

Lenny J. Lowe, Ph.D.
Department of Religious Studies
College of Charleston

Office: RELS building 4A Glebe St., room 102
Office hours: Tuesdays, 11am – 2pm
E-mail: lowelj@cofc.edu Phone: 843.953.8033

RELS 105 Intro to World Religion SPRING 2023

No Prerequisites; Fulfills GenEd Humanities Requirements

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the idea of “World Religions” and the collective perspectives and practices to which the category refers. In service of this goal, we will examine several of the most widely practiced “religions,” exploring both historical and contemporary practices, objects, and beliefs. As we explore this “data,” however, we will also keep in our minds two foci: (1) *the reality of variety within these religious cultures*, and (2) *the cultural and political stakeholders*. The course will be delivered using both lectures and frequent in-class discussions as well as music, film, and other media.



COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course include:

- 1) The course aims to cultivate an appreciation for the variety of thought, practice, and values associated with many of the most dominant world religious cultures.
- 2) The course also aims to develop a critical-analytical approach to thinking about “religion” and religious cultures around the world.
- 3) Finally, the course will help students recognize the economic, political, and social impacts of religion and religious difference in the contemporary world.

GENERAL EDUCATION SLOS (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 humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments.*

****Both SLOs will be evaluated in analytical writing assignment.**

REQUIRED TEXTS

Prothero, Stephen. *Religion Matters: An Introduction to the World's Religions*. New York: W.W. Norton Publishers, 2020.

All supplemental readings will be provided via OAKS Course Page with accompanying citation information.

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

At minimum, students should have access to a laptop or desktop computer. No special software or other tools or technology are required.

POLICIES

Attendance

Our course is involves reading accompanied by a lecture and discussion. It is imperative that you attend class to understand our reading material and its significance as well as the major themes of the course. Please adhere to the following guidelines:

EXCUSED ABSENCE = illness, emergency

UNEXCUSED ABSENCE = hangover, missed alarm, fatigue, boredom, etc.

After 5 unexcused absences, you receive an email checking on you.

After 7 unexcused absences, you receive a “one level” deduction in your final grade (B+ → B, C → C-, etc.)

After 9 unexcused absences, I will unenroll you from the course

**COVID-Related Absence Policy: Obviously, COVID variants still exist. But, so do a lot of other things, like influenza, strep, mono, stomach viruses, etc. You should use your best judgment as always. If you are sick or THINK you are sick, you should stay home. If you are nervous about missing a lecture, I can easily set up a zoom in which you'll just be “watching” and “listening.” No other special accommodations can be given.*

Technology Troubles?

If you are having trouble with any particular link in the course shell, you may contact me directly via email at lowelj@cofc.edu or via the “General Q&A” discussion thread if you believe your question is relevant to other class members. For tech troubles related to your CofC login, OAKS, or computer problems, please contact the CofC IT department at helpdesk@cofc.edu or by phone at (843) 953-3375.

Accessibility

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of CofC. If any student requires assistance or academic accommodations for a disability, please be sure to visit the Center for Disability Services to obtain proper

documentation prior to our meeting. More information can be found at <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu>. However, in an online setting, what all of this means suddenly becomes much more opaque. So, please reach out to me if you have specific needs, and we will work it out!

Religious Observances and Accommodations

Religious observances will be accommodated in accordance with the Student Attendance Policy.

College of Charleston 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.

If the instructor determines the student's actions are related to misunderstanding, it 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 XF 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 X to be expunged. 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>

Expectations for Student – Professor Communication

- 1) If you need to reach me for a private or individual question, you may contact me via email at any time at lowelj@cofc.edu. You can expect a response within 24 hours.

- 2) Zoom sessions are available upon request, and you should feel absolutely welcome to chat with me face to face at any point throughout the four week course.
- 3) I have designated office hours, and that is my preferred meeting time. You may stop by with or without an appointment during office hours, but a quick email always helps to ensure that I'll be there and expecting you.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

In my in-person courses, I use "Specifications Grading." However, in this online, asynchronous course, it is very difficult to explain and manage such a system. For that reason, our course will use a simple "point" system.

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of the total points you earn.

Writing Project (50 Pts.)

- **"Doing is Believing" Site Visit Essay ("Assignments" Folder in OAKS)**

Discussion Threads (5 pts. each = 50 Points)

- **10 online semi-formal discussions. (OAKS)**

Quizzes (20 Points Each = 100 Points)

- **5 Module Quizzes (OAKS)**

Exams (50 Points Each = 100 Points)

- **Midterm (OAKS)**
- **Final Exam (OAKS)**

- **TOTAL = 300 POINTS**

Your grade will be determined based on 300 possible points.

A =	90% - 100%	(270 – 300 pts.)
B+ =	88% - 89%	(264 – 269 pts.)
B =	83% - 87%	(249 – 263 pts.)
B- =	80% - 82%	(240 – 248 pts.)
C+ =	78% - 79%	(234 – 239 pts.)
C =	73% - 77%	(219 – 233 pts.)
C- =	70% - 72%	(210 – 218 pts.)
D+ =	68% - 69%	(204 – 209 pts.)
D =	63% - 67%	(189 – 203 pts.)

D- =	60% - 62%	(180 – 188 pts.)
F =	59% or Below	(178 pts. or below)

Course Summary, Objectives, and Assignments

MODULE 1 – INTRODUCTIONS

January 11-13

This is a short, introductory module that will orient you to the course, to me, to one another, and to the academic study of religion.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the course, expectations, classmates
 - Students will understand the complexity of the term “religion”
 - Students will understand the difference between “Religious Studies” and “Theology”
- **READ:**
 - Prothero, “Chapter 1 Introduction: Why Religion Matters” pp. 3 – 25
 - **DO:**
 - **Module 1 QUIZ**
 - **Discussion #1**

MODULE 2 – RELIGIONS OF RELEASE

~HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, SIKHISM~

January 16 - February 3

This module introduces students to religions that have emerged in the Indian Subcontinental context. These religions share much in common, including conceptions of the structure of the universe, and subtly different understandings of what the ultimate “goal” of religion is. This results in sometimes radically different and sometimes quite similar ritual practices.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms like *samsara*, *moksha*, and *atman*

- Students will become familiar with the geographies and cultures of the Indian Subcontinent
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of god/God/gods, the human self, and the nature of the universe.
- Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- READ:
 - Chapter 2 “Hinduism: The Way of Devotion” pp. 26-78
 - Chapter 3 “Buddhism: The Way of Awakening” pp. 79-128
 - Chapter 4 “Sikhism: The Way of the Guru” pp. 129 - 178
- DO:
 - Module 2 QUIZ
 - Discussion #2
 - Discussion #3
 - Discussion #4

MODULE 3 – RELIGIONS OF REPAIR

~Judaism, Christianity, Islam~

February 4 – March 3

This module introduces the three most well known so-called “Abrahamic” religions. These three all emerge from the Mediterranean Basin at different moments separated by many centuries. All three traditions root their understanding of “one God” in the patriarch Abraham, but they have all taken very different paths that bring them into cooperation and conflict throughout history.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
- Students will become familiar with the sacred texts and important theological differences that characterize these three religions.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of God, the human self, and the nature of the universe.
- Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- READ:
 - Prothero, PART II
 - Chapter 5 Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return, pp. 170 – 224
 - Chapter 6 Christianity: The Way of Salvation, pp. 225 – 292
 - Chapter 7 Islam: The Way of Submission, pp. 293 – 338
- DO:

- **Module 3 QUIZ**
- **Discussion #5**
- **Discussion #6**
- **Discussion #7**

MODULE 4 – RELIGIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

~YORUBA, KONGO, HAITIAN VODOU~

March 13 - 26

This module engages with a set of traditions that emerge out of the violence of transatlantic slavery. We begin by examining the West African traditions of Yoruba and Kongo, and then we trace them as they combine with European Christianity in the Atlantic world context. This module offers an opportunity to reflect upon the idea of religious combination, the use of bodies and materials in religion, and challenges to binary moral systems.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
 - Students will become familiar with the specific ritual practices of these traditions
 - Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of the human self and the nature of the universe.
 - Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- **READ:**
 - Supplemental Readings (in OAKS)
 - Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*
 - Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*
 - Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara!*
 - **DO:**
 - **Module 4 QUIZ**
 - **Discussion #8**

MODULE 5 – RELIGIONS OF REVERSION

~CONFUCIANISM, DAOISM, NAVAJO~

March 27-April 16

This module introduces only TWO traditions (in order to make space for you to write your essay), both coming from ancient China. Confucianism and Daoism are both deeply

interwoven into the ambient culture of China, and neither is exclusive of the other. Yet, they introduce different ideas about how to live the best life. This module will also be a great opportunity to consider what we MEAN when we call something a “religion” since neither of these has a strong concept of “God”.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
 - Students will become familiar with the founders and histories of each of these traditions and the way they each understand the role of the individual in the world.
 - Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of the human self and the nature of the universe.
 - Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- **READ:**
 - Chapter 8 Confucianism: The Way of Ritual Propriety, pp. 340-390
 - Chapter 9 Daoism: The Way of Flourishing, pp. 391-440.
 - **DO:**
 - Module 5 QUIZ
 - Discussion #9
 - Discussion #10

CONCLUSION: ATHEISM, PLURALISM, AND POLITICS

April 17-26

Our final module considers the idea of Atheism AS A RELIGION vs. AS ANTI-RELIGION. This module also offers us some general conclusions to our course.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the long history of atheism.
 - Students will critically consider how “atheism as religion” challenges our understanding of religion
-
- **READ:**
 - Prothero, PART IV
 - Chapter 11 Atheism: The Way of No Way, pp. 491-535
 - **DO:**
 - Complete Course Evaluations

COURSE SCHEDULE (By Week)

Date/Topic	Assignments
<p>Week 1 (Jan. 11-13) INTRODUCTIONS</p> <p>Wednesday: What's a "Religion"?</p> <p>Friday: What are "Religions"?</p>	<p>READ: Nongbri (OAKS); Syllabus</p> <p>DO: DISCUSSION #1; Quiz #1</p>
<p>Week 2 (Jan. 18. 20) HINDUISM</p> <p>Wednesday: Variations</p> <p>Friday: Contemporary Issues</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 2 "Hinduism"; https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-violent-toll-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india</p> <p>DO: DISCUSSION #2</p>
<p>Week 3 (Jan. 23, 25, 27). BUDDHISM</p> <p>Monday: The Basic Tenets</p> <p>Wednesday: Varieties of Buddhism</p> <p>Friday: Contemporary Buddhism & Buddhism in the West</p>	<p>READ: Finish reading Prothero, Ch. 3 "Buddhism"; "The First and Final Addresses" (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: Discussion 3</p>
<p>Week 4 (Jan 30, Feb. 1, 3) SIKHISM</p> <p>Monday: Story of the Guru</p> <p>Wednesday: Cultural Geography & Religion</p> <p>Friday: Violence and Religious "Affect"</p>	<p>READ: Prothero, Ch. 4 "Sikhism"</p> <p>DO: NO DISCUSSION; Module 2 Quiz</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Week 5 (Feb. 6, 8, 10) JUDAISM</p> <p>Monday: Mythic Origins</p> <p>Wednesday: History and Scattering</p> <p>Friday: Contemporary Varieties & Politics</p>	<p>READ: Prothero, Ch. 5 “Judaism”; https://ash.harvard.edu/christian-zionism-religious-right-and-donald-trump-history%E2%80%99s-role-contemporary-politics</p> <p>DO: Discussion #4</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 6 (Feb. 13, 15, 17) CHRISTIANITY Pt. 1</p> <p>Monday: Palestinian Origins & Variety</p> <p>Wednesday: Political Power & Orthodoxy</p> <p>Friday: Reformation & Modernity</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 6 “Christianity”</p> <p>DO: Discussion #5 (OAKS, Due Sunday Feb. 27th)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 7 (Feb. 20, 22, 24) CHRISTIANITY Pt. 2</p> <p>Monday: American Evangelicalism</p> <p>Wednesday: Global Charismaticism</p> <p>Friday: MIDTERM (IN CLASS)</p>	<p>READ: (Before Wednesday) https://religiondispatches.org/the-only-surprising-thing-about-the-demon-sperm-doctors-views-is-that-theyre-shared-by-many-evangelicals/</p> <p>DO: No discussion; MIDTERM IN CLASS (OAKS)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 8 (Feb. 27, March 1, 3) ISLAM</p> <p>Monday: History and Context</p> <p>Wednesday: Practices and Priorities</p> <p>Friday: Contemporary Varieties & Politics</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 7 “ISLAM”: “Qur’an” (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: MODULE 3 QUIZ</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SPRING BREAK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PARTAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYY!!</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Week 9 (March 13, 15, 17) YORUBA & KONGO</p> <p>Monday: Destiny and Divinity in Yoruba</p> <p>Wednesday: Materializing The Dead in Kongo</p> <p>Friday: Hot and Cold and the Lasting Impact of Slavery</p>	<p>READ: “Flash of the Spirit” (OAKS); https://blog.oup.com/2016/03/effects-slave-exporting-west-africa/ ; https://jilc.syr.edu/2019/03/23/the-lasting-impacts-of-the-transatlantic-slave-trade-on-west-africa/</p> <p>DO: Discussion #6</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 10 (March 20, 22, 24) HAITIAN VODOU</p> <p>Monday: Vodou and Revolution</p> <p>Wednesday: “A Ground Gained”</p> <p>Friday: Healing and Harming</p>	<p>READ: Desmangles, “Faces of the Gods” (OAKS); Deren, “The Trinity” (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: Discussion #7 (OAKS); MODULE 4 QUIZ</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 11 (March 27, 29, 31) CONFUCIANISM</p> <p>Monday: History & Context</p> <p>Wednesday: Texts & Practices</p> <p>Friday: Contemporary Revival</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 8 “Confucianism”; Excerpts from <i>The Analects</i> (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: Discussion #8</p> <p>SITE VISIT PAPER DUE (via OAKS, Sunday April 10th)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 12 (April 3, 5, 7) DAOISM</p> <p>Monday: History & Context</p> <p>Wednesday: Texts & Practices</p> <p>Friday: Transnational Daoism</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 9 “Daoism”; Siegler (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: Discussion #9</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 13 (April 10, 12, 14)</p>	

NAVAJO	
Monday: History and Context	READ: Prothero Ch. 10 “Navajo”
Wednesday: Texts & Practices	DO: Site Visit Essay Due April 16 th
Friday: Politics, Environment, and Advocacy	
Week 14 (April 17, 19, 21) ATHEISM	
Monday: Historical Atheism	READ: Prothero Ch. 11 “Atheism”; “Why The World Needs Religious Studies” https://religiondispatches.org/why-the-world-needs-religious-studies/
Wednesday: Atheism as Religion	DO: Discussion #10
Friday: Why Religious Studies?	
Week 15 (April 24, 26)	
Monday: Conclusions	FINAL EXAMS:
Wednesday: Evals & Goodbyes	RELS 105-01: May 3rd, 10:30am RELS 105-02: April 28th, 10:30am

Religious Site visit

- *Write a 5 – 7 page essay that both describes and analyzes your experience at a religious site (a place you have visited THIS SEMESTER). It should contain a detailed account of your visit, the things you see, the sounds, the smells, the way you felt, the things that were interesting, the people you met, etc. (2 pages). The remaining three pages should attempt to compare what you learned in class about the tradition with what you say. For example, you might analyze how the teaching of “no-self” was a subject in the meditation 101 class that you attended. Or, you might want to analyze how “color” seemed to play an important role in the Hindu Temple that you visited, etc.*

Religious Site Visit List:

- *Central Mosque of Charleston* (Charleston, SC)
- *Circular Congregational Church* (Charleston, SC)
- *Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory* (Columbia, SC)

- *Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity (Charleston, SC)*
- [Hindu Temple in Charleston](#) (Charleston, SC)
- [Hindu Temple in Columbia](#) (Columbia, SC)
- [Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim](#), (Charleston, SC--the birthplace of reform Judaism)
- [Meher Baba Hindu Spiritual Center](#) (Myrtle Beach, SC)
- [Mepkin Abbey Trappist Monastery](#) (Moncks Corner, SC)
- [Old St. Andrew's Parish](#) (Charleston, SC)
- *Tibetan Buddhist Society (Charleston, SC)*
- [St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church](#) (Charleston, SC)

BEST PRACTICES FOR FIELD SITE VISIT

- 1) *Remember that you are going into a religious community of humans. It is not a zoo. So, what you will be doing is “participant observation” not just “observation.”*
- 2) ***Please*** *contact the community that you would like to visit at least a few days in advance to ask permission for you to visit and “participate” with them.*
- 3) *Do not attend in groups larger than 3. Visiting as a group may help you to feel more comfortable, but large groups can make communities feel very objectified.*
- 4) *Ask your contact what would be appropriate for you to wear? Also, ask if it is ok if you take notes. (If not, don't worry about it. Just jot down some things immediately after).*
- 5) *Give your contact a FULL DISCLOSURE of who you are, what you are doing (i.e. doing something in order to fulfill a class assignment), and be willing to talk with someone afterward or attend any event that they invite you to attend (these can be some of the most fruitful ways to learn about a community).*

Ethnographic Methods for Students

- 1) ***You don't have to write everything down. Focus more on your experience and your participation while you are in it. Worry about writing soon after you leave the experience.***
- 2) ***Think about: what kind of people are here (i.e. demographics)? How did I feel when I came in? What kinds of words do I hear repeated in the lessons, conversations, music, etc.? How are people dressed? How do people seem to be interacting during the service? How is this the like what I expected? How is this surprisingly different than my expectations?***
- 3) ***What's happening here regarding the big frames of analysis: gender, politics, race, economy, etc.? Does anything stand out?***
- 4) ***When you leave, as soon as you are able, sit down and write as much as you can remember. Narrate the event and include your thoughts and reactions. Don't censor yourself. This will become your “fieldnotes.” You can reflect on them later.***

