

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Department of Religious Studies
REL 2011, Section B53
Religion: Analysis and Interpretation
Tuesday 5:00 p.m.-7:40 p.m.
Marine Science Building (MSB), Room 113
Dr. Jayne A. Klein

Office Hours: Tuesday: 3:00-4:30
Office: AC1 – 214

Phone: (305) 919-5597
e-mail: martinj@fiu.edu

“If we take the world’s enduring religions at their best, we discover the distilled wisdom of the human race.” Huston Smith

“Blessed is he who learns a lesson of worship from Nature.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Nothing worth knowing can be understood with the mind ...” Woody Allen

Course Description

Some people view religion as a singularly powerful means for promoting goodness and morality in the world. Others believe that religion is the source of most of the hatred and violence in the world today. Still others believe that it is the “opiate of the masses” (Karl Marx). Whatever one’s opinion of religion, however, we would probably all agree that, from the beginning of humanity’s existence on Earth, it has always been a powerful influence in our lives – whether for good or for ill – and that it is likely to remain so long into the future.

It is not the intention of this course to uphold any one particular religious belief system over any other, but rather, to introduce students to the academic study of religion. Thus, we will look at some of the major theorists in the field and examine religious phenomena as psychological, anthropological, and sociological forces in the history of humanity. We will examine the belief systems and practices of several of the world’s major and enduring religious traditions, with the primary goal of identifying those **universal elements** – those common threads – found in all of them, elements that bind all of us, as human beings living together on this small planet, to one another. We will also look at the transcendental, or mystical, experience – an experience found in one form or another in every religion. The main purpose of our analysis and interpretation of religion and the religious experience, then, will be to shed light on the meaning of religion as a whole, and to, therefore, hopefully shed some light on the very meaning of human existence itself.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, the successful student will be able to:

- Understand key theories of religion and have a working knowledge of various approaches to the study of religion.
- Analyze the differences and similarities between various World religions.
- Explain, interpret, evaluate and describe in an organized, critical and analytical fashion the context, history, influence, and structure of one or more religious communities as they exist in a given society.
- Appreciate the importance that the various religious traditions discussed throughout the semester hold for their practitioners.
- Reflect more critically on his/her religious and/or secular worldview and on the place and function of religion in human existence.

Course Texts

You will need to purchase the following books for this course:

- Hopfe, L. M., & Woodward, M. R., Religions of the World, Eleventh Edition. © 2009, 2007, 2005, 2004, 2001, 1998 by Pearson Education, Inc. ISBN- 13-978-0-13-606177-9.
- Hesse, Hermann, Siddhartha. New Directions Publishing, ISBN: 0-8112-0068-x

Other required readings will be in the form of handouts, which the professor will distribute to you at various times during the course of the semester; and book excerpts, which will be posted *on-line* on the F.I.U. Library Course Reserves.

Attendance and Class Participation

Ten (10) percent of your final grade depends on regular attendance and class participation. **Regular attendance and punctuality are expected of all.** Only **one** unexcused absence will go without penalty. Any additional unexcused absence beyond that will cause a drop of one rung on the final grading scale, i.e., from an A to an A-, an A- to a B+, and so on. If you will be unable to attend a particular class, you are expected to inform the professor beforehand via e-mail or telephone and explain your reason.

Course Requirements

1. You are all expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading material, to present your ideas to the class, and to ask questions.
2. In order to get a passing grade in this class, you are expected to complete all assignments by the due dates published in the course syllabus.
3. All assignments must be typed and double-spaced.
4. As this is a Gordon Rule course, clarity, organization, development of ideas, and writing style – including grammar, spelling and punctuation – will be important parts of the grade for all assignments.

Exams and Written Assignments

1. There will be two (2) multiple-choice exams: **#1- Tues., 2/5 & #2- Tues., 3/5.**
2. You will be required to write a research paper for which you will select **two religions other than your own.** Once selected, you will first research them thoroughly (in terms of their practices and beliefs). You will then attend at least one religious service/ceremony for **each** of your chosen religions and present your personal impressions and your understanding of them. In your paper, you are to provide physical descriptions of the outside and inside of each house of worship you attend and of its immediate surroundings. You are also to make note of how the services are organized (that is, if men and women are seated and worship together or apart; what their mode of dress is; and so on). Your final product will be a research paper at least ten pages long that is a synthesis of your findings and a comparison of the two religions, their services, and your impressions or feelings about each of them. This paper will be due on **Tuesday, March 19.**
3. There will be a final exam consisting of 4-5 questions that you will have to answer in essay form. They are meant to demonstrate your understanding of and thoughts on assigned readings and class lectures. Your essays should show that you have read all of the material carefully and have attempted to analyze, synthesize and apply the ideas presented. The exam questions will be handed out on Tuesday, April 16, and will be due on **Tuesday, Apr. 23**

***NOTE:** The professor reserves the right to modify the course syllabus at any time. Students will receive verbal notification of any modifications, should they be made.

Gordon Rule and Writing Standards

The State of Florida has determined that in order for students to successfully fulfill the requirements of a Gordon Rule writing course, he/she must demonstrate “college-level writing skills.” At FIU, college-level writing is defined as that which exhibits the following characteristics: (1) it has a clear purpose and a thesis or controlling idea; (2) the thesis is supported with adequate reasons and evidence; (3) it shows sustained analysis and critical thought; (4) it is organized clearly and logically; (5) it shows knowledge of conventions of standard written English; and (5) it shows awareness of disciplinary conventions in regard to content, style, form, and delivery method.

Grade Point Distribution:

10%	Attendance and Class Participation
15%	Multiple Choice Exam # 1
20%	Midterm -- Exam # 2
30%	Research project
25%	Final Exam

(*Note:* You will be given an opportunity to receive extra credit by making an oral presentation of your research to the class and/or answering an additional essay question.)

Remember: All late work will receive a grade or point penalty. To do well in the course, you must complete all assignments on time.

Grading Scale

94-99 A	“As” are awarded for excellent to exceptional work, free of technical and stylistic errors, showing sustained thought and engagement with the material on an impressive academic level.
90-93 A-	
87-89 B+	“Bs” are awarded for good to very good work, with some occasional errors, but nonetheless clearly indicating a good grasp of the material and assigned task.
84-86 B	
80-83 B-	
77-79 C+	“Cs” are awarded for average to above average work, meeting minimal standards but marked with errors and exposing gaps in student performance and/or fulfillment of the assignment.
74-76 C	
70-73 C-	
67-69 D+	“Ds” are awarded for barely passing to below average work, usually riddled with errors and seriously deficient in fulfilling the assignment.
64-67 D	
60-63 D-	
Below 60 F	“Fs” are given for unacceptable work.

Plagiarism Policy

Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University.

Since this is a writing intensive course, the student might feel tempted to “borrow” materials from written sources or from another person’s work (such as a classmate), whether by directly quoting it or by paraphrasing it. Regardless of the best intentions, this is known as “plagiarism,” the stealing of another person’s words or ideas, and it will not be tolerated. To make it very clear, plagiarism is defined as “literary theft” and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles, or internet sources, then, **each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large, must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate**

citation procedure (i.e., a footnote). All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for such academic misconduct as plagiarism, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook, which could result in dismissal from the university.

Class and Reading/Assignment Schedule

Tuesday, January 8

Introduction to the course and review of course syllabus

In class reading: Definitions and assessments of the term “religion”

Lecture & Discussion: Defining Religion: What is religion? What is spirituality? What is mysticism? What are the differences between spirituality and religion? Why should we study religion?

Some basic theories on the origins of religion

Reading Assignment for Tues., Jan. 15: Hopfe & Woodward, Introduction (pp. 1-10) and Chapter 1 (pp. 15-28) – on-line at Library Course Reserves; Livingston, Chapter 3, “The Sacred and the Holy” – on-line Library Course Reserves); and Emile Durkheim, excerpt from his work Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (handout)

Tuesday, January 15

Lecture and Discussion: *Basic Religions*

Lecture & Discussion: *Theorists and Themes in Religious Studies*

Emile Durkheim
Rudolf Otto
Mircea Eliade
Karl Marx

Reading Assignment for Jan. 22: Livingston, Chapter 5, “Sacred Ritual” (on-line Library Course Reserves)

Tuesday, January 22

Lecture and Discussion: *New Age Religion*

Film: “Beyond the Grave: The Afterlife”

Reading Assignment for Jan. 29: Brian Weiss, from Messages from the Masters, Chapter 15 and Appendix A (on-line Library Course Reserves)

Tuesday, January 29

Lecture and Discussion: *Universal Religious Values*

His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet

Dr. Brian Weiss

Film: *Compassion in Exile*

Reading Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 5: Hopfe & Woodward, Chapter 3, African Religions (pp. 51-70)

Tuesday, February 5

Exam #1

Lecture and Discussion: *Introduction to African Spirituality*

Reading Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 12: Laurenti Magesa, African Religion, Chapter 2, “The Moral Universe” (on-line FIU Library Course Reserves)

Tuesday, Feb. 12

Lecture and Discussion: *African Spirituality* (continued); *the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage*

Film: *The Middle Passage*

Reading Assignment for Tues., Feb. 19: H & W: Chapter 4, Hinduism; begin reading Siddhartha, the novel by Hermann Hesse

Tuesday, Feb. 19

Lecture and Discussion: *Hinduism*

Reading Assignment for Tues., Feb. 26: H & W, Chapter 6, Buddhism; and finish reading Siddhartha

Tuesday, February 26

Lecture and Discussion: *Buddhism, the life of the Buddha, and the novel Siddhartha*

Reading Assignment for Tues., March 5: H & W, Chapter 13, Islam

Tuesday, March 5

Midterm (Exam #2)

Introduction to Islam and the Life of Muhammad

Week of March 11-16 – Spring Break – no classes

Tuesday, March 19

***Islam* (continued)**

Film: *A History of God, part three*

Film: *Islamic Mysticism: The Sufi Way*

Reading Assignment for Tues., March 26: H & W, Chapter 11, Judaism

Tuesday, March 26

Judaism

Film: *A History of God, part 1*

Reading Assignment for Tues., April 2: H & W, Chapter 12, Christianity

Tuesday, April 2

***Judaism* (continued)**

Introduction to Christianity

Tuesday, April 9

Film: *A History of God, part 2*

Student presentations of research

Tuesday, April 16

Student presentations of research

Tuesday, April 23– Final exam week

Final exam due – last day of class