

REL 2011: Introduction to Religion

Department of Religious Studies

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Course Description

This course is a foundational course 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 and differences across religions, as well as, exposure to 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, as such an understanding will contribute to a richer understanding and appreciation of the diversity of religious activities throughout the world.
- 5) Critically engage the issue of religious diversity in national and international context (Global Engagement).
- 6) Analyze issues in the field of religions studies from multiple approaches (Global Perspective).
- 7) Evaluate the interrelationship between his/her own and others' religious views as they relate to understanding other cultures and solving common problems (Global Awareness).

Course Requirements/Assessments

Attendance: 20%

Participation: 10%

Debates: 5%

Journal: 10%

Quizzes/Exams: 25%

Three Essays: 20%

Presentation: 10%

Attendance

A daily reflection paper will be turned in at the end of class to record attendance. The reflection should be no longer than a handful of sentences to a paragraph describing what was learned in class that day, along with whatever was interesting or confusing to you. You must have your name and date on the reflection to be credited for attendance. Excessive tardiness or arriving at the end of class only to submit a reflection will not qualify as attending class.

Participation

Participation is an extremely important component to creating an interactive learning environment and to get the most out of the class and counts towards your final grade. Your participation grade will be compiled by assessing by how you ask questions during lectures, the quality and thoughtfulness of the questions, and asking questions during class debates.

Debates

There will be a series of structured debates held throughout the semester. Attendance is expected during debate sessions and both debaters and the audience (i.e. the rest of the class) will receive a grade for the session. The debaters will be assessed following a rubric to be found on canvas and is to be completed by the audience. The audience will be assessed by the professor on the quality of their assessment of the debaters.

Journal

Throughout the semester, you are to keep a journal to develop an awareness of the presence of religion around you and, more importantly, your unconscious tendencies that draw you towards something greater than yourself. You will a composition book and are to journal a minimum of three days a week and each journal entry must be dated at the beginning. Journal entries must be handwritten and **LEGIBLE**. Write slowly and thoughtfully. All entries will be prompted with a specific question for you to

contemplate. After the minimum three entries for the week are met, you can journal freely about any topic you wish, as long as it ties back to religion. The grade for the journal will be based upon how thoughtful, introspective, provocative, and probing the entries were, but most importantly, that you completed all of the topics. How personal your entries are up to your discretion. All information divulged in the journal will be kept confidential, with the exception of the expression of wishing to cause any harm or malice towards another person.

Essays

Essay One – The first essay will be a reflexive analysis of your journal. You will receive a personal prompt by the professor after review of your journal. The more detailed and thoughtful your entries are, the more engaging and meaningful your prompt will be. You will also need to resubmit your journal question typed on the cover page of the essay. The paper should be about 4 - 5 pages and use the typical formatting guidelines, such as double space, 10 – 12 inch font, and 1.0-inch margins. A cover page is necessary to include the title of the paper, your name, class, date, and any other identifying information you wish to include.

Essay Two – 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. A cover page is necessary to include the title of the paper, your name, class, date, and any other identifying information you wish to include.

Essay Three – The third essay will be a hand written essay to be produced during the final covering topics from the textbook and discussed in class. More information on this essay will be discussed during the semester.

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. Quizzes will typically be given at random at the professor's discretion to assess the understanding of the class 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 60-73 = 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

Bowen, John R. (2018) *Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of Religion*. Routledge New York, NY 7th Edition.

Composition Notebook

Weekly Schedule

Week of January 7th: **Introduction. Reading:** Bowen, Chapter 1.

Weeks of January 14th and January 21st: **Doctrinal Dimension. Reading:** Bowen, Chapters 2 and 3.
Debate Topic: The possibility for the existence of God. **No class January 21st Martin Luther King Day**

Weeks of January 28th and February 4th: **Ethics Dimension. Reading:** Bowen, Chapters 9 and 15. **Debate Topic:** Theodicy and the Problem of Suffering.

Weeks of February 11th and February 18th: **Mythical Dimension. Reading:** Bowen, Chapters 11 and 12.
Debate Topic: The historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.

Midterm on Monday February 25th

Weeks of February 25th and March 4th: **Ritual Dimension. Reading:** Bowen, Chapters 5 and 10. **Debate Topic:** Is Yoga a necessarily religious practice?

Spring Break March 11 - 16th. No Classes

Weeks of March 18th and 25th: **Social Dimension Reading:** Bowen, Chapters 4 , 13, and 14. **Debate Topic:** The possibility and desirability of a secular state and society.

Friday March 22nd: Turn in Journals at the beginning of class. Journals will be returned by Monday April 1st.

Weeks of April 1st and 8th: **Experiential Dimension. Readings:** Bowen, Chapters 6,7, and 8. **Debate Topic:** The trustworthiness of religious experiences.

Essay One Due Monday April 8th

Week of April 15th: **Presentation Week**

Second Essay Due on Friday April 19th.

Final Exam TBA

Syllabus Is Subject To Change