

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall, 2013

RELS 298.001/ENVT 352: Special Topics: Religion and Food

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: RSS 116 (prepared to get lost your first visit)

Office Hours: T/TR 1:45pm to 4:30pm, or by appointment

Email: levasseurjt@cofc.edu (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends)

Lectures: MW 2:00 to 3:15pm, ECTR 219

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Major or Minor)

Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.

In announcing the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives (part of the State Department) at the White House today, Secretary of State John Kerry expressed the following: “In fact, if I went back to college to day, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that’s how integrated [religion] is in everything that are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today.”

Course Description and Instructional Format: This course introduces students to the academic study of religion and to the environmental humanities through the lens of food. We will become familiar with key religious studies theories that help us to understand how food is a marker of identity, status, and privilege; how food reinforces and/or subverts power in society; and how food is used in religious rituals to communicate with supernatural agents or deities. We will also look at food taboos and dietary requirements and how, when, and why these originated, and how these have changed due to migration and globalization. This exploration will be undertaken within the context of contemporary issues surrounding food security, sustainable agriculture, and food justice, such that we will examine the issue of sustainable and ethical food production and consumption within religions. This course is comparative and cross-cultural, focusing primarily on Indigenous peoples, Hinduism, and Christianity, via a mix of lectures, videos, discussions, and reading of primary religious texts, scholarly articles, and first-person “insider” accounts.

Course Goals and Objectives: Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the academic study of religion, including a brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion, focusing especially on social constructivist and comparative approaches to the academic study of religion.
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about three religions (Hinduism, Indigenous religions [esp. of Peru], and Christianity), including their historical development and current manifestations, as well as briefly learning about some of their key figures, sacred texts, important terms, and foundational concepts as all of these relate to the themes of the course.
3. To develop an appreciation for the myriad and often contentious views about food and food production present in U.S. and global politics and society.
4. To help students encounter religious traditions outside of those in which they were raised/are most familiar with, thus helping to build citizenship and religious literacy skills.

<http://www.cofc.edu/about/missionvisionvalues/core-purpose-and-values.php>

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of three religions, especially in regards to food.
2. To investigate and analyze how food, and narratives about food, acts as a marker of identity, status, and privilege within and between religious communities and acts as a boundary marker between sacred/profane, prohibited/required, in-group/out-group.

3. To question how food can both reinforce and/or subvert power dynamics in a community and in society.
4. To gain an understanding of how food is used in religious rituals, ceremonies, practices, and to communicate with supernatural agents/deities.
5. To master basic factual knowledge about world religions and specific food: teachings, scriptural passages, myths, beliefs, and practices.
6. To analyze the interaction between food and gender, and also rites of passage based on food/that include food.
7. To briefly explore food taboos, and to theorize how globalization has and continues to change interfaces between religion and food.
8. To explore how various religions have and continue to grapple with social and environmental ethics in regards to food production and consumption.
9. To explore the emerging links between sustainable agriculture and world religions, focusing especially on issues of agroecology, food justice, food security, and religious environmentalist discourses about sustainable food production.
10. To gain an appreciation for key concepts, including but not limited to: food security, food justice, food miles, food deserts, industrial agriculture, sustainable agriculture
11. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions, while also engaging in interdisciplinary discussions about religion/sustainable agriculture issues.

General Education Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, or valued in various expressions of human culture.
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments (or alternatives that require equally coherent and sustained analysis).
 - a. These two general education student learning outcomes will be assessed in the final exam, essays 1 and 2.

Required Texts:

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. These readings are to be printed out and brought to class for discussion. You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for the day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand. Readings listed for the day are to be read by the beginning of class for that day.

1) Fick, Gary. *Food, Farming, and Faith*.

2) Sanford, Whitney. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*.

3) Apffel-Marglin, Frédérique. *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*.

- <http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html>
- <http://usreligion.blogspot.com>
- <http://religionandpolitics.org>
- <http://www.religiondispatches.org>
- <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com>
- <http://religionnews.com/index.php?/rnsblog>
- <http://www.cornucopia.org/>
- <http://www.slowfood.com/>
- http://www.fao.org/index_en.htm
- <http://www.oxfam.org/>
- <http://www.heifer.org/>
- <http://www.farmsanctuary.org/>
- <http://www.acresusa.com/magazines/magazine.htm>
- <http://viacampesina.org/en/>
- <http://www.foodfirst.org/>
- www.biodynamic.org.uk/
- <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/>
- <http://www.worldwatch.org/>
- <http://earthdevotion.org/>
- <http://www.arcworld.org/>
 - <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.htm>
- <http://fore.research.yale.edu/>
- www.religionandnature.com
- <http://www.nrpe.org/> National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateA&navID=>

- Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS) <http://www.food-culture.org/>
- Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society (AFHVS) <http://afhvs.org/>
- European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe) <http://www.eursafe.org/>

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *Attendance*: Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are repeatedly more than 5 minutes late to class, you will begin to be counted as absent for that day, as tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Keep in mind that the instructor will not provide notes or discussion of class material that have already been covered; it is your responsibility to be present and to be to class on time. After 2 unexcused absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After your 4th unexcused absence, you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. An excused absence means that I receive an email from CofC saying your excuse was “documented;” if I receive an email (or no notice at all) saying your absence was “undocumented,” then it is unexcused. It is up to you to contact the Office of Student Affairs in order to find out what counts as a documented excuse. Please observe the totality of this attendance policy.

**Lecture notes will not be shared and/or repeated after the day they are presented, so it is your responsibility to contact other students to receive copies of notes for classes you have missed. However, students are more than welcome to come to the office to view a copy of .ppt lectures if they were present the day of the lecture and were not able to fully capture all of the material during a lecture, or if there are questions about content covered that day in class. .Ppt’s will not be made available online, so make sure you are taking good notes during class.

**A valid, documented excuse *must be received* in order for a test to be made up; missed quizzes and reading summaries are not able to be made up or turned in late—you must be present, or must clear *in advance* with me that you will email your answers before class begins if you are unable to be in class.

2) *Common Courtesy*: As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Be aware that if the professor observes that a student is often, and more so, continuously texting or using their computer for activities not directly related to the course, then the student’s class participation component of the overall grade will automatically lose points. The more often this behavior occurs, then the more points will be deducted. Please stay focused and on task if you have your computer open!

3) *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating—this is especially true on the take-home reading quizzes, whereas if strong evidence appears that students collaborated, then all parties involved will automatically receive a “0” for that assignment.

4) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cds/index.htm>

5) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals. I urge you to pay special attention to the Center for Student Learning, and I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies and course content. They offer tutoring, supplemental instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843)953-5635.

6) *Assignments*: Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. **Class participation**—This includes your attendance, how well you engage the assigned readings, and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions and small group discussions. There will be open-book quizzes on the readings; summaries of readings; and/or question prompts about the readings that count towards this aspect of your grade. This also includes possible reflection journals based on a prompt provided by the professor, which will become the basis of a discussion. Group work on applying for a Green Fee project is also included. Students who are exceptionally engaged and who exhibit mastery of course materials and a robust inquisitiveness about the course content may earn more than 100% for this part of the overall grade. 15% of grade.
2. **Reading Analysis**—You will be required to write a 500 word “reflection” for five pre-selected class meetings—each reading for assigned for that day is to have a reflection analysis. This writing will contain two components:
 - a. **Critical and Factual Analysis (66 points)**—each review will begin by addressing four interrelated items:
 - i. What is the key argument/point of the reading
 - ii. What evidence is used in making this argument
 - iii. Why does the argument and data matter to the author?
 - iv. What other authors/readings is this reading related to/with whom is it in dialogue?

These are to be written as an abstract for a Journal, so you must generate a title for the article; find four keywords to put at the end; suggest “cross listed” readings from the course at the end; and then your summary should read like an abstract. You may use relevant quotes to show you captured the main points as needed, but do not give 300 words of quotes.

- b. **Personal Analysis and Reflection (33 points)**—the second half of the entry should address thoughts and emotions that were triggered as you read, as well as what you learned that was helpful or challenging. Overall, you should address how the article helped you understand either religion, or religion and food, better. This should be written in the first person.

These will be uploaded to OAKS via the course Dropbox, submitted as a word docx (or worddoc). (20% of grade).

3. **Paper assignments**—A four-page “memo” will be due, comparing the pros and cons of GMO vs. Heirloom seeds, on Saturday, 9/14 (10% of grade); a 1,500 word report and analysis on religion and food ethics will be due on 11/13 (15% of grade).
4. **Tests**—There will be an in-class Mid-term on Wednesday, October 2nd, and a take-home final exam. Each is worth 20% of your grade. The final exam will include two essay questions, numbers 1 and 2, and each question is worth 8.5% of your overall grade.
5. **Extra Credit**—there will be options for extra credit as the course develops. Most likely these will include watching movies and/or analyzing a current source of conflict over religion that is garnering media attention. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion and contain connections to what we have covered in class. Each activity is worth .5 points, and a student may earn a total of 2 possible

extra credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is at the beginning of class on 12/2. Any student who was present for the entirety of each class will receive .5 points.

- a. Pre-arranged extra credit activities, each worth 1 point, include volunteering at the Charleston Food Bank; volunteering at Crisis Ministries [currently being renovated]; and volunteering at Green Grocer farm on Wadmalaw Island, followed by a written analysis of the experience.

Remember, grades are not randomly assigned! When you do well (or not) on an assignment or test, reflect on the factors that made a difference—the time you committed, your awareness of the instructions, your understanding of the material, and the help you sought.

Grading Scale: A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

Recipes

1. *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. **Genesis 3:1-6.***
2. *Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! **Matthew 7:9-11***
3. *"Eating is one of the important functions of life. It begins as a biological act, a means of satisfying hunger. When we invite a friend for dinner, a new dimension is added to eating; it becomes a social act. It helps to cement friendship. When a meal takes place in connection with the joy of observance of a commandment, it becomes a solemn act that helps add significance to an occasion. On the Sabbath, or even more, on Passover at the Seder, eating becomes a religious act, an act of worship, with the table becoming an altar of God." **Rabbi Isaac Klein***
4. *Prasadam...[is] on the...spiritual platform. One should never consider prasadam to be like ordinary hotel cooking. Nor should one touch any kind of food not offered to the Deity. **Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada***
5. *"Let me be clear about something. I'm not going to try to convert anyone here to Judaism, and I would appreciate it very much if you didn't try to convert me to Christianity. What I am trying to do is to be the best Jew that I can be, so that you can be the best Christian that you can be. Let's study together." **Elie Wiesel***
6. *"[O]ne can only speak of [religions] of particular times and places, or one can speak of [religious] texts, or perhaps of specified [religious] traditions and their material, intellectual, and social productions. From my point of view, there is no [religion] that speaks on its own, no capacious ["tradition"] that contains things within itself." **-Raoul Birnbaum, "Socially Engaged Buddhism and the Trajectory of Buddhist Ethical Consciousness," 2009***

7. *"We are not obligated to complete the task; neither are we free to abstain from it."* –**Pirke Avot 2:21**

Class Schedule

Unit 1: Appetizer-Key terms and concepts

W 8/21: Receive Syllabus

M 8/26: OAKS: (1) selections from Durkheim; (2) La Pena and Lawrance, Foodways; (3) Ency of Rel: Agriculture; (4) Ency of Rel: Food

W 8/28: OAKS: (1) selections from Daniel Quinn; (2) chapter by Kirkpatrick Sale **Summary #1 Due**

M 9/2: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/How-the-Potato-Changed-the-World.html?c=y&story=fullstory>; OAKS: Encyclopedia entries on (1) Food history; (2) Food security; (3) Green Revolution

W 9/4: OAKS: (1) Wes Jackson, Post-Carbon Reader; (2) Jensen and McBay, pg.12-23; (3) Fred Kirschenmann, "Can Organic Agriculture Feed the World?"

M 9/9: OAKS: (1) Shiva, "Women and the Gendered Politics of Food;" (2) Feagan, "The Place of Food: Mapping out the 'Local' in Local Food Systems;" (3) Peterson, "Is Eating Locally a Moral Obligation?"

*bring in an example (picture, website, advertisement) of "local" cuisine from the Lowcountry

***Summary #2 Due**

W 9/11: OAKS: (1) Lu, et al on Bt Cotton; (2) Ronald and Adamchak, "The Future of Sustainable Food Production;" (3) Kaufman, "The Second Green Revolution"

****Writing Assignment #1 due Saturday, September 14th, at 5pm, on OAKS**

Unit 2: Main Course #1: Christianity

M 9/16: OAKS: (1) FK, "Theological Reflections While Castrating Calves;" (2) Catholic Social Teaching and Food; (3) Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation"

W 9/18: Gary Fick, Foreword through Chapter 4

M 9/23: Fick, chpts. 5-8

W 9/25: Fick, chpts. 9-10

M 9/30: Fick, finish book

*try to trace all the ingredients of a meal—who grew each item, where, and how? Who shipped it, how? What variety of seed/animal was it, and who bred this? If you can't find this information, how come? Come ready to discuss your results.

W 10/2: Mid-term

Unit #3: Main Course #2: Hinduism

M 10/7: OAKS: (1) Jim Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative;" (2) Knight and Messler, "Environmental Concern in Cross-National Perspective" ****Summary #3 Due**

W 10/9: Whitney Sanford, Foreword to pg. 27

W 10/16: WS, chapters 2-4 ****Summary #4 Due**

M 10/21: Finish WS, chpts 6-7

W 10/23: share opening paragraph, conclusion, outline, and sources for paper; OAKS: Connie Barlow, "Garden of Eden on Your Dinner Plate"

Unit #4: Main Course #3: Indigenous Peoples

M 10/28: OAKS: (1) chapter from Ragged Edge of the World; (2) Watson and Huntington, "They're Here..."

W 10/30: FA-M, Introduction-chpt 3

M 11/4: FA-M, chpts 4-6

W 11/6: FA-M, chpts 7-8

M 11/11: Finish FA-M

W 11/13: **Paper Due**

Unite 5: Dessert: Conclusion

M 11/18: OAKS: Larry Rasmussen on Soil

W 11/20: OAKS: (1) Wendell Berry, “Solving for Pattern;” (2) FK, “On Becoming Lovers of the Soil”

*****Summary #5 Due**

M 11/25: Receive Final Exam; OAKS: (1) Winona LaDuke, “Buffalo Nation;” (2) Gary Paul Nabhan, “Renewing America’s Food Traditions”

M 12/2: OAKS: (1) David James Duncan; (2) David Abram, “Reciprocity”

Final Exam: mandatory attendance—we will have a potluck and share Haiku poems and pictures

“The Laughing Oath”

I do solemnly swear from this day forward
To grease my giggling gears each day
And to wear a grin on my face for no reason at all
I promise to tap my funny bone often,
With children, family, friends, colleagues and clients,
And to laugh at least fifteen times per day.
I believe that frequent belly laughter
Cures terminal tightness, cerebral stuffiness,
And hardening of the attitudes,
And that HA HA often leads to AHA! Therefore, I vow, from this day forth,
To brighten the day of everyone I meet,
And to laugh long and prosper.

