

RELS 101.002: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION-RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND PEACE

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4 Glebe Street, Room 206 (upstairs in the back), 3-3911

Office Hours: M and W, 12 to 2pm, or by appointment (email works best)

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

Lectures: EDCT 219, TR 3:05 to 4:20pm

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 today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that's how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today."

Course Description and Instructional Format: This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to the academic study of religion, as well as to some of the diverse religious traditions extant on our planet. The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, open class discussion, and small group discussion. The course is designed so that the student, by the end of the semester, has gained a basic appreciation and understanding of some of the world's major religions, and why such an understanding is important for both a liberal arts education and also to being a world citizen.

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

1. To introduce students to the academic study of religion, including brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion; the historical development of the field; and the influence of liberal Protestantism on both the field's formation, and popular U.S. conceptions of "religion."
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about varieties of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, respectively, including their historical development and current manifestations, as well as learning about key figures, sacred texts, important terms, and foundational concepts as these relate to the topics of peace and conflict, and under what historical, economic, political, and environmental conditions..
3. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and often times contentious ways in which religion has shaped politics, from ancient to modern times and from local to global levels, with a special focus on the U.S.
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.
 - a. <http://www.cofc.edu/about/missionvisionvalues/index.php>
 - b. Daniel Deffenbaugh: "One of the fundamental objectives of any pedagogical strategy is to force students to step outside their received system of values and consider the validity of new ideas and novel approaches to understanding the world."

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of world religions.
2. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions.
3. To systematically create a research paper that requires reflection on the writing and research process.
4. To attempt to critically empathize with leading authorities within Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism in regards to why they advocate for either peace or violence, and the impacts their teachings and/or living example may have on certain followers, past and present.
5. To introduce ways to consider how religion can become a source for conflict resolution.

This course satisfies the **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

1. These two General Education SLO will be assessed on paper assignment #2, worth 20% of your grade.

Required Texts:

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. 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, and ideally printed out to be brought to class. I suggest downloading all pdfs ASAP so you have them on your computer.

- *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* by Mark Juergensmeyer (“TMG,” below)
- *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh (“PES,” below)
- A variety of readings will be made available on OAKS. These are to be printed out and brought to class.
- For suggested movies: from CofC Library main page, go to Databases; then “F;” then choose “Films on Demand;” then type in the title of the movie provided below, in the “search” box.

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *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 also be a mix of either open-book quizzes on the readings; summaries of readings; and/or question prompts about the readings that count towards this aspect of your grade. Students should check email regularly for reading quiz questions, which will be emailed at least 24 hours in advance of the class for when they are due. Participation may also include possible reflection journals based on a prompt provided by the professor, which will become the basis of a discussion. 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. Paper assignments—you are write two papers for the course:
 1. Biography of a Peace Activist—the first 5-page paper is to be a biography of a peace activist (excluding Jesus) or peace advocacy group from Christianity with the focus being on any era. Details will be discussed in class. 15% of your total grade. Due 9/26.
 2. Compare and Contrast Muslim views of peace and conflict using Lakoff—this paper is a comparison of Muslim legal scholars and religious leaders, one advocating peace, the other violence, where analysis of their position will be contextualized using George Lakoff. This 7-paper will also include a reflection on your researching and writing process. Details will be discussed in class. 20% of your grade; paper counts towards your SLO objectives. Due 10/31.
 3. Reflection paper on assumptions about Buddhism and Peace/Violence, focusing on contemporary issues in Myanmar between Buddhists and Muslims. 3 pages. Details will be discussed in class. 7% of your grade. Due 11/11.
 4. Movie review and reflection on *War Made Easy*. 2 pages. 3% of your grade. Due 9/9.
 - i. <http://coc.kanopystreaming.com.nuncio.cofc.edu/node/41591>

***Hard copies of these assignments are due at the beginning of class; late papers will be marked down 1/3 grade for every 24 hours they are late from the start of class period.

3. Tests—These are not cumulative, and will consist of fill in the blank, listing of key concepts, multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay questions. Study guides will be provided in advance for each test. 20% of your grade per test, for 40%.
4. Extra Credit—there will be options for extra credit as the course develops. Most likely these will include watching movies (especially those listed in the syllabus found in CofC’s Films on Demand) 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 3 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is the last day of class. Any student who was present for the entirety of each class will receive .5 points.
 1. Possible options: volunteering at the Peace One Day festival, for 2 points; volunteering at Crisis Ministries with the class, for 1 point, including summaries.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; 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)

2) *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. 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 5th 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. I will forward to you all emails I receive from Student Affairs in regards to an absence so you are aware if it is documented/undocumented.

Please note:

**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 borrow 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. Lastly, if I am going too fast, ask me to slow down.

**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 evidence suggests that such actions have taken place, then I will send the work in question to the Office of Student Affairs/Dean of Students, where they will begin procedures to investigate possible infractions. 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.

* **Inappropriate paraphrasing is the most common type of plagiarism; please refer to the following tutorials for tips on how to avoid it:** <http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/content.php?pid=47664&sid=351353>

*Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

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/~cdis/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.

*Counseling and Substance Abuse Services: Suite 300 RSS building; 843-953-5640

* **Center for Student Learning**: I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning’s (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, 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.

*really helpful links: <http://csl.cofc.edu/student-resources/index.php>

Course Schedule (assigned readings are to be read by the beginning of class for the day they are assigned; OAKS readings should be printed and brought to class)

As you read, it will help your studying and your ability to master the course goals and objectives if you pay attention to and take notes on the following:

- (a) What is the key argument? (i.e. Be able to summarize the key argument/s in two to three sentences using your own words.)
- (b) What evidence is presented by the author/s to make this argument?
- (c) Why does this argument matter to the author/s?
- (d) How is the argument and evidence related to other readings? What body of knowledge is being developed, or what argument is being developed by readings?

It is **the student's responsibility** to approach me if a reading is not clear or if there are unanswered questions about the reading. The same is true for content covered in class. If you do not verbalize to me that you are having difficulty understanding course content (from class or readings), then I can only assume that everything is clear. If this is not the case, then you should approach me after class or during office hours. As much of what we read and discuss will be new material, there will most likely be difficulties; if this is your experience, then please see me. 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.

Unit 1: Key concepts, theories, and methods

*note that throughout the course you will most likely encounter new words and concepts foreign to you. Many of these are new words in terms of language, and also religious concepts. Familiarize yourself the best you can, because you'll see them in lecture and on the tests. Pay attention to the ones that you encounter in class and in the readings. This holds true for all units/religions we will cover.

- o Tuesday, 8/19: get syllabus; defining key terms
- o Thrs, 8/21: OAKS—Kripal, Intro and Chapter 1
- o Tues, 8/26: OAKS—Kripal, chapters 2 and 3
- o Thrs, 8/28: OAKS—Martin on “Authentic” religion
 - o Complete on-line plagiarism “Post-Test Your Knowledge” and print results to turn in to me:
<http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>
- o Tues, 9/2: OAKS—Lakoff on Cognitive Frames and Morality
- o Thrs, 9/4: TMG—preface and Introduction
- o Tues, 9/9: guest lecture, Kristi Brian; movie review due; *Good Soldiers*, chapter 4

Unit 2: Christianities, Peace, and Conflict

- o Thrs, 9/11: lecture, OAKS: basics on Christianity; work on paper #1
 - o FD: The Birth of a New Religion: Christianity in the 1st and 2nd Centuries; In the Name of Christ
- o Tues, 9/16: OAKS: Walter Wink *Jesus and Nonviolence*, chapters 1-3 (pg. 1-50)
- o Thrs, 9/18: TMG, chp 2, pg. 19-36
- o Tues, 9/23: OAKS: Martin Luther King, Jr.; begin *Constantine's Sword*
- o Thrs, 9/25: finish movie; work on paper #1
 - o FRIDAY, 9/26, 3pm—paper 1 due in my mailbox, 4 Glebe Street
- o Tues, 9/30: Test 1

Unit 3: Varieties of Islam, Peace, and Conflict

- o Thrs, 10/2: OAKS—basics on Islam; lecture
 - o FD: The Arabs Make Their Entrance: Islam and Empire; Islam vs. Islam; 9/11 Through Saudi Eyes
- o Tues, 10/7: OAKS—selections from Edward Said; postcolonial theory; representation of Islam as the “Other” in the West; Islamaphobia
- o Thrs, 10/9: OAKS: two Muslim views of the same Quranic passage
- o Tues, 10/14: TMG, chapter 4
- o Thrs, 10/16: OAKS: selections from Talal Asad *On Suicide Bombing*
- o Tues 10/21: bring 1st paragraph and sources for paper #2, meet at library
- o Thrs, 10/23: begin film *Obsession*, work on paper
- o Tues, 10/28: Sam Harris interview; TMG, chapter 7
- o Thrs, 10/30: Guest Lecture, Michael Klare; OAKS: Latour on War and Peace in an age of Ecological Conflict; The Earth Charter

- FRIDAY, 10/31, 3pm—paper 2 due in my mailbox, 4 Glebe Street

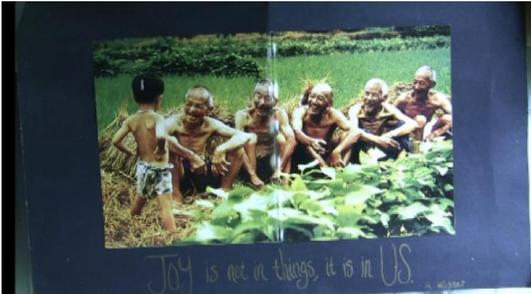
Unit 4: Varieties of Buddhisms, Peace, and Conflict

- Thrs, 11/6: OAKS—basics on Buddhism; lecture
 - FD suggested movie: Walking with Buddha
- Tues, 11/11: OAKS: *Peace and Justice on the World Scriptures-Buddhism*
- Thrs, 11/13: volunteering write up due; PES, foreword through pg. 35
- Tues, 11/18: PES, 36-83
- Thrs, 11/20: PES, finish PES (84-134)
- Tues, 11/25: TMG, chpts 10 and 11

Final Exam on Units 3 and 4

“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.



“Joy is not in things, it is in Us.”