

## ***Religion 100Q (HSCW): Introduction to Religion (Fall 2012)***

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### ***I. Course Description***

Religion 100 explores diverse ways of being religious in thought, action, community, and experience. This course will introduce you to three major religions of the world (if you wish to study several world religions, you should take Rel 150): We will investigate the religions and sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. The first two components (Judaism and Christianity) of the course are structured the same way: We will begin by examining the religion's basic history and beliefs. In class discussions, we will only be able to cover selected major subjects and events; you will glean other aspects from your readings of Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions*. Then we will examine some sacred texts from the tradition, because few if any religions can be understood without an encounter with their sacred texts (such "texts" can be either oral or written). Finally, we will examine an ethical topic within that religious tradition (i.e., how to be religious in "action"). In particular, we will discuss how two historically-significant figures from the 20<sup>th</sup> century responded to the existence of evil within society: (a) for Judaism, Elie Wiesel and his book, *Night*; (b) for Christianity, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the book, *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*. The third section of the course on Hinduism is more exploratory. Instead of following the format above, students will work on a Hinduism wiki page and present their research to the class.

### ***II. Texts***

*Experiencing the World's Religions*, by Michael Molloy. This text is an academic, non-sectarian approach to the study of the world's major religions. We will only cover the Introduction (Chapter 1) and the chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism.

*Night*, by Elie Wiesel. This text, which relates Wiesel's experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, will serve as the primary text for our discussions of the Holocaust and ethical responses to such an evil.

*I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, by Martin Luther King, Jr. This text, which includes Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," and "I have a Dream" speech, will be the focus of our discussions about the Civil Rights movement—a religious response to the presence of evil within society—which we will examine within the context of Christianity, liberation movements within Christianity, and connections with the religion and philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi.

*The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*. "The Song of the Lord" is a mere 700 lines of the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, but it is one of the world's great scriptures. This text portrays the warrior Arjuna's battlefield conversation with the divine Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) and includes much of the essence of Hindu philosophy and wisdom.

The Bible (New Revised Standard Version): <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>. Since there are several texts for this class, I will not require you to purchase a Bible. We will, however, be reading significant sections of the Bible, *and you will need to bring extensive sections to class for our discussions* (you can borrow an NRSV Bible or print out pages from the above website). If you wish to purchase a Bible, the Oxford College bookstore has copies of the best academic translation available: The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* in the NRSV.

### III. Goals of the Course

The course is structured in three major parts. There are specific goals for each section of the course (listed below), but the overarching goals are for you to increase your awareness of the important elements of three major religions, recognize the similarities and differences among them, and understand better their sacred texts and world views. Specifically,

**Judaism:** After completing the section on Judaism, you should be able to discuss major developments in the four general periods of Jewish history, describe the three parts of the Hebrew Bible, interpret selected texts from the Hebrew Bible, describe Jewish religious practices, explain the characteristics of the major divisions within Judaism, discuss the history of persecution that culminated in the Holocaust (including the account in Elie Wiesel's *Night*), and discuss challenges that Judaism faces in the modern world.

**Christianity:** After completing the section on Christianity, you should be able to summarize the life and teachings of Jesus in the context of his times, describe the structure and basic content of the New Testament, interpret selected texts from the New Testament, explain basic Christian doctrines and practices, discuss the growth of Christianity, and discuss the Civil Rights movement as articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (in selected chapters of *I Have a Dream*) in the context of Christian belief.

**Hinduism:** After completing the section on Hinduism, you should be able to describe the origins of Hinduism; discuss major concepts and beliefs; discuss social aspects such as caste and stages of life; explain the practices and goals of the four religious paths; describe features of devotional Hinduism; recall the names and characteristics of Hinduism's most popular Gods; and discuss the ethical and spiritual issues raised by Mohandas Gandhi. These goals are accomplished largely through a research and IT project (i.e., creation of a wiki page).

### IV. Course Requirements

- A. **Tests** (300 points): There will be three major tests during the semester (test dates and details about the tests will be posted on the class Blackboard site). Each test will be non-cumulative and will cover all our activities during that time period (e.g., lectures, readings, study guides, and other activities). Tests will contain both objective and essay questions. Make-up tests will only be given for excused absences, and you should notify me *in advance*.
- B. **Site Visit Reports and Evaluations** (60 points): An overarching goal of this course is for you to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of traditions different from your own. One of the best ways in which to accomplish this goal is to attend worship experiences of other traditions. You will attend two such services, write a short paper about your experiences, read another class member's experiences on a site visit, and then discuss your experiences

with each other. Please select sites to visit that will introduce you to traditions unfamiliar to you (e.g., if you are most familiar with the Christian tradition, you should visit a Jewish Synagogue and a Hindu Temple; if you wish to visit a site from another religious tradition, please speak with me in advance). Details of possible religious sites to visit, as well as due dates, guidelines for your visit, report, and evaluation, will all be posted on Blackboard. It would be helpful to go on a site visit with a friend who is a member of that religious tradition.

- C. **Participation/Reading Guides** (40 points): Some of the lectures for the course are online; I will make those available as the semester progresses. The focus of each class period, then, will be inquiry, and those inquiries will utilize study and reading guides. Some of those guides should be completed before coming to class; others we will do in class (all assignments will be listed in this course's Blackboard site). These study guides are extremely important, because an essential element of studying religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism is to read their sacred texts carefully. These readings will enhance our class discussions and improve your text grades (*they will be covered extensively on the tests*). In addition to your contributions to class discussions, the participation grade also stems from brief 2-4 minute presentations to the class. We will start every class period with one student (perhaps two) giving a brief analysis of what was accomplished in the previous class period. This presentation focuses not on mere summary, but delves into deeper issues and questions the class session raised. Your fellow students will then have a chance to ask questions or make comments about those issues. That way we can begin the new class session with a better understanding of what we are accomplishing in every single class period.
- D. **Research and IT Project** (100 points): You will research and publish information on the Rel 100 Hinduism wiki page about an aspect of Hinduism, will work collaboratively to improve and expand that wiki page, and will present your individual research to the class.
- E. **Class Attendance and Participation:** Class attendance and participation are essential to the learning process and to your grade. You are expected to attend each class session, to be on time, and to be prepared to interact with the subject matter and your fellow classmates. You will be allowed two absences without academic penalty. If you have more than two absences, eight points will be subtracted from your point total *for each absence*.

Final grades will be assigned as follows: 463+ total points = A; 448-462 = A-; 438-447 = B+; 408-437 = B; 398-407 = B-; 388-397 = C+; 358-387 = C; 347-357 = C-; 338-346 = D+; 298-337 = D; 297 and below = F.

## V. Appointments

My office hours are Wednesday, 1:00-3:00, although some days I have to be on the Atlanta campus for meetings. I am available every day via email and most days in my office. E-mail is usually the quickest way to reach me to ask questions or to set up an appointment.

## VI. Course Philosophy

This course is intended for anyone who is interested in studying Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. No prior knowledge or commitment to any particular religious tradition is required or

expected, nor is any particular religious stance encouraged (or discouraged), other than what is outlined below. Since we will engage in the academic study of these religions, we all must be open to the contemporary methods of the scholarly study of these religions—their sacred texts, beliefs, history, and other contexts.

I simply ask you to approach this class with an open mind. No matter what your beliefs, religion, and/or philosophy, this openness must include a willingness to explore religions, beliefs, and understandings other than the ones with which you might be familiar. And all of us, no matter what our personal beliefs, should cultivate an appreciation of and respect for traditions, beliefs, and philosophies that are different from our own.

As is to be expected in a college classroom, all of us have divergent beliefs, and I expect you, like me, not to try to force your personal beliefs on others in this class. You will be encouraged to state your opinions and to dialogue with others, but everyone's views will be respected.

An essential element of our semester together is the ability to trust each other. 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." 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. The Honor Code may be found at:

[http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current\\_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/](http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/)

***VII. Tentative Course Schedule and updates will be posted on the class Blackboard site.***

The assignments for Tuesday are: The assignments for Tuesday are: (1) Read Molloy, Chapter 1; (2) Listen to/watch first (mp4) lecture; (3) Read Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2 and bring copies of those chapters to class. Then you need to start reading Molloy, Chapter 8 on Judaism.

**An announcement from the Academic Affairs Office of Oxford College:**

"Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education."

*And yet, though we strain against the deadening grip of daily necessity,  
I sense there is this mystery.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke  
"Und doch, obwohl ein jeder von sich strebt"  
**Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Letters to God**