

RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions
Fall 2019
Sections 02, 03

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher

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Time/Location: T/H 1:40-2:55; 3:05-4:20 ECTR 103

Office: Religious Studies Department, 2nd Floor, 4 Glebe St.

Office Hours: T/H 12:30-1:30, and by appointment.

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to five of the world's major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well the role that religion plays in a secular society like the United States. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical development of each tradition and pay special attention to the various concepts of divinity as well as the sacred texts, rites, rituals, myths, and narratives that are considered essential to each. With this background in place, we will then examine the ways in which these developments and concepts have influenced traditional and/or denominational variations within each tradition. Finally, we will apply what we have learned to critically analyze a culturally-specific contemporary topic inspired by our discussion and examinations. There is no prerequisite for this class.

Required Text: Will Deming, ed. *Understanding the Religions of the World* (ISBN 978-1-118-76757-3)

Selected readings uploaded to OAKS. (Please print out and bring to class.)

Course Objectives: The primary goal of this course is the development of a critical approach to the study of religion. I find that this development is best achieved through discussion and so this course is designed primarily to facilitate and encourage open dialogue. Through comparative, historical, and dialogical analysis, students will 1) identify the significance of each religious tradition as an unique system of meaning, 2) learn how religious adherents articulate the central features of their respective religious systems, 3) learn to actively listen to the variety of voices within those traditions, and 4) learn to give critical voice to their own religious or non-religious views. This course satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Student Learning Outcomes: 1) students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture, and 2) students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments. These two learning outcomes will be assessed on the third paper, which will ask students to analyze primary sources in terms of their religious ideas.

Course Expectations: Students are expected to attend class prepared for critical discussion. Readings are to be completed prior to class meeting and all assignments are expected to be handed in by the start of class on the assigned date. No late papers will be accepted. Whether by actively

listening or by actively contributing to discussion, students are expected *to be present*. For this reason, cell phones and laptop computers are not permitted unless otherwise approved. Most importantly, students are expected to be respectful to one another and open to new ideas, critiques, and/or challenges.

Course Requirements: This class is assessed on a 100pt grading scale. In addition to weekly readings and discussion, students will be required to hand in “P’s and Q’s” for each meeting. Here, students will be responsible for selecting one relevant passage (“P”) and crafting one relevant question (“Q”) pertaining to the assigned readings. These P’s and Q’s will help to encourage attendance and participation and will constitute 20pts of the final grade. There will also be three graded papers, each increasing in length and point value. The first is a 3-page paper worth 10pts, the second is a 5-page paper worth 15pts, and the third is an 8-page paper worth 20pts. (45pts total) Each will be prompted and offer a number of questions from which to answer. There will also be a cumulative final exam worth 35pts.

Lying, cheating, attempting cheating and/or plagiarism are violations of the student Honor Code (complete version and all related processes can be found in the online Student Handbook) which, when identified, will be investigated. Any student found responsible by the Honor Board will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure for academic dishonesty.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale: A = 100-92; A- = 91-89; B+ = 88-86; B = 85-82; B- = 81-79; C+ = 78-76; C = 75-72; C- = 71-69; D+ = 68-66; D = 65-62; D- = 61-59; F = 58 and below

Course Schedule, Readings, and Assignments:

(Instructor reserves the right to amend as necessary.)

Tues, Aug 20: Introductions and Expectations

Thurs, Aug 22: What is Religion? Why do we study it?

See Department of Religious Studies website: “Why study Religion?”

Suggested Reading: Deming, pp. 2-6

Tues, Aug 27: Guiding Question #1: Is Religious Diversity or Difference a Problem?

Diana L. Eck: “Dialogue and Method: Reconstructing the Study of Religion”

from *A Magic Still Dwells*, pp. 131-142

Thurs, Aug 29: Continued Discussion (No P&Q)

Tues, Sept 3: Guiding Question #2: Religious Pluralism and Interpretation: How do we determine what’s *True*?

Diana L. Eck: “Dialogue and Method: Reconstructing the Study of Religion”

from *A Magic Still Dwells*, pp. 142-149

Thurs, Sept 5: Continued Discussion (No P&Q)

Tues, Sept 10: **Hinduism**

Situational Awareness: History and Development Deming, pp. 9-17

Thurs, Sept 12: ***Paper One Due: Significant Encounter***

Karma, Samsara, Moksha: Deming, pp. 18-29

Tues, Sept 17: Salvation: Deming, 34-43; 54-56

Thurs, Sept 19: Special Topic: Hinduism and Commodification: “A call to multiple arms! Protesting the commodification of Hindu imagery in western society” by Tanisha Ramachandran (OAKS)

Tues, Sept 24: **Buddhism**

Situational Awareness: The Life of the Buddha: Deming, pp. 61-66

Thurs, Sept 26: The Four Noble Truths and the 8-Fold Path: Deming, pp.67-70

Tues, Oct 1: Nirvana and internal emergences: Mahayana and Theraveda: Deming, pp. 75-82; 108-110

Thurs, Oct 3: Special Topic: Sex in Western Buddhism: “What’s Wrong with Sex” from David R. Loy’s *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution*. pp.65-77 (OAKS)

Tues, Oct 8: **Judaism**

Situational Awareness: Deming, pp. 269-291; Internal emergences: pp. 290-298

Thurs, Oct 10: Special Topic: After the *Shoah*: “Useless Suffering” by Emmanuel Levinas from *The Problem of Evil*. pp. 371-380 (OAKS)

Tues, Oct 15: Fall Break—No Class

Thurs, Oct 17: ***Paper Two Due: Hinduism and Buddhism***

Seder Meal and its Significance

Tues, Oct 22: **Christianity**

Situational Awareness: Historical Development: Deming, pp. 325-343

Thurs, Oct 24: Contemporary Beliefs, Rituals, and Practices: Deming, pp. 358-382

Tues, Oct 29: Internal emergences and denominationalism: Deming, pp. 347-358; 383-384

Sam Portaro: “Whence Pluralism, Whither Denominationalism” from *CrossCurrents* pp. 1-8 (OAKS)

Thurs, Oct 31: Special Topic: Christian Identity Movement: “Christian Identity’s Millenarian Vision of History” from Michael Barkun’s *Religion and the Racist Right*. pp. 103-119 (OAKS)

Tues, Nov 5: **Islam**

Situational Awareness: The Life of Muhammad and historical development:
Deming, 389-402

Thurs, Nov 7: The Five Pillars, Deming, 417-426

Tues, Nov 12: Internal emergences: Sufism: Deming, 440-444;

“Introduction: Islam’s Path of Radical Love” from Omid Safi’s *Radical Love: Teachings from the Islamic Mystical Tradition* pp. xix-l, p.1 “God of Love,” p.71
“Path of Love,” p. 151 “Lover and Beloved,” p. 211 “Beloved Community”; and

selections from Jalaluddin Rumi in Mahmood Jamal’s *Islamic Mystical Poetry: Sufi Verse from the early Mystics to Rumi*. pp. 126-156 (OAKS)

Thurs, Nov 14: Special Topic: Jihad and America: “Terrorism: Jihad Abused?” from Robert Spencer’s *Onward Muslim Soldier: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (OAKS)

Tues, Nov 19: **Religion in America**

The First Amendment and the Establishment Clause

<https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html>

Thurs, Nov 21: Continued discussion: See “Religion: An Overview”; “Governmental Encouragement of Religion in Public Schools: Prayers and Bible Reading”; “Conscientious Objection”; and “The Belief-Conduct Distinction”

Tues, Nov 26: Special Topic: Atheism in America: “Them’s Fightn’ Words: A Brief Look at New Atheism in America” by Erika Blair (OAKS)

Thurs, Nov 28: Thanksgiving—No Class

Tues, Dec 3. ***Paper Three Due: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam***
Reading Day

Final Exams: 1:40 class: Tues, Dec 10, 4pm-7pm

3:05 class: Thurs, Dec 5, 4pm-7pm

Note: Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to see me during office hours. For more information, please contact Disability Service at (843) 953-1431.