

## **Rel 100Q Introduction to Religion 04A1, *with writing***

Fall 2015

MW 4:20-6:00 p.m.

### **Dr. Florian Pohl**

Email: fpohl@emory.edu

Office: Seney Hall 115 B

### **Course Description**

This course will serve as a basic introduction to religion as an academic field of study. It is a selective and comparative introduction to religions in a variety of locations, with an emphasis on the modern American context. We will employ major categories of the discipline with which to better penetrate and analyze three major religious and philosophical traditions that are the foci of the course: Native American Religions, Islam, and Judaism. We will focus upon these traditions' key historical developments and diverse, contemporary forms via your own explorations and discoveries, starting with the most basic and exciting question, "What (and where) is religion?" and the effort to answer the question from firmly within the perspective of the scholar of religion. In this manner, you will experience how to inquire and think like the religion scholar in the comparative study of world religions. You will read and analyze primary and other sources from within a religious tradition as well as case studies and scholars' works on religious communities and their practices. Such inquiry-based learning requires that students embark on a journey of questioning within our scholarly study in order to learn more about the academic discipline of the comparative study of world religions. In other words, you will be asked to investigate the religious traditions we study via your own increasingly independent research. Primarily through your own processes of inquiry, you will become familiar with the methods and categories employed in the comparative study of world religions. In addition, you will be asked to reflect in a disciplined manner in order to cultivate an appreciation for such methods and categories and to critique and offer improvements to them. In this way you will not only learn how some individuals and groups have practiced specific religious traditions but you will also become conversant with specific theoretical debates within the field of religious studies that raise challenging questions about what religion is and how it ought to be studied. Such questions frequently won't allow for quick solutions but rather will require you to become comfortable with tentative answers and with reflecting on how your own assumptions about religion impact your study.

### **Course Objectives**

The discipline of comparative religious studies is not a means to evaluate traditions for worth, but a scholarly means of determining patterns, commonalities and differences between religious practices, beliefs, and traditions in general while recognizing the unique characteristics of and pluralities within each religion of the world. From the foregoing you can see that the ultimate aim of the course is to neither glorify nor critique any one tradition but rather to equip you with an understanding and skills in the study of religion as an academic discipline. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student in this course are:

- to gain access to some basic information about a number of different religions, without attempting to discuss all of them comprehensively (that would be an impossible task);

- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of human religious activity and to think both empathetically and critically about religious traditions;
- to familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences in religious worldviews;
- to learn how to think about religion rather than what to think about it;
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications;
- to construct your own arguments within the framework of the academic study of religion to convince others that your way of conceptualizing a matter is correct; and
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

### **Required Readings**

- James C. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008.
- Alex Haley. *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973.
- John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- Lis Harris. *Holy Days*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Additional primary and secondary sources will be made available on Blackboard. We will also make extensive use of web sources. The web is not a library but it can be a fabulous resource if navigated cautiously, i.e., if you critically evaluate and assess the information you find there. Finally, we will also get in the scholarly habit of using some of the standard reference works in the study of religion, most of which are available through the library's extensive online collection. These include: *Encyclopedia of Religion (ER)*, *Encyclopedia of Religion in America (ERA)*, *Contemporary American Religion (CAR)*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (EI2)*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ)*.

### **Blackboard**

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. Please acquaint yourself with Blackboard's features and different usages and use them as frequent points of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing as well as in preparation for the assignments.

### **Grading**

You do not need to have any prior experience with the academic study of religion to take this class. I do, however, expect you to work hard, and to contribute to class discussions. If you are not comfortable with the expectations for reading and writing in this class, you should consider taking another class instead. You are expected to keep up with and master all reading assignments. If you have not done the readings, it will simply be impossible for you to participate in the discussion. While we will suffer from that, the main damage will be done to your own learning, quiz and exam grades, performance in paper assignments and your participation grade. The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

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- |                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Preparation and Participation | 10% |
| 2. Academic Journal              | 10% |

3. Lecture Presentation	10%
4. Site Visit Paper	10%
5. Two Inquiry Essays (15% each)	30%
6. Final Inquiry Project	30%

## Course Requirements

### 1. Attendance and Participation (10%)

Attendance: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. The assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. Make sure you arrive for class on time. Latecomers will be counted absent at the very beginning of class. Should you be late, you are permitted to enter the classroom only if you do so silently and without disturbing class proceedings. You are **allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions**. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%. This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy.

Professional Classroom Behavior: My expectations of professionalism extend to classroom etiquette. This includes the use of cell phones and other wireless devices during class. Texting or web-browsing that's unrelated to class discussion are not allowed. If you use your phone, let's say, to tweet or to check the stock market, or if your phone goes off during class, you will be counted as absent for that day as well.

Preparation: Reading assignments for each week are due at the beginning of each week unless noted otherwise. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. Appropriate preparation means reading the material several times, making notes, and coming to class with specific questions; part of this preparation should include consultation with recommended readings and standard reference works in order to understand fully the argument in the text.

Participation: There will be ample opportunity for you to participate in our class. Apart from my lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, and in-class writing assignments. Additional activities and assignments including peer assessments on written and oral work will also count toward your participation grade. While I will call on you often and ask about the content of assigned readings you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion in class on your own.

Student Minutes and Presentation: Taking notes on lectures and class discussion is a critical part of your learning experience. You are all expected to take notes during class as you will have to draw on them for your own work as well as when preparing for the essays. Your notes will also be the basis for **brief 2-minute presentations** that each of you is to give in class as part of your participation grade. Every day our meetings will start with one of you presenting on the previous class session. Be concise as you only have three minutes of talking time, and resist the temptation to provide a summary of the previous class. Instead, highlight the main points and provide details only when relevant. Your peers will provide you with feedback on your presentation's content, structure, and delivery. Additional tips and guidelines for presentations and public speaking can be found on our Blackboard site.

Comprehension Checks: We will have short unannounced quizzes once every week or two at the beginning of class. These will consist of 3-5 questions, usually fill-in-the blanks or multiple

choice, which cover the major points from the day's readings. I will put the questions on the SmartBoard and ask you to write out the answers on a sheet of paper. After the quiz you will grade your own paper and sign an honor pledge as we discuss the answers. The comprehension checks are designed to help you with your preparation and can only help, not hurt, your course grade. At the end of the semester I will sum the points. Those whose comprehension check scores are in the top half of the class will have their two Inquiry Essay scores reweighted (from 15/15 to 10/20) in the direction that benefits them most.

## **2. Academic Journal (10%)**

For this class you are asked to keep an academic journal. The academic journal is designed to encourage you to keep up with your reading, keep you engaged with the material, enrich class discussion (as you will already have something to say), help you practice your skills in thinking critically and writing fluidly, and, finally, provide a log of your thoughts at this state in your studies. We will use Blackboard's blog function to collect your entries which also allows us to read and comment on each other's writing. Additional guidelines and descriptions can be found on our Bb site.

## **3. Lecture Presentation (10%)**

During the course of the semester we will be discussing a wide range of concepts, events, or people in the history and contemporary reality of western religious traditions. Frequently we will benefit from additional information and analysis that goes beyond what our readings offer. Therefore, you will be assigned a particular topic for which to develop expertise through additional out-of-class research. You will be responsible for an **eight-to-ten-minute lecture presentation** based on your topic in order to deepen the class' understanding of the subject. All presenters are required to meet with me prior to the presentation date to discuss the results of their initial research and ideas for the presentation. You must bring an annotated list of at least three reliable academic sources you are planning to use for your presentation to our conversation. All citations should conform to the conventions of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester. (See guidelines on Blackboard for further information.)

## **4. Site Visit Paper (10%)**

For this paper (1,000 words, +/- 10%) you are required to attend a public worship service or a particular religious ceremony in a religious tradition other than your own. (See Blackboard for details.) You may choose any temple, synagogue, church, mosque, etc. that you wish, with *the rule that it must be of a faith you have never practiced*. To visit and observe worship in a religious tradition other than your own can by itself be a fascinating eye-opening experience. It will give you an insight into the actual living reality of the religion. Moreover, it is also a good way to measure the textbook's knowledge and class discussion against your own personal experiences. Part of the visit will be to interview a member of the group about what you observed. After your visit you are to write an analytical essay that provides a meaningful academic perspective on the worship service by integrating your observations and interview data with some of the scholarly theories, principles, and categories studied this semester. Please see the course schedule and Bb for deadlines and other details.

## **5. Two (2) Inquiry Essays: IE 1 (15%), IE 2 (15%),**

There will be three (3) opportunities to write inquiry essays throughout the semester (see course schedule for dates). **You must write a total of two (2) inquiry papers.** This means that you have the freedom to choose which essays you want to write in accordance with your interest and schedule. The inquiry essays encourage you to study one topic carefully and in its context, as you refine your ability to write clearly and argue persuasively within the academic study of religion. All inquiry essays will be take-home essays of 1,200 words (+/- 10%). I will post in advance of each assignment essay prompts as well as guidelines on how to write the essays. I will be looking for two things in your writing: a) evidence of your knowledge and understanding of class material and b) your ability to use or apply the material in ways that go beyond what you have read or heard in class. This second part can be done in many ways: you can critique the material, apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. Regardless of your particular approach to the topic, you must have a specific point or claim to argue in your essay. I encourage you to write a thesis paragraph ahead of time and to discuss it with me. Many students have found that it improves the quality of their writing. Support for your writing will also come from your peers through a peer review process (see guidelines on Bb).

### **6. Final Inquiry Project (30%)**

Your final inquiry assignment asks you to write an inquiry/analysis essay of 1,500 words (+/- 10%). The guidelines for the previous inquiry essays also apply to the final essay. Different from the earlier assignments, however, the final inquiry essay gives you the opportunity to reflect in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner on **a topic of your choice** relating to our course. Any topic or text that relates to and draws on the materials from this course is permissible. Make sure that you offer an argument about, or interpretation of, the topic you choose. Make one overall point. Do not try to do too much. The point of this assignment is to encourage depth, since the journals encourage breadth.

### **Office Hours and Opportunities for Conferencing about Your Writing**

The number and nature of the writing assignments make this a writing-intensive course. Peer reviews, class discussion, and written feedback that I give you on your assignments are meant to help you reflect on your writing and to enhance your written work through a series of revisions. In addition to these formal procedures, I also encourage you to see me during my office hours in order for us to reflect together on how to improve your writing. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, I will be happy to make an appointment with you at a more convenient time. At a minimum, I expect everyone to stop by my office at least once in the semester--by yourself, in pairs, or in small groups. Bring a piece of writing together with feedback and comments so that we have something to start our discussion.

### **Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience**

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please also note the support provided by the Writing Center run by Dr. Lisa Bolding or the ESL program headed by Ms. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact Emory's Access, Disability Services, and Resources to initiate the accommodation request process. More detailed information is available on their website at [www.ods.emory.edu](http://www.ods.emory.edu).

**Academic Fairness**

All students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the "responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work." The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so we (and you) are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I will trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

## **SCHEDULE OF READINGS, TOPICS, AND EVENTS**

REL 100Q (04A1), Fall 2015

Week 1 (8/26)

### **Introductions to each other and the class**

Reading: Syllabus. Livingston (Preface, pp. xv-xvii).

## **I. The Nature of Inquiry in the Academic Study of Religion**

Week 2 (8/31, 9/2)

### **What is the academic study of religion?**

Readings for Monday (8/31): Livingston (Part I: Chapter 1) and Miner's "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (Bb);

Readings for Wednesday (9/2): Livingston (Part I: Chapter 2) and William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 1-5 (Bb).

- *Labor Day Holiday (Monday, September 7)*

## **II. Religion and Colonialism: Religions of Native Americans**

Week 3 (9/9)

### **Introduction to Native American Religions**

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 2/Bb). Black Elk Speaks (Preface, Chapters 1-2). Livingston (Chapter 8: Deity). Reference Works: "Black Elk" (*ER* or *CAR*), "Lakota Religious Traditions" (*ER*).

Week 4 (9/14, 9/16)

### **Black Elk's Great Vision**

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 3-14). Livingston (Chapter 3: The Sacred and the Holy).

Week 5 (9/21, 9/23)

### **Black Elk and the Ghost Dance Movement**

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 15-22). Livingston (Chapter 13: Soteriology [Goals of Salvation, pp.311-333]). Reference Works: "Ghost Dance" (*ER*), "Wovoka" (*ER*).

Week 6 (9/28, 9/30)

### **Black Elk Speaks and Neihardt's Authorship**

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 23-26). Excerpts (Bb) from Scott G. Brown *A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies* (London: Continuum, 2008).

- *First Inquiry Essay Prompt available (Bb) on Wednesday, September 30.*
- *First Inquiry Essay due Sunday, October 4 (11:59 p.m.)*

## **III. Religion and Race: African-American Islam**

Week 7 (10/5, 10/7)

## **Introduction to the Varieties of Islam; Malcolm X, Black Nationalism, and the Nation of Islam**

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 13, Bb). Reference Works: "Islam in North America" (ERA). [FP: not the encycl. article here; assign it for next week]

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 10-16. Reference Works: "Nation of Islam" (ERA)

- *Fall Break (10/12-10/13)*
- *Midterm Deficiencies (Wed 10/14)*
- *Last day for dropping course without academic penalty (Fri 10/16)*

Week 8 (10/14)

### **Malcolm X, Black Nationalism, and the Nation of Islam (cont.)**

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 10-16. Livingston (Chapter 4: Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine).

Week 9 (10/19, 10/21)

### **Malcolm X's Hajj Experience**

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 17-19. Reference Works: "Muslim Pilgrimage" (ER) or "hadjdj" (EI2). Web Resources: TBA. Livingston (Chapter 5: Sacred Ritual).

- *Optional Field Trip to Masjid Al-Islam (Friday, October 23 [tentative])*

Week 10 (10/26, 10/28)

### **Malcolm X and African American Muslims after the Rejection of the Nation of Islam**

Reading: TBA. Web Resources: TBA. Reference Works: TBA.

- *Second Inquiry Essay Prompt available (Bb) on Wednesday, October 28.*
- *Second Inquiry Essay due Sunday, November 1 (11:59 p.m.).*

## **IV. Religion and Secular Life: Hasidic Judaism and the Lubavitcher Movement**

Week 11 (11/2, 11/4)

### **Varieties of Judaism: The Hasidic Movement**

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 11, Bb); Livingston (Chapter: Sacred Scripture); Holy Days (Chapters 1-2). Reference Works: "Chabad-Lubavitch" (ERA).

- *Optional Field Trip to Chabad at Emory (Friday, November 6 [tentative])*
- *Optional Field Trip to Allen Memorial Church (Sunday, November 8 [tentative])*

Week 12 (11/9, 11/11)

### **Holy Days: Hasidic Life and Spirituality**

Reading: Holy Days (Chapters 3-6). Reference Works: "Devekut" (EJ). Livingston (Chapter 12: Ethics). [FP: OR: Soteriology (Ways of Salvation) [FP: maybe assign "Ethics" for Monday and "Soteriology" for Wednesday; or the other way around]]



Week 13 (11/16, 11/18)

**Holy Days: Religion in Modernity**

Reading: Holy Days (Chapters 7-15). Livingston, Part IV (Religion in Modernity). Web

Resources: [Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace](#), [Chabad at Emory](#).

- *Third Inquiry Essay Prompt available (Bb) on Wednesday, November 18.*
- *Third Inquiry Essay due Sunday, November 22 (11:59 p.m.).*

**Week 14 (11/23): No Class!!!**

*No Class on Monday, November 23. Professor at National Conference of American Academy of Religion (AAR)*

- *Thanksgiving Recess: Wednesday, November 25-Sunday, November 29*
- *Submit Site Visit Paper on Bb (Sunday, November 29)*

Week 15 (11/30, 12/2)

**Defining Religion**

Reading: TBA

- *Exchange Drafts of Final Inquiry Essay with Peer Group Members (Friday, December 4)*
- *In-class Peer Review of Inquiry Essay Drafts (Monday, December 7)*

Last Day of Class (12/7)

**Peer Reviews and Evaluations**

- *Turn in Final (Revised) Inquiry Essay on Bb (Thursday, December 10 [11:59 p.m.])*