethical Dimensions"
Essay 1 Due on Friday September 18th.

Weeks of September 28th and October 5th: Mythical Dimension
Midterm Exam on Monday September 28th

Reading: Smart – “Mythical Dimension”

Weeks of October 12th and 19th: Ritual Dimension

Reading: Smart – “Ritual Dimension”

Weeks of October 26th and November 2nd: Social Dimension

Reading: Smart – “Social Dimension”

Second Essay Due: October 30th

Weeks of November 9th and November 16th: Experiential Dimension

Readings: Smart – “Experiential Dimension”

Week of November 23rd: Thanksgiving

No Class

Week of November 30th: Class Presentations

Third Essay Due: December 4th

Week of December 7th: Finals Week

Final Exam TBA

Syllabus Is Subject To Change