

**REL 3308: Religious Analysis and Interpretation**  
**Department of Religious Studies**

**Instructor's Name:** Andres Arrazola

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 11:00 – 11:50 a.m.

**Location:** GL 150

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**Course Description**

This course is a course offered by the Religious Studies Department. The course incorporates the cross cultural study of world religions. This course introduces the five world religions: Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and East Asian religious culture by looking at topics and themes such as doctrine, ritual, scripture, mysticism, ethics, and myth while also introducing methodological approaches to the comparative study of religion. In all, with a comparative approach to the 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%

Two Essays: 20%

Presentation: 15%

### **Essays**

**Essay One** – Write a 4 – 5 page paper where you engage the question of “What is religion” by reflecting on the religious traditions studied in class. In essence, you are proposing a theoretical concept to explain the varieties of religious phenomenon. Consider how robust or narrow your definition is and why you decide to articulate it that way. Also consider how your definition considers what is exclude from your definition of what a religion “is” and why you have decided to leave that phenomena outside of what counts as “religion”. You must use standard formatting such as 10 – 12 inch font and 1.0 in margins in your paper.

**Essay Two** – Write an essay detailing what you have learned at your site visits to the class. You must apply the six dimensions of religion learned in class and demonstrate how they manifested themselves during your site visits. The focus of the paper should be a description of how each of these dimensions was present during your visit. The paper must detail the date of each observation described in the paper. Also, consider how the textbook describes the religion researched and if the description is reflected well or poorly by your site visit. Each member of the group must write their own paper. You must use standard formatting such as 10 – 12 inch font and 1.0 inch margins in your paper. The paper should be 5 – 7 pages long.

### **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 to perform a site visit at a religious house of worship, which I call the research site. You must choose a religious tradition you are not familiar with and you must visit the site at least four times. Not all members of the group have to be present at each individual visit to the research site. Along with individual essays detailing visits to the research site, groups will also present their findings to the class on the last week of class.

### **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**

Esposito, John, Darrell Fasching, and Todd Lewis: World Religions Today. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Oxford University Press.

ISBN 10: 0195365631

ISBN 13: 978-0195365634

### **Weekly Schedule**

#### **Week of January 12<sup>th</sup>: Introduction**

Reading: Chapter 1: 1 - 33

#### **Week of January 19<sup>th</sup>: Indigenous Religions**

Reading: Chapter 2: 36 - 73

#### **Weeks of January 26<sup>th</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>: Hinduism**

Reading: Chapter 6: 302 - 387

#### **Weeks of February 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>: Buddhism**

Reading: Chapter 7: 389 - 469

#### **Midterm Exam on Friday February 20<sup>th</sup>.**

#### **Weeks of February 23<sup>rd</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup>: Judaism**

Reading: Chapter 3: 75 - 145

#### **Week of March 9<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Spring Break**

**Weeks of March 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>: Christianity**

Reading: Chapter 4: 147 - 211

**Weeks of March 30<sup>rd</sup> and April 6<sup>th</sup>: Islam**

Reading: Chapter: 5: 213 - 298

**First Essay Due: April 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Week of April 13<sup>th</sup>: East Asian Religions**

Readings: Chapter 8: 471 - 559

**Week of April 20<sup>th</sup>: Class Presentations**

**Second Essay Due: April 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Week of April 27<sup>th</sup>: Finals Week**

**Final Exam TBA**

**Syllabus Is Subject To Change**