

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2023

RELS 101: APPROACHES TO RELIGION
Tues & Thurs 10:50-12:05; Ed Center 103

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler
Email: sieglere@cofc.edu Office phone: 843-953-3910
Office: 4 Glebe St. 2nd floor
Office Hours: Wed 1-4 or by appointment (either in my office or by Zoom)

This class introduces the academic study of religion through the category of experience. What does it mean to have a religious experience? How can religious experiences be classified? Where do they come from? The cornerstone of this class will be a close reading of a classic of religious studies and one of the great works of American literature, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by William James. We will read it slowly and discuss it extensively. To supplement James' own examples of religious experience, we will focus on various religious traditions as they are practiced today and figure out what each can tell us about religious experience. These traditions include Pentecostalism, Psychedelic Spirituality, and Daoism.

This course will fulfill the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes for Humanities**:

SLO #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.

SLO #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 by a writing assignment that will ask students to analyze primary sources in terms of their religious ideas.

Course Requirements:

- Participation and attendance in class including group work and in-class writing: **10%**
- Four out of six "surprise" quizzes, which will be announced the class before. (The two lowest quizzes will be dropped.): **4 x 5% = 20%**
- 3-4 pp. personal reflection paper, due Sept 12: **10%**
- Midterm exam, written in class on Oct 5: **15%**
- 3-4 pp. policy paper about drugs, due Oct 31: **20%**
- 2-3 pp. analytic paper about the Daoism, due Nov 21: **10%**
- Final exam, written in class on Dec 11: **15%**

We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due. There may also be various opportunities to gain **extra credit** by attending relevant lectures or films and writing short papers about them.

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism (incl. using GAI*) are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

There are two required books:

1. **William James**, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Oxford World's Classics)
ISBN-13: 978-0199691647
2. **Thomas B. Roberts, ed.** *Psychedelics and Spirituality*
ISBN-13: 978-1644110225

There are also required short readings, numbered 1 to 16, on OAKS. Please print these out! **Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.**

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Tues Aug 22: Making the Strange Familiar and... Or, What's This Class About?

Read: Miner (Handout)

Thurs Aug 24: What is the Academic Study of Religion?

Read: Studyreligion.org and "C of C Religious Studies" (Websites); P&S 248-253

Tues Aug 29: Who is William James?

Read: VRE ix-xxviii; xxxiii-xxxvi (Chronology; skim)

Thurs Aug 31: What is "Medical Materialism"?

Read: VRE 12-21; 27 (from "To pass now...")-28; OAKS #1- Aghapour

Tues Sept 5: How did James define "Religion" and "the unseen"?

Read: VRE 29 (bottom)-32 (bottom; to "... ecclesiasticism at all") plus 35 (from "such a definition" to end of page); 48-66 (you may skim (not skip) all examples)

Thurs Sept 7: What Is "Peak" Experience?

Read: OAKS #2- Maslow

Tues Sept 12: Is it better to be "healthy minded" or to have a "sick soul"?

Read: VRE 67-69; 74-78; 104-105; 108 ("Let us now say" at the bottom)- 113 ("...the sepulchre surrounds it."); 127 ("The worst kind of melancholy...)- 131.

Personal reflection paper due

Thurs Sept 14: What is Revivalism and Pentecostalism?

Read: OAKS #3- McClymond; OAKS #4- Baer (first half)

Tues Sept 19: How Does James Define “Conversion”?

Read: 150-166 (you may skim 153-156 and 159-165); OAKS #4- Baer (second half)

Thurs Sept 21: Special Guest: Rev. Jacqueline Varner

Read: OAKS #5- “A New Century”; Handout- TBA

Tues Sept 26: What Is Premillennialism?

Read: Various short online news articles

Wed Sept 27 7:30PM: Special Screening of *Hell House* (dir. George Ratliff, 2002)

Thurs Sept 28: Discussion of *Hell House*/ What Is Saintliness?

Read: VRE 207-213; 252-253; 258-262; 283-289

Hand out midterm exam study guide

Tues Oct 3: What is Mysticism? / Midterm Exam Review

Read: VRE 290-294; 296 (from “Nitrous oxide...”)-301 (to “inflowing tide.”); 305 (from “We have now seen...)-307 (to “...than the Christian.”); 310-317 (recommended)

Thurs Oct 5: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Tues Oct 10: Psychedelics as Sacraments and Mystery

Watch: Harvard Divinity School Videos

Read: P&S 1-5; 161-168; 169-177 (recommended)

Thurs Oct 12: Indigenous Psychedelics and The Peyote Road

Read: P&S 119-129; OAKS # 6- Jones; OAKS #7- Harner (recommended)

Tues Oct 17: Fall Break

Thurs Oct 19: Towards the Psychedelic Sixties

Read: P&S 31-49 (recommended); 59-64; 71-89; 94-105 (recommended); 140-143; 144-158 (recommended); 241-243; OAKS #8- “Huxley”

Tues Oct 24: Special Guest: Dr. Yevgeniy Gelfand

Read: P&S 224-233

Thurs Oct 26: The Future of Psychedelic Spirituality

Read: P&S 50-52; 178-187; 274-276

Tues Oct 31: What is Daoism?

Read: OAKS #9- DuBois; OAKS #10- “The Way”

“Drug” policy paper due

Thurs Nov 2: What is the Daoist Body?

Read: OAKS #11- Miller

Tues Nov 7: What is Qigong?

Read: OAKS #12- Cohen; handouts on practice

Thurs Nov 9: What Is Different about Daoist Experience?

Read: OAKS #13- Komjathy

Tues Nov 14: Are Asian Religions More Experiential?

Read: P&S- 52 (last sentence)-56; 221; 196-217; OAKS #14- “Zen as Pure Experience”
(recommended)

Thurs Nov 16: Are Religious Experiences Real?

Read: OAKS #15- Sharf

Tues Nov 21: No Class- Professor at Conference

“Daoism” Paper Due

Thurs Nov 23: Thanksgiving

Tues Nov 28: CLASS CHOICE

Read: OAKS #16- TBD

Thurs Nov 30: What Are James’ Conclusions? / Final Exam Review

Read: VRE 368-380 (recommended); 384-393

Mon Dec 11 1-3 pm: Final Exam

&&&&

NOTES: 1) THIS CLASS IS IN PERSON ONLY. THERE IS NO ZOOM OR OTHER ONLINE OPTION. 2) DO NOT use laptops in class, unless you have a valid reason to do so, which you must discuss with me in advance. 3) **Absence Policy:** Missing classes without an explanation will affect your in-class participation score since you cannot participate if you are not present! Further, students who have 4 or more unexcused absences will receive an automatic 0% for In-Class Participation. Missing a small number of classes in the name of sensible health precautions (e.g. cold/flu symptoms, or getting tested after a COVID exposure) will not incur any penalties to your participation grade, as long as you keep me informed and keep up with your work outside of class. If you anticipate missing multiple classes for any reason—athletic commitments, health

conditions, family or work obligations, travel, etc.—please get in touch with me to discuss options for keeping up.

The Center for Student Learning (CSL) will provide online academic support services in course content, writing skills, and study strategies. For more information regarding CSL, please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843) 953-5635.

Students with documented **disabilities** who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at snap@cofc.edu.

Mental & Physical Wellbeing: “At the college, we take every students’ mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.”

***Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)** tools are not permitted for any work in this class. If you use GAI tools, your actions would be considered academically dishonest and a violation of the College of Charleston’s Honor Code and Code of Conduct. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the College’s Honor Code. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or other GAI tools. Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments should be prepared solely by the student and without any assistance. Questions in this regard should be shared directly with your professor. Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, support of any generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools is not permitted, and submissions using GAI will be treated as plagiarism per the College of Charleston’s Honor Code.