Course Description: This course constitutes an overview of the main theories of the study of religion and reflection on what exactly is the object of inquiry in the field of Religious Studies. Students are expected to engage thinking with historical and systematic surveys of the main religions of the world including basic and general knowledge of religious systems that started in ancient times to the contemporary expression of these in our area.


Goals: Students must demonstrate an understanding of religion as a complex phenomenon as well as acquire basic knowledge and comprehension of the main religions of the world including their followers, beliefs, and their influence in the present. Students will be able to compare and contrast religious societies and cultures: in local and/or international contexts and in contemporary or historical perspectives. In addition, students will be able to apply critical thinking to important topics in the field of religious studies. (Global Awareness) Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives. (Global Perspective) Students will be able to appreciate the need for a willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world. (Global Engagement)

Requirements: There will be three multiple choice exams, each worth 25% of the final grade: Exam #1 (Feb. 18th), Exam #2 (Mar. 25th), & Exam #3 (Apr. 29th). Attendance and participation are very important to this course. Students are expected to attend all class meetings and read their assigned readings, which will be given at the end of each class, so students can participate in class discussions, which are worth 25% of the final grade. In addition, this course fulfills the Global Learning for Global Citizenship initiative. Students will: (1) Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems; (2) Be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives; and (3) Demonstrate a willingness to accept shared responsibility for solving local, global, international, and intercultural problems.

Intellectual & Academic Behavior: As members of the academic community, students are expected to recognize and uphold standards of intellectual and academic integrity.
REL 3308-SectU03-Spring 2011
Adjunct Professor Miles
Book Order*

Title: “World Religions”
Author: Warren Matthews
ISBN#: 0-495-00709-9
Thomson Wadsworth Pub.
5th edition, 2007
Required Text-150 copies
*Yes, I will be using the same text next semester

Prof. Miles
REL 3308/Spring 2011
Week by Week…Readings and Discussions

Week 1: Introduction to course (syllabus, rules, and grade expectations) as well as getting to know each other, a little-Group 1 (Dreams).

Week 2: Understanding Diversity (looking up terms: stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and hate crimes). Group 2 (Understanding Diversity). Introduction to world religions including important concepts and definitions (i.e., religion, religious studies, theology, sect, cult, etc.). “Out of a Cult”-Dr. Phil video. Common features of most religions (Read Intro. Ch. pp. 2-4) and “religion-making characteristics”.

Week 3: Introduction to world religions continued, including why we should study religion, approaches to the study of religion, and why religions exist, per theorists (Tylor and Frazer, Freud, Durkheim, Marx, & Eliade). “When Bad Things Happen to Good People”-Rabbi Kushner video.

Week 4: Indigenous religions of North America and South America (Read Ch. 1 pp. 15-37) Group 3 (Religious v. Spiritual). Discussion will include common features and various tribes (Naskapi, Hopi, Aztecs, Incas, etc.).
Week 5: Religions of Africa (Read Ch. 2 pp. 41-59). Group 4 (Magic and Witchcraft articles). “Witchcraft in America” video. Discussion will include various groups including Yoruba and related topics such as Santeria and Vodou.

Week 6: Exam #1-Understanding Religion, Native Americans, and African Religions

Week 7: Hinduism (Read Ch. 3 pp. 65-96). Discussion will include sacred writings, caste system, stages of life, and contemporary issues. Gandhi article. Group 5 (If karma is real/true, what good and bad can come of it).

Week 8: Buddhism (Read Ch. 4 pp. 101-137). Discussion will include the life of the Buddha and his main teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, Ten precepts, Three Jewels, etc. Dahlia Lama article. Group 6 (karma and the caste system).

Week 9: “Pursuit of Happiness” video, articles, and discussion. Group 7 (People and things that make you happy).

Week 10: SPRING BREAK : )

Week 11: Exam #2-Hinduism and Buddhism

Week 12: Judaism (Read Ch. 8 pp. 233-269). Discussion will include sacred writings, main beliefs, branches, rites of passage, dietary laws, etc. “Holocaust” video and article. Group 8 (Afterlife).

Week 13: Christianity (Read Ch. 9 pp. 275-316). Discussion will include Jesus’ life story and his teachings, including miracles, as well as basic beliefs. Group 9 (Angels).

Week 14: Islam (Read Ch. 10 pp. 321-355). Discussion will include main teachings, including both pillars of belief and observance, as well as jihad (Muslim and non-Muslim views) and Muslim marriages.


Week 16: Final Exam-Judaism, Christianity, and Islam