

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2019

Sustainability Related (SR) RELS 105: INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4 Glebe, room 202

Office Hours: 12pm to 1pm, Monday and Wednesday

Email: levasseurjt@cofc.edu (I typically respond to emails within 6 hours during the day M-F. Do not expect responses on the weekend.)

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, then Secretary of State John Kerry (Obama administration) 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 some of the diverse religious traditions extant on our planet. The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, podcasts, weblinks, and group discussions. The course is designed so that the student, by the end of the course, has gained an 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 a brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion.
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about a variety of world religions, including their historical development and current manifestations, as well as learning about key figures, sacred texts, important terms, and foundational concepts for a variety of world religions.
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.
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>

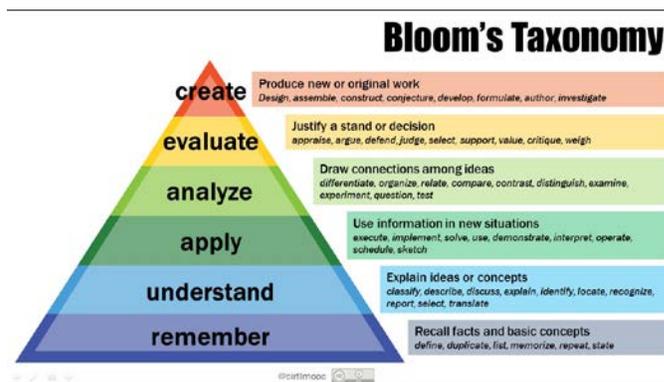
Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of world religions.
2. To expose students to some of the world religions located in the Charleston area.
3. To develop comfort in working with other students in an online setting.
4. To design a solution to a 21st century problem related to the triple bottom line of sustainability that focuses on religion and society (QEP SLO 6).

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. Both will be assessed on the paper.

You will notice that as this is an introductory course, with much of the content covering foreign languages and concepts from cultures you are most likely unfamiliar with, we will be doing a lot of “remember” and “understand” tasks based on Bloom’s taxonomy:



Required Texts:

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. Reading questions provided under the content section of this syllabus for each religion and due on OAKS will help guide you through these readings. Note: students who are having trouble with OAKS should immediately

contact the Helpdesk at the College of Charleston either by email or phone.
<http://it.cofc.edu/help/helpdesk.php>

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

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

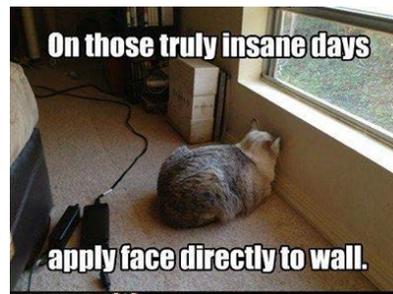
1. Class participation—This includes your participation in group and class discussions and being present and attentive in class. For this you will also be assigned readings and short answer content-based quizzes for each required reading. Hard copies of answers are due at the start of class for which they are assigned. Late quizzes will not be accepted. Students who are exceptionally engaged and who exhibit mastery of course materials and a robust inquisitiveness about the course content and who complete all the reading quizzes may earn more than 100% for this part of the overall grade. 15% of your grade.
 - a. Note each unit under Content (below, in syllabus) will have listed both the assigned readings and questions for each reading. Questions appear in the order you will encounter the answers in the reading.
 - b. Evidence of copying of or sharing answers will lead to a 0, and may be considered plagiarism (see Honor Code, below).
2. Paper assignment—you will analyze a documentary. Specific instructions will be provided. 10% of your grade.
 - a. Papers are to be uploaded to OAKS by 4.26 at 12pm. Late papers will lose 10 points per every 24 hour period they are late beginning thereafter.
3. Site visit—you will undertake an ethnography of a religious site in Charleston. Specific instructions will be provided. 10% of your grade.
 - a. Papers are to be uploaded to OAKS by 3.27 at 5pm. Late papers will lose 10 points per every 24 hour period they are late beginning thereafter.
4. Group project—you will participate in a group project to design a solution to a pressing 21st century social problem related to religious identity and practice. Specific instructions will be provided. 20% of your grade.
 - a. Papers and project are to be uploaded to OAKS by 3.5 at 10pm. Late projects will lose 10 points per every 24 hour period they are late beginning thereafter.
5. Lecture exams—there will be 6 exams. They will consist of true/false; multiple choice; multiple select; fill-in-the-blank in the correct order of sentences provided; and short-answer questions. These tests are based on the content covered in class. It is suggested you make use of the study-guide sheets provided at the beginning of each unit. Make sure to master the material highlighted on these guides. Each quiz is weighted equally. *Assume a learning curve on the first 2 quizzes until you get used to the format and the content covered.* 45% of your grade (each quiz is 7.5% of your grade).
 - a. Students are only able to make up a missed exam if their absences is officially documented.
6. 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 and/or attending on-campus or Lowcountry-based events that are on the study of religion, or are hosted by “insiders” that are critically analyzed. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion at the event 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 4.22.

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*: Students are expected to be in class, on time, for each scheduled meeting. A student may receive 3 undocumented absences before their grade is reduced by 1/3rd of a grade for a 4th and 5th undocumented absence. 6 undocumented absences will result in an automatic WF. It is the students responsibility to approach the Office of Student Affairs on campus that oversees student absences—they send me an email that says your absence is either “documented” which counts as excused by the College, or “undocumented.” I will forward to you what the College sends me. Please do not provide evidence for absences to me, but to the appropriate administrator in the Office of Student Affairs.

Please note that lecture notes will not be shared and/or repeated after the day they are presented. 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 .ppt lecture 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. If I am going too fast, ask me to slow down.

3) *Common Courtesy*: As stated in the CofC Student Handbook: “a college classroom requires a higher level of courtesy than many people exercise in ordinary public space. Everyone in a classroom is there for the purpose of learning, and no one should be able to deprive another person of the chance to learn. Expressions of rudeness and even carelessness degrade the high purpose of learning that should be paramount in a college classroom.” To maintain a respectful and supportive environment:



- **Be kind and ethical.** Avoid using sexist, racist, and homophobic language in your writing and speaking; it will not be tolerated.
- **Be forgiving.** We all make communication faux pas, so ask clarifying questions rather than attacking. But if you experience any questionable or outright inappropriate behavior from your colleagues, please let me know.
- **Respect disagreement.** I expect everyone in the class to respect others’ rights to speak, to listen attentively to what is said, and to use discretion and sensitivity when speaking. This does not mean you have to agree with everything said, especially about a topic as complex as religion! Debate is a valuable component of a learning community. However, I expect you to be respectful of me and of your colleagues.

- **Share your knowledge.** As Bill Nye says, “everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t.” You are an expert in something (perhaps many things), so if that expertise becomes relevant, share your knowledge!

Please note, too, that use of cell phones and computers are prohibited in the classroom. Students observed texting will be asked to put their phone away. Repeated use of phones will lead to a lower class participation grade. Students may discuss with me in advance the possibility of using a computer to take class notes, although granting such permission is at the discretion of the professor.

4) *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.

*** Inappropriate paraphrasing, especially of internet sources, 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>

5) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request online 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>

6) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: What is Religion? Why should we study religion? Key categories...

“[A]ll religious identities are plural, partial, and hybrid; the ways many religiously affiliated people might not belong to their religions, and the ways many nones [nonreligious] may in fact not be *not* religious” become our data and topic of analytical study. (quote from Dr. Kate McCarthy, “(Inter)Religious Studies,” pg. 6, 2018)

W 1.9 1st class—Introduction to course, receive syllabus

F 1.11 “Branding a Hero”—engaging with pluralism and religious literacy

OAKS: Ninian Smart’s “Introduction: The Importance of Understanding the World’s Worldviews.” Chapter 1

- What is a tradition? What are subtraditions? What is pluralism? [hint: the answers to these 3 questions are related] List two examples given for each of the seven elements of religion.

M 1.14 Lecture: Critical Social Theory and Prejudice

OAKS: Craig Martin, “Authenticity,” pg. 145-163

- What issue still has incredible relevance to how religion is used today?; what is the importance of binary opposition in determining authenticity and values, including the two things that derive from “this power play?;” what four questions derive from looking at the function behind asking what is authentic [there are 2 sets of similar questions, so make sure to get the right set]?

W 1.16 Lecture: What is Religion?

OAKS: Why Study Religion in the 21st Century

- What has religion been in every culture and every phase of history? What do more Americans today than ever before experience? What is demonstrably the case? What is his actual answer to the question of ‘why study religion in the 21st century? What is the overall picture given Pew Religious Knowledge survey results? What are younger Americans becoming today? What does he think is a frightening sector of the US population in regards to religious views? He gives 4 reasons for why we need more instruction on religion—which one do you think is the strongest reason he provides, and why? Why does he think one religious group is not going to conquer the world?

F 1.18 Lecture: What is Religion/Hermeneutics

“where does the meaning of a text come from, or who gives such meaning?”—

Mallory Nye

M 1.21 NO CLASS

W 1.23 Lecture: Hermeneutics

OAKS: Mallory Nye “Texts” (13 questions on this one as it covers a lot of territory, using good analytical theory and summarizing insights from leading scholars)

- How are religious texts, as particular cultural products, distinguished? What are the distinctions between poetics, hermeneutics, and responses? The study of texts and religion goes beyond books to what other types of texts? As scholars of religion why do we want to read not just important canonical texts? Finish this line: “An important question is how texts are used within particular religious locations:” To understand a religious text we need to read it, but also need to have what? What is not a neutral activity, and why? Authors are created within what? The study of texts requires we pay close attention to what 2 things? What does it mean to say texts produce readings? What are interpretive communities? What is the politics of reading? What levels need to be addressed/understood for an effective reading and understanding of a text?

F 1.25 Catch-up day

M 1.28 Exam 1

Unit 2: Hinduism



W 1.30 Lecture—Hinduism

OAKS: Diana Eck, selections from her book “Darsan”

- [give English and Sanskrit names/terms, both] What happens when Hindus go to temple, and what is this called in Sanskrit? When Hindus go to temple, what do they commonly say? What is the central act of Hindu worship? What does it mean to be a “sacred sightseer”—what are these Hindus doing, and why, and to where do they go? What are the 3 categories of holy persons who can give darsan? Where does contact between devotee and deity occur? (stop at top of pg. 10)

F 2.1 Lecture—Hinduism

OAKS: become familiar with the vocabulary list for Hinduism--this is key! 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 test. Pay attention to the ones that you encounter in class and in the readings. This holds true for all units/religions we will cover.

OAKS: Thomas Hopkins, “Hindu Views of Death and Afterlife”

- Give two key features of each of the three margas, and thus explain each of the three margas—provide both the Sanskrit and English names of each marga

M 2.4 Lecture—Hinduism

OAKS: William Dalrymple, “The Maker of Idols”

- why is ritual purity and following exact protocol so important? What is the function of “idols” (murtis) in Hinduism?

OAKS: **Skim** Encyclopedia of Religion (ERN) entries on bhakti, moksha, mantras, dharma/darma, karma, and guru—know the main reason these terms are important

M 2.4 Lecture/Documentary

OAKS: **Skim** readings on deities, purity/pollution, temples

W 2.6 catch-up day

F 2.8 Exam 2

Unit 3: Buddhism



M 2.11 Lecture—Buddhism

OAKS: Reading on the Core Teachings of Buddhism

- What are skandhas; quickly describe the three marks of existence [give English and Pali, both]

OAKS: Reading on Key Buddhist Concepts—understand the concepts

OAKS: ER entries on mandalas and merit—understand the concepts

W 2.13 Lecture—Buddhism

OAKS: Selections from “What the Buddha Never Taught”

- summarize his description of meditation

F 2.15 Lecture—Buddhism

OAKS: Selections from “The God’s Drink Whisky”

- Give Lek’s description of traditional daily Buddhist activities, and then in modern times

M 2.18 scenes “Wheel of Time”

W 2.20 catch-up Day

F 2.22 Exam 3

Unit 4: Judaism



M 2.24 Documentary “Within These Walls”

W 2.27 Lecture—Judaism

OAKS: Judith Plaskow, “Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective”

- The Jewish feminist reshaping of Jewish history must proceed at what three levels at once (include in this a brief one sentence description of each)?

F 3.1 Lecture-Judaism

OAKS: Reading on Jewish prayer

- What are the three main prayer times of day—give Hebrew name.

M 3.4 Lecture-Judaism

OAKS: Selections from “My Year of Living Biblically”

- What key lessons emerged from his attempts to live biblically? Which specific biblical commandments did he try to live out?

OAKS: ER entry on kashrut—understand why kosher/kashrut is important

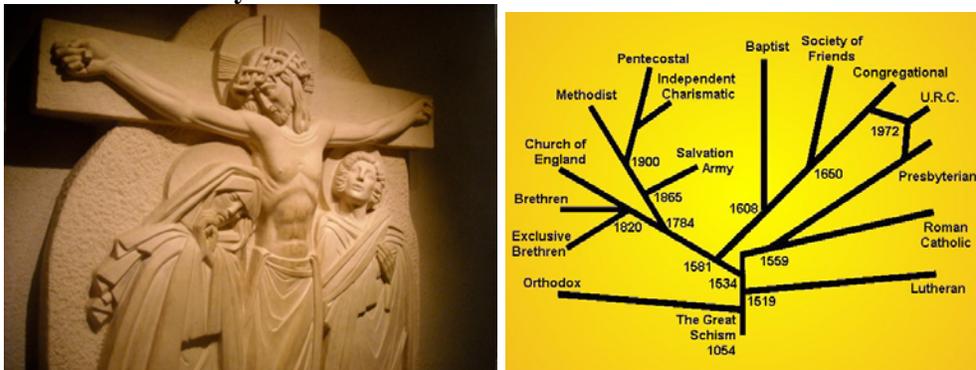
T 3.5 **Group Project Due to OAKS by 10pm******

W 3.6 Site Visit—Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim

F 3.8 catch-up day

M 3.11 Exam 4

Unit 5: Christianity



W 3.13 Lecture—Ancient Mediterranean Religions

F 3.15 Lecture—Christianity

OAKS: Selections from “Rag and Bone”

- What forms of “currency” did relics take in pre-industrial times?

3.17-3.23 SPRING BREAK---HAVE FUN! BE SAFE!

M 3.25 Lecture—Christianity

OAKS: Selections from “Making Saints”

- What is a saint? What does the Greek word “martyrs” mean? What is the difference between “sancti” and “beati”?

W 3.27 Lecture--Christianity

****Site Visit Paper Due****

F 3.29 Documentary

M 4.1 catch-up

W 4.3 Exam 5

Unit 6 Islam



F 4.5 Lecture—Islam

OAKS: Do Muslim women need saving? [Time magazine article]

- What does the author mean by saying “a language of rights does not capture the complications of lives actually lived,” and what does the author want us, as Westerners, to know about Islam and women?

M 4.8 Lecture—Islam

OAKS: Ernst, “Following Muhammad”

- Define: salam; iman; mu’min; hadith; sunna; hijab
- What three concepts are fundamental to Islamic religious thought? What is din, and how does this differ in Arabic than the Christian concept of religion? Who are the Salafiyya, and despite their rhetoric, what various factors have influenced them? Who is the Muhammad of grace, vs the Muhammad of authority? What are 3 key differences between Sunnis and Shias (see also final section of the reading)? What does sura 24:31 discuss? What four things factor into what women wear?

W 4.10 Lecture—Islam

OAKS: Standing Alone in Mecca

OAKS: Selections from “Malcolm X”

- What is the importance of the hajj for these two pilgrims (i.e. both readings on Mecca/hajj)? How did their experience impact their understanding of Islam?

F 4.12 Documentary

M 4.15 Catch-up day

W 4.17 Exam 6

Unit 7 Futures of Religions?

F 4.19 Possible Religious Futures—Religion of the Market

OAKS: David Loy, “Religion of the Market”

- Apply Ninian Smart’s 7 Elements of Religion to “The Market,” as shared by Loy. After applying these 7 elements, why might it make sense to think of The Market as a new religion, and why might it not make sense to do so?

Extra Credit options—T 3:30-5pm; TR Winona Laduke

M 4.22 (NOTE: WE MEET ON TUESDAY!!)—last class (extra credit due)

OAKS: Bron Taylor

- What did he learn in his ethnographic fieldwork and historical research? Who are the participants in the global environmental milieu? What is dark green religion, and what is it rooted in, or at least what does it cohere with, and what do

participants feel? What are the 4 types of Dark Green Religion? What is his conviction? What is there for the first time in human history?

Final Exam: Friday 4.26 Paper Due at 4.26 12pm to OAKS



“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.