Approaches to Religion: Sacred and Special Stuff (RELS 101.03)
TR 1:40PM-2:55PM (ECTR 103)

CONTACT
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Hours:          W 11:00AM-12:30PM, R 3:00PM-4:30PM
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DESCRIPTION
When we hear the word “religion,” the first thing that probably comes to mind is belief. But when we actually encounter religion in the world, we soon find ourselves face to face with lots of stuff: rosary beads and hijabs, gongs and incense, prayer shawls and peace pipes, amulets and daggers and dolls. This course will introduce students to the academic study of religion through an exploration of some of the stuff – meaning, physical objects and material culture – that is significant for Christians in America, Muslims in Africa, and Buddhists in Asia. And, in the process, we will consider one of the most central questions for religious studies: what makes some stuff special or “sacred,” in the first place?
OBJECTIVES
1) Introduce you to the academic study of religion
2) Acquaint you with the ways religion is lived in different contexts
3) Provide you with tools to compare religion across contexts responsibly
4) Hone your critical reading and thinking skills through disciplined engagement with texts, targeted assignments, and constructive conversation with classmates

GENERAL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
This course fulfills General Education Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):
1. Students will analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
2. Students will examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments.
These outcomes will be assessed in Paper #2

EVALUATION
20% Attendance and Participation
• I take attendance daily.
• You cannot participate if you are not present.
• Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
• Miss more than FIVE classes and you will be dropped from the course.
20% Pop Quizzes (5% each)
• There will be five surprise quizzes scattered throughout the semester.
• They will test critical reading and thinking skills on that day’s reading.
• You will have the first ten minutes of class to complete the quiz.
• I will drop your lowest quiz grade.
20% Two Papers
• Paper #1 (10%): Due Thursday, February 8
• Paper #2 (10%): Due Thursday, April 5
15% Midterm Exam: Thursday, March 1
25% Final Exam: **Tuesday, May 1 (12:00-3:00PM)**

Extra Credit
• There are two ways to receive extra credit. You may attend a specified extra credit event and/or a worship service of a religious tradition to which you do not belong. Specified extra credit events are listed in the syllabus with the acronym EC. In order to receive credit, you must attend said event and write a short paper reflecting on it (1-page, double-spaced, 12-point font). Your reflection is due via email within one week of said event. Extra credit will be applied to your quiz grade.
GRADING SCALE
A = 93-100  B+ = 87-89  C+ = 77-79  D+ = 67-69  F = 0-60
A- = 90-92  B = 83-86  C = 73-76  D = 63-66
B- = 80-82  C- = 70-72  D- = 60-62

REQUIRED TEXTS
Since our collective success in this class depends on careful and critical reading of all assigned materials, it is imperative that you have your own physical copies of all texts. I expect you to actively engage the texts (underline arguments, star key points, write exasperated comments in the margins, etc.) while reading outside of class and to bring them with you to class to facilitate discussion.

There are three required books. All other readings will be posted on our OAKS site (under Content). Please print & bring hard copies with you to class when assigned.

You will receive a 0 for attendance if you fail to bring your assigned material on any given class day. Digital copies are prohibited without permission of professor (see Technology policy below). Books are on reserve in the library, but to actively engage library copies you will need to photocopy them. If cost is a concern, please see me.

- S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5½ OBJECTS: Bringing the Spiritual to its Senses* (Beacon, 2014)
- S. Brent Plate ed., *KEY TERMS in Material Religion* (Bloomsbury, 2015)

EXPECTATIONS

**For Me:**
- To be passionate and prepared for class each day
- To help you understand and assess the ideas in our required readings
- To be clear and fair in communicating how your learning will be evaluated
- To be accessible to answer your questions and hear to your concerns
- To be committed to facilitating and fostering space for difficult discussions
- To be open to questions about the role my identity plays in my teaching

**For You:**
- To complete all assignments
- To be on time and in attendance in class sessions
- To bring all relevant materials with you to class
- To prepare for class by reading critically and carefully
- To participate in civil and constructive conversations with classmates

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ATTENDANCE AND LATE POLICIES

• You can only participate in our class if you are physically present, so attendance is essential to success. I will take attendance daily. If you miss more than five classes you will fail and be dropped from the class.
• Class begins promptly at 1:40PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect you to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes 1:40. Points will be deducted if you arrive late or leave before the end of class.
• Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. Any assignment turned in after the designated deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10 points) for each day that your assignment is late. Days are calculated by 24-hour periods that begin with the original due date and time.
• No one is more sympathetic to the busyness of our curricular and co-curricular schedules than I am (I have a wife, three daughters, a dog, after all). Nevertheless, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Deadlines for other classes and other prior commitments are not acceptable excuses for missed class or late work.
• The same goes for technological problems. We are increasingly dependent on our devices and other technologies. However, as I know you know, technology can fail us. Computers crash, iPads break, servers are sometimes down, etc. Again, though I am sympathetic, technical difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late assignments or missed class. I expect you to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and remember, always (ALWAYS!) back up your documents!!!

TECHNOLOGY
Students are expected to have a CofC email address linked to OAKS that they check regularly. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication.

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom. Use of cellphones is strictly prohibited and will result in a 0 for attendance.

I prefer that you use paper and pen/pencil as your note-taking devices (crayons and markers also acceptable). If you prefer to take notes on a laptop or tablet, I ask that you sign an agreement with me for responsible use and that you sit in the rear of the classroom, so as not to distract your classmates. If your use of devices disrupts our class, I reserve the right to embarrass you and/or ask you to leave. (Please see me if and when you wish to sign an agreement.)

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION
If you have, or think you may have, a documented disability (physical, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, etc.) please visit the Center for Disability Services. The Center can provide you with the information and documentation necessary to arrange accommodations you may require. The Center for Disability Services (SNAP) can be accessed via: http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/.
RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION
The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College. Our full Statement on Religious Accommodations Policy can be found here: http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/rlc/accommodation.php

THE CENTER FOR STUDENT LEARNING
The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the CSL website: http://csl.cofc.edu/.

WRITING LAB
I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more, visit http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/.

HONOR CODE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to a misunderstanding will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—working together without permission—is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration
during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others’ exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance. Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

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

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

What Makes Stuff Sacred?
Week 1 – Religion ’n Stuff
Tuesday, January 9
Thursday, January 11

Week 2 – What Makes Some Stuff Sacred?
Monday, January 15: Martin Luther King Day
Sekou, “Martin Luther King’s Radical Legacy” – OAKS
Tuesday, January 16
OBJECTS, “1/2”
OBJECTS, “Soul”
Thursday, January 18
OBJECTS, “Stones”
EC: Thursday, January 18:
Frontier Jews & Black Catholics

Week 3 – What Makes Some Stuff Sacred?
Tuesday, January 23
KEY TERMS, “Thing”
Thursday, January 25
OBJECTS, “Incense”

Week 4 – What Makes Some Stuff Sacred?
Tuesday, January 30
KEY TERMS, “Smell”
Thursday, February 1: NO CLASS

Week 5 – What Makes Some Stuff Sacred?
Tuesday, February 6
OBJECTS, “Drums”
Thursday, February 8
KEY TERMS, “Sound”
DUE: Paper #1

**Sacred Stuff among Catholic Christians**
Week 6 – *What is Christianity?*
Tuesday, February 13
Walls, “Is There A ‘Historic Christian Faith’?” (OAKS)
Thursday, February 15
KEY TERMS, “Belief”

Week 7 – *How is Catholic Christianity embodied?*
Tuesday, February 20
FIELD TRIP: St. Patrick Catholic Church
Thursday, February 22
Cressler, “Becoming Catholic” (OAKS)

Week 8 – *Catholics in the United States*
Tuesday, February 27
PHOTOS: Catholics on the South Side of Chicago (OAKS)
Thursday, March 1
IN CLASS: Midterm Exam

**Sacred Stuff among Sunni Muslims**
Week 9 – *What is Islam?*
Tuesday, March 6
Ernst, “The Sacred Sources of Islam” (OAKS)
Thursday, March 8
FILM: *Koran By Heart* (OAKS)

Week 10 – *How is Sunni Islam embodied?*
Tuesday, March 13
MS. MARVEL
Thursday, March 15
KEY TERMS, “Dress”

**Monday, March 19 – Friday, March 23: NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

Week 11 – *Muslims in West Africa*
Tuesday, March 27
VIDEO: Ware, “Key Lessons From the History of Islam in West Africa” (OAKS)

EC: Tuesday, March 27: Dr. Simran Singh Comes to Campus
Thursday, March 29
Ware, “Education, Embodiment, and Epistemology” (OAKS)
Sacred Stuff among Chan/Zen Buddhists
Week 12 – What is Buddhism?
Tuesday, April 3
Lopez, “Introduction” to The Story of Buddhism (OAKS)
Thursday, April 5
GUEST: Dr. Zeff Bjerken
DUE: Paper #2

Week 13 - How is Chan/Zen Buddhism embodied?
Tuesday, April 10
KEY TERMS, “Ritual”
Thursday, April 12
FILM: Edward Burger, Alms
Goulet, “Review: Alms & Vows” (OAKS)

Week 14 – Buddhists in East Asia
Tuesday, April 17
Soko, “My Struggle to Become a Zen Monk” (OAKS)
Thursday, April 19
OBJECTS, “Bread”

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 1 [12:00-3:00PM]