

**REL 212 Asian Religious Traditions, 4425**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3:15pm, Seney 208**

**Dr. Eve Mullen**  
**Office tel. 4-8428**  
**emullen@emory.edu**

**Dr. Mullen's office hours:** Mondays 11:30-1:45, Tue/Thursdays 2:30-4:00. Or by appointment.  
**Office location:** Department of Religion, Seney Hall 115C, on the first floor. Please remember that your professor is available to help you at any time in the semester. If given office hours are not convenient for you, please make an appointment at a time convenient for you, call, or email.

### **Course Description and Aims**

This course serves as a thematic study of at least two Asian religious traditions. Thematic emphasis may include relationships of text and context, pilgrimage, gender, epic performance, religious institutions, visual arts, or colonial and post-colonial identities. The course will introduce the student to some major Asian religious and philosophical traditions and will focus upon the traditions' key historical developments and contemporary forms.

This semester, our course will begin with an exploration of Hindu schools of thought and religious traditions and will continue with Jain, Buddhist, Japanese Shinto, and Chinese Confucian and Taoist traditions. Any study of cultural traditions has as an aim an understanding of the basic assumptions and practices of different peoples. 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. Students will also be encouraged to reflect analytically upon the methodologies and scholarly categories within the course. We will question the very categories of comparative religious studies, identify possible cultural biases in the discipline's vernacular, and hopefully achieve a de-centered, new understanding of how "religion" can be defined.

### **Course Objectives**

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 enrolled in this course are:

- to familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences in religious worldviews,
- to think both empathetically and critically about different religious traditions,
- to develop the ability to interpret texts and other cultural phenomena (such as rituals, myths, architecture) that have religious presuppositions or implications,
- to reflect analytically upon the methodologies and scholarly categories employed in the academic study of religion, and, of course,
- to develop further your critical skills as a thinker, reader, writer, and speaker within and beyond the academic study of religion.

## Course Requirements and Grading

You do not need to have any prior experience with the academic study of religion to take this class. However, you must work hard, and 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 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, test grades and your participation grade. One's final grade will be calculated according to the following:

Attendance and Participation	10%
Test I	15%
Test II	15%
Test III	15%
Research/Site Visit/Interview Paper	15%
3 Reflection Papers	15% (5% each)
Final Exam	15%

(Grading Scale: A, B, C, D, F. Plus and minus grades may be given on individual assignments and final grades.)

## Attendance and Participation including Student Notes and Presentation

Attendance and Participation: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. Assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. 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. Class participation is part of the learning process. As it is also part of the final grade, there will be ample opportunity for it over the course of the semester. Apart from the lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, peer reviews and in-class writing. You must keep up with all readings and assignments and get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. 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.

If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please see Disability Services on campus for proper aid. Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please go to the Writing Center or the ESL program.

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 tests. Your notes will also be the basis for a brief five-minute presentation 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. Here you will draw on your minutes/notes to give a brief summary of the main points discussed in the previous class as well as an outlook on unresolved issues and open questions which need further address. Be concise as you only have five minutes of talking time. Your peers will have a chance to comment on the accuracy of your notes and presentation and make suggestions for improvement. I will take volunteers for presentations throughout the semester.

## Reflection Papers

This short paper (3-4 pages, 12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) is meant as a free reflection opportunity. The student will reflect in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner on any topic of lecture, class discussion, or reading assignment. The paper is an outlet for one's thoughts on any topic relating to the course. The reflection papers will be graded based upon evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the material. The first reflection paper must have been turned in, at the latest, by February 13. The second may be turned in by April 2. The third reflection paper is due by the final exam date.

## Three Tests and the Final Exam

There will be three tests over the course of the semester. The tests will cover both the reading assignments and in-class material. Each test will consist of two parts, a short identification section and an essay section. Choices of questions will be provided. You will also have one Final Examination in the final exam week. The exam is cumulative; in preparation for it you will have to look back at the entire semester and reflect on the material, including the traditions studied, in a comparative, scholarly manner. You may also be asked to reflect critically upon the categories and methodologies we have employed in class.

## Research/Site Visit/Interview Paper

One paper on a topic of the student's choice is also required. This paper should be between 10 and 12 pages long, typed, double-spaced (use 12pt font and one-inch margins). The paper due date is April 23 (in class). Late papers will be penalized. Any topic, tradition, or text relating to our course is permissible. Please email me for approval of your topic and for help in finding sources by March 17. You have much freedom regarding this assignment. You may write a research paper without interview or site visit descriptions, a paper on a site visit that incorporates research work, or an interview/s-centered paper that incorporates research. As this is a research paper at foundation, citations and a list of references are required. Only use scholarly, authoritative sources found via Emory's excellent library system.

Encouraged are reports on site visits to a service or meeting in a religion *other than one's own*. It is perfectly fine for you to undertake these site visits in small, collaborative groups. Each group member, however, must write an individual paper. When visiting in a group, please be very careful to avoid intimidation of the community members of whom you are a guest, particularly when interviewing: groups must be polite and unintrusive.

Please note again that Site Visit or Interview Papers must also show preparedness in research; in other words, your paper must not only be descriptive or simply transcribe an interview. It must be meaningfully explanatory, as well. The paper should exhibit your applied knowledge of approaches and intellectual grasp of the material at hand. Of greatest importance is that you choose a topic that interests you. Plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don't be afraid to trust your own words and scholarly analyses. Please see the professor not only for approval of your topic but also for help in finding resources. Note: You must have cleared your topic with me by March 17.

You will write a progress report on your research to-date, due on April 7. It will provide a snapshot of your work and should include a brief description (no more than 300 words) of your research topic, interesting findings so far, as well as any difficulties you have encountered. In addition, please also attach a bibliography of the works you are using in your research.

## Online Tools

This course will use the online communication tools on LearnLink (LL) as well as readings and documents located there. To use LL you only need to have a LL email account. The LL Conference for our class can be found under the class conferences; you should move the LL Conference to your desktop so you do not miss any important information. Also, you would do well to get acquainted with some of the LL features and use LL as a frequent point of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing. Grades are posted via Blackboard online.

## Academic Honesty

Finally, 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 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 trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

## Required Course Texts

Required course textbook: Hopfe and Woodward. *Religions of the World*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001 or later). Required supplementary text: Huston Smith. *The World's Religions*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). Available in the bookstore. Primary and other secondary excerpts may be photocopied and provided.

## Schedule of Readings, Topics and Events

Week 1 (week beginning Jan. 16) (Wednesday only)	Introductions and class business Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, Introduction Overview
Week 2 (Jan. 23)	Foundations: the Study of Religion Smith, Chapter I Media Presentation: <i>The Message of the Myth</i>
Week 3 (week of Jan. 28)	Hindu Traditions: Roots, Cosmogonies Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 4
Week 4 (week of Feb. 4)	“Hinduisms” continued: Diversity Smith, Chapter II
Week 5 (week of Feb. 11)	Jainism: an Indian-origin Tradition. Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 5 <b>Reflection Paper 1 due Wednesday</b>
Week 6 (week of Feb. 18)	<b>Test I Monday</b> Media: <i>The Hero's Adventure</i>

Week 7 (week of Feb. 25)	Buddhism: Gautama and the Four Noble Truths Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 6
Week 8 (week of March 3)	Buddhism: Ethics Smith, Chapter III
<b>Spring Break</b>	
Week 9 (week of March 17)	Japanese Zen and the Zen Aesthetic; and Shinto Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 9 <b>Test II Wednesday</b> <b>Paper topic must be approved by Monday</b>
Week 10 (week of March 24)	Confucianism: K'ung Fu Tzu and the Chinese context Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 8
Week 11 (week of March 31)	Confucian Movements: Neo-Confucianism Smith, Chapter IV <b>Reflection Paper 2 due Wednesday</b>
Week 12 (week of April 7)	Taoist Tradition: Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu Smith, Chapter V <b>Progress Report due on Monday</b>
Week 13 (week of April 14)	Chinese Philosophical Traditions in Modernity <b>Test III Wednesday</b>
Week 14 (week of April 21)	Comparative Conclusions, In-class exercise. Discussion. <b>Research/Site/Interview Papers due in class Wednesday</b>
Week 15 (week of April 28, Monday only)	Review for Final Examination.
<b>Final Examination: Monday, May 5, 2 – 5pm. <u>Reflection Paper 3 due at exam's start.</u></b>	