This course will focus on three classic texts from India in depth: the most famous Hindu text named The Bhagavad Gita; The Yoga Sutra that is today considered a perennial classic and guide to yoga practice; and the first biography to tell the Buddha’s life story in an epic poem known as The Buddhacarita. First, we will place these texts in their Hindu and Buddhist contexts and consider how they were used and understood differently in India, before we examine how new meanings were discovered when these texts were translated in Europe and consumed in modern America. We will learn how to read “religiously” rather than as consumers, examine the relationship between genre, gender, and social roles, and explore how texts “script” religious experience and inform cultural norms. We will investigate how the texts become the object of veneration, what criteria are used to identify a text as “sacred,” and the ways by which texts create authority. We will also watch films and performances that represent and reinterpret these texts and their practices for a contemporary audience.

Course Goals for Students and Student Learning Outcomes
- to develop an ability to understand, interpret, and contextualize Hindu & Buddhist sacred texts
- to gain an appreciation for why these Hindu & Buddhist texts have endured as “classics”
- to develop critical interpretive skills by reading key works of scholarship whose authors attempt to translate, interpret, and situate these texts within their original cultures and their reception in the west
- to demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft a persuasive argument in defense of a thesis by using and analyzing evidence from primary and secondary sources

This course also satisfies the General Education Student Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted and 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. Both General Education Learning Outcomes will be assessed on the 2nd essay due 4/12 on the literary and religious content of the Buddhacarita, which is worth 15% of your overall grade.

Required Texts Available at Barnes & Noble CofC Bookstore—Don’t substitute other translations!
1) Bhagavad Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War transl. by Barbara Stoler Miller (Bantam, 1986)
3) Yoga: Discipline of Freedom, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller (Bantam, 1995)
4) Life of the Buddha, translated by Patrick Olivelle (NYU Press, 2009)

There are also required E-Readings (ER#1-16), pdf of selections from scriptures, scholar’s articles, and stories available on OAKS under RELS 205, which registered students can access after they login to MyCharleston (http://my.cofc.edu). Please print out each ER article and bring it to class on the day that it will be discussed, along with the required primary sources. The correct ER# for each article is listed in the syllabus and on OAKS, not on the first page of the article itself that you print out, so please ignore the ER# written on the article’s first page if it is different from what is listed on the syllabus!

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-93</td>
<td>(4.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90</td>
<td>(3.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>(3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-83</td>
<td>(3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82-80</td>
<td>(2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>(2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77-73</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>72-70</td>
<td>(1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>66-63</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>63-60</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Integrity and the Honor Code: There is a zero-tolerance policy toward plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty in this course. This means that anyone caught taking credit for work that is not his or her own, or cheating in any other way, will receive a failing grade for the entire course. A student found responsible for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty.
RELS 205 Sacred Texts of the East and Their Modern Meanings in the West

Class Requirements and Prerequisites
The course presumes no previous experience in religious studies. Its only prerequisite is the desire to read exotic and challenging materials from two Asian religions and a willingness to practice critical empathy and engage in conversation about these readings. One of the fun things about this course is that we get to do some “traveling” to India and across America through documentaries and films. You should consider these films as “texts” that require careful interpretation & their content will be covered on exams.

* Classroom Code of Conduct and Attendance Policy
It is strongly advised that you read the entire assignment before we discuss the topic in class. This will help you understand the lectures and engage in class discussion. When there is an assignment from the E-Reading material on OAKS, you should bring it to class with you, along with the books that are assigned for that day’s class. It is imperative that you have your own physical copies of these texts. Because social media and technology take one’s own and others’ attention away from class, use of cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other digital devices are prohibited in class, except in rare circumstances. Another form of disruption occurs when students arrive late or leave early; please don’t leave in the middle of class unless you absolutely must! Attendance records will be kept for each class: there will be 3 allowed absences; 4 or more absences will negatively affect your grade. After 8 absences, the student will be dropped and earn a WA grade for excessive absences. If you have a legitimate excuse (illness, emergency) please contact the Absence Memo Office (Lightsey Ctr. Suite 101) to document the reason for your absence. You are responsible for making up any absences; please get any notes on missed seminars from a classmate.

* Participation in Class (10%)
Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Asking questions, raising concerns, and offering your own interpretations during discussions is a crucial part of this class. Please read the discussion topics on the syllabus and come to class with ideas and questions that will help us engage in meaningful discussion; you are expected to be an active participant. Grades for participation will be assigned on the basis of the quality and consistency of your involvement in class discussions.

* Weekly Reflection Cards (15%) RC grades are: + (100); √+ (90); √ (80); √- (75); — (70)
Once each week (usually on Thursdays) you shall bring to seminar a thoughtful reflection related to the assigned reading for that class. The reflection should be written on a 3x5 or 5x7 card, and be based on an issue that you have found puzzling, thought provoking, challenging, irritating, or interesting. Your reflections should raise interpretive issues or express concerns about the topic that you find important.

* Two Essays of 4 pages each (Gita essay = 15%; Buddhacarita essay = 15%, 30% of final grade)
These two essays each will be based upon assigned topics in relation to the texts that we examine. The questions that serve as the basis for these assignments are open to different interpretations without a single “correct” answer, but the essay requires you to make an argument based on a close reading of the text. Late papers are not accepted since the essay topic will be discussed in class on the day it is due.

* Creative Project due 3/26 (15%)
For this project students will creatively adapt themes from the BG or YS into a new form of media. You will write a brief creator’s statement that explains what you sought to accomplish, the sources that inform your project, and how you interpreted them. You might be inspired by the different ways that the BG and YS have been reinterpreted and performed in modern India or the West, e.g. themes from the BG have been creatively adapted in musical or theatrical performances or the practice of yoga in the film Kumaré.

* Midterm on February 22 (15%) and Final Exam on April 25 (15%)
The exams will consist of short answer and essay questions and key textual and exegetical passages to identify and analyze. I will provide a Review Sheet before each test with key vocabulary words, essay topics and sample passages for analysis.

Class Resources: Writing Lab and Center for Disability Services
I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab (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. See: http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab SNAP students: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter to me from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more on the SNAP program, see: http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu
RELS 205 Sacred Texts of the East and Their Modern Meanings in the West

Class Topics and Reading Assignments and Abbreviations
The following abbreviations will be used in listing the required reading material: ER#1 refers to the first Electronic Reading available on OAKS; while RC#1 refers to the first Reflection Card assignment that responds to the assigned reading for that day. BG refers to the Bhagavad Gita; BGBio to The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography; Yoga refers to Yoga: Discipline of Freedom; and LoB to the Life of the Buddha.
For a complete list of the sources of the Electronic Readings (ER#1-16) found on OAKS, see below p. 7.


1/9 Course Introduction: “Reading Religion” and Controversies over Texts
(Review this syllabus in class)

1/14 In the Shadow of God’s Word: What Makes a Text “Sacred?”
(ER#1-2: “Sacred Texts” and “Texts”)
Discussion topics: What makes a text “sacred?” How did the Protestant Reformation shape how we understand religions today? In ER#2 there is a discussion of a phrase “there is no outside-of-text;” what might this phrase mean for scholars of religion, and especially for those who study practices like meditation and religious experience? What do the varying translations of the quote on duty from the Bhagavad Gita teach us about interpretation and authority?

1/16 Exploring Authorship & Authority, and Faith in Fiction
(ER#3-4: “Authorship” and “Is Nothing Sacred?”) RC#1 due
Discussion: What is the relationship between authors, authority, and the “death of an author?” How might “reader-response theory” help us understand what binds together a religious community? What is “sacred” for Rushdie in ER#4? What does he mean when he writes that language and the sacred have the “power of totemization?”

1/21 Reading Religiously or as Consumers: How has Social Media Changed the Way We Read?
(ER#5-6: “Faking Cultural Literacy” and “How Religious People Read”) RC#2 due
Discussion: Do you recognize your own reading and conversational habits when you read “Faking…Literacy?” What are the primary differences between “religious” vs. “consumerist” readings of sacred texts? Is learning to “read religiously” and to feel reverence towards a sacred text an edifying project only for the faithful, or is it a necessary practice for students of Religious Studies? Why does memorization of a text enhance its religious value?

1/23 Getting Inside the Heads of Hindus: How to Read Hindu Texts with Empathy and Critical Rigor
(ER#7-8: “Other Scholars Myths” and “How to Read a Religious Text”) RC#3 due
Discussion: ER#7 presents an Indian myth about a hunter and a sage, which Doniger suggests can be interpreted as a metaphor for scholars of religion. What does she mean when she writes: “The hunting sage is my idea of the right sort of historian of religion?” Should scholars use both their “heads” and their “hearts” in their scholarship? What is gained by interpreting a religious text (like the Chandogya Upanishad in ER#8) as a human product? Should scholars ask irreverent questions about religious texts that undermine their transcendent status?

The Bhagavad Gita’s Content and Context

1/28 On Doing One’s Duty: Conflicts over Hindu Family Values (Dharma)
(BGBio: Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-20; and BG: Chapters 1-2)
Discussion: What does Richard Davis (in BGBio) mean by the phrase “the doubleness of the Gita?” What is Arjuna’s ethical dilemma in the first two chapters? Does Krishna’s teaching on Dharma and disciplined action (karma) resolve Arjuna’s distaste for violence?

1/30 Different Forms of Discipline (Yoga)
(BGBio: Chapter 1, pp. 20-42; and BG: Chapters 3-6) RC#4 due
Discussion: How does the Gita’s location within a sprawling Mahabharata epic affect its meaning? Some say the overall plot of the Mahabharata, which the Gita is a part of, ends with the futility of all the great battles in that great war. If this is so, how can Krishna’s argument, that a just battle perpetuates the cosmic order of the universe, be true? Do you find Krishna’s arguments that urge Arjuna to fight compelling on moral grounds?
On Medieval Hindu Commentaries on the Gita: an Interpretive Battlefield?
(BG: Chapters 7-9; BGBio: Chapter 2, Krishna & His Gita in Medieval India, 43-65)
**Discussion:** How did the Gita become “an interpretive battlefield, a Kurukshetra for medieval theologians?” Krishna’s Gita inspired the creation of gitas for other gods, who compete for supremacy with Krishna. How does this mimicry echo the religious claims advanced by Krishna himself in the Bhagavad Gita? In what way does Shankara’s interpretation of the Gita explain away Krishna's status as a supreme personal deity?

Krishna’s Revelation: An Awesome and Terrifying Theophany
(BG: Chapters 10-12 and ER #9: “Kurukshetra in Context”) RC#5
**Discussion:** Robert Oppenheimer, the “Father of the Atom Bomb,” quoted from chapter 11 of the Gita when the first atomic bomb was successfully tested, saying: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Why do you think Oppenheimer quoted these lines at that moment? What effect does Arjuna’s vision of Krishna have on him (and on you as a reader)? Does surrender to God here justify subsequent acts of violence? Is Arjuna convinced that fighting his relations is acceptable by Krishna’s arguments, or by Krishna’s overpowering status as a god of all creation?

Does the Gita Sanction War or Promote Non-Violence?
(BGBio: Chapter 4; BG: Chapters 13-18) Essay#1 due in class
**Essay topic:** What ethical values does Krishna promote when he urges Arjuna to act? Does the Gita sanction war and justify violence, or does it promote non-violence (ahimsa) and the pursuit of peace in the worship of God?

The Bhagavad Gita Takes on New Clothes in the West and in Modern India

The Gita and Globalization: Colonialism in India and Transcendentalism in America
(BGBio Chapter 3: Passages from India; BG: “Afterward”) RC#6
**Discussion:** How did British Colonialism inspire both the first English translation of the Gita and inform very different interpretations of its value for understanding India? Why were German Romantic thinkers and American Transcendentalists so drawn to the Gita’s “primordial wisdom?” How did Vivekananda use the Gita at the World’s Parliament of Religions to refute colonial claims about India and advance a new view of Hinduism? Which aspects of the Gita are overlooked by each of these modern interpreters, including Swami Vivekananda?

The Gita’s Rebirth in Modern Performances: BG as a “Classic” and the Hindu “Bible”
(BGBio Chapters 6-7) RC#7 clips from Peter Brook’s theatrical version of Mahabharata
**Discussion:** In the performances described in Chapter 6, how is the Gita used either to justify or to critique the economic forces and effects of globalization? What characteristics of the Gita enable it to become a “classic” and a “global scripture” that transcends the time and place of its origin? Do you think time stands still during the Gita?

Midterm Exam
(No reading, study the Midterm Exam Review Sheet)

The Yoga Sutra’s Philosophical Content and Its Context in India

Introducing Patanjali’s Yoga: To Catch the Mind and Keep it Still
(ER#10: Preface & Reading the Yoga Sutra in the Twenty-First Century; Yoga pp. 1-17) RC#8
**Discussion:** Why is the Yoga Sutra a “comeback classic?” In ER#10 David White tells us about the many meanings of “yoga” ascribed to the YS and found in the Sanskrit-English Dictionary. What surprised you most about the range of meanings? Does the classic definition presented by Patanjali (yoga = citta + vritti + nirodha) make sense to you? Do the many different meanings of “yoga” warn us how hard it is “to catch the mind and keep still?”

Yoga as Meditative Absorption
(Yoga pp. 18-43)
**Discussion:** What is the relationship between spirit and matter in the YS? How does Patanjali’s analysis of the mind-body relationship reveal why people construct false identities and enslave themselves to a world of pain? How does the first chapter of the YS relate to the teachings about “yoga” in the Bhagavad Gita? In what way does Patanjali’s teaching about the independence of spirit from matter diverge from the karma-yoga of the Bhagavad Gita?
The Practice of Yoga: How Do the Eight Limbs of Yoga Practice Lead to Freedom?  
(Yoga part II: The Practice of Yoga pp. 44-59)  

Discussion: Before he lays out the “eight-fold limbs” of practice, Patanjali identifies the causes of suffering and ignorance; what are these causal factors and forces of corruption? Why is a “unified self” so problematic? Does the “evolution” of material nature described in chapter two of YS sound “scientific” to you? Is the reversal of this evolutionary process through moral observation opposed to science? Why is breath control so effective?

Yoga and Extraordinary Mystic Powers  
(Yoga part III: Perfect Freedom and Extraordinary Powers, pp. 60-73)  

Discussion: Do the extraordinary powers of the mind promised in chapter three sound magical and mystical to you, or do they seem realistic effects of yoga practice? Are these special powers a method for “marketing” yoga practice? Do these powers make yoga practice seem either “religious” or “superstitious”?

Orientalism and Marketing Yoga from the Exotic East: Western Versions of the Yoga Sutra

The European Rediscovery of the Yoga Sutra: Orientalist Views of Yogi “Fanatics”  
(ER#11: “Colebrook and the Western ‘Discovery’ of the YS”)  

Discussion: How could Colebrook be so sympathetic to Yoga philosophy and yet so hostile to “fanatical” yogis? What conclusions might the British Orientalists reach when they realized that there were no contemporary Indian yogis who could provide an explanation of the Yoga Sutra? How does their skepticism towards the living religion of Hinduism and yet their sympathy towards Indian classical culture betray “Orientalist” values?

Yoga and Consumerism: Branding and Selling Yoga  
(ER #12: “Branding Yoga,” watch “Become a Story Now” before we watch V. Gandhi’s film)  

Discussion: How does the type of yoga introduced by Vikram Gandhi’s alter-ego, Shri Kumaré, both conform to and differ from the yoga “branding” described in ER#12? How does ER#12 and the film problematize any claim about what “authentic” yoga is? Does Gandhi really “make up” a new religion or does he draw upon symbols, practices, and a philosophy about “illusion” that is recognizably Hindu and associated with previous interpretations of yoga?

Spring Break!

Introducing the Life Story of the Buddha  
(ER#13: “The Lifestory of the Buddha”)  

Discussion: How does the “doubleness” of the story of the Buddha (who has both god-like and human qualities) remind you of the “doubleness” of Krishna and the Gita? What are some of the religious consequences of the Buddha’s “doubleness”? If the story of how Siddhartha Gautama becomes a Buddha does not make him a “unique” individual, why is the story so compelling for Buddhists?

Reading the Story of the Buddha and His Teachings as Literature  
(Creative project due)  

Discussion: What are some of the “fictions of reading” that inform Western readings of Buddhist texts? Which methods of reading that are proposed by Flores might correct these western misunderstandings? What role does desire play in how westerners have interpreted the Buddha’s story?

The Buddhacarita’s Content and Context

Introducing Ashva-ghosha’s Buddhacarita: Siddhartha’s Birth and Youth  
(LoB, “Introduction” pp. xvii-xxx; Cantos 1-2)  

Discussion: According to the translator’s Introduction, how does the story of Buddha correspond to the Brahmanic tradition of Hinduism? Does this correspondence remind you of the relationship between Jesus in the “New Testament” and the Judaism of the “Old Testament”? How is the birth and youth of Siddhartha similar to and different from the birth and youth of Jesus?
4/2  Life Lessons about Love, Old Age, Sickness & Death and the Departure from the Palace  
(LoB, Cantos 3-5)  RC#12  Clips from film The Little Buddha  
**Discussion:** How do the gods intervene in the story of Siddhartha’s trips outside the palace? How might their role in the story affect how a pious Buddhist would understand Siddhartha? Is Siddhartha’s naiveté about old age, sickness, and death compatible with how prescient he seems at birth, when he declares “for Awakening I am born” (1.15)? Why does Ashva-ghosha spend so much time describing the erotic flirtation of the courtesans in chapter four only to describe their states of dishevelment when Siddhartha leaves the palace? Is this view of women misogynistic?  

4/7  Becoming a Renunciant: Does Siddhartha’s Asceticism Violate Hindu Family Values?  
(LoB, Cantos 6-8)  
**Discussion:** How does Siddhartha justify his quest to become a renunciant to his friend Chandaka? Does Siddhartha here violate the Hindu value of Dharma? Can the pain and suffering that Siddhartha brings to this wife Yashodhara and his step-mother Gautami after he abandons them be justified, or is his ascetic quest for enlightenment selfish?  

4/9  Siddhartha’s New-Found Dharma Versus the Dharma of Vedic Scriptures & Brahmanic Tradition  
(LoB, “Introduction” pp. xxxi-li; Cantos 9 & 12)  RC#13  Clips from film The Little Buddha  
**Discussion:** After reading the translator’s comments about competing forms of Dharma in the Introduction, how many types of Dharma can you discern in Cantos 8-9? When Siddhartha meets the sage-ascetic Arada in canto 12, how does Arada’s philosophy echo what we’ve studied in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra? In this chapter we see Siddhartha attain blissful and transcendent states of trance, even a trance state beyond nothingness, but he remains dissatisfied with these experiences. What does this tell us about his quest for the experience of enlightenment?  

4/14  Becoming Buddha: The Conquest of Mara and Enlightenment  
(LoB, Cantos 13-14)  Essay on Buddhacarita due  
**Discussion:** What similarities and differences can you see when you compare Siddhartha’s battle with Mara and Krishna’s theophany (in chapter 11 of the BG)? What enables Siddhartha to defeat Mara? As an allegory, what might this battle represent? What realizations does Siddhartha reach about Samsara during the three watches of the night on the eve of his enlightenment?  

4/16  Birth of the Scientific Buddha  
(ER#15a-b: “The Scientific Buddha” & “Birth of the Scientific Buddha”)  
**Discussion:** What does the gradual European discovery of the Buddha and the religion of Buddhism teach us? Why did the West invent a “scientific Buddha?” Why do we ask that that Buddhism be compatible with science?  

4/21  Death of the Scientific Buddha  
(ER#16: Lopez, “Death of the Scientific Buddha” pp. 101-132)  
**Discussion:** Does Lopez’s claim that the modern western encounter with Buddhism is really a “series of moments of misrecognition” make sense of how you understood Buddhism prior to this class? How is Buddhist meditation not like modern stress-reduction meditation? What can we learn from the experiments with a split-brain patient about the left vs. right brains, and the relationship between language and experience? How do the teachings ascribed to the Buddha continue to serve as radical challenges to our current worldview?  

4/25  **Wake Up! Final Exam on Saturday at 8:00 am**  

5/4  Final Grades available  

5/8-9  Graduation: Final Rite of Passage to Moksha or Nirvana
Sources for Electronic Readings (ER#1-16) on OAKS


