

Course Description, Objectives, and Policies



REL 100QW - Introduction to Religion - Fall 2017

MW 4:20-6:00 p.m. (Seney Hall 322)

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Office: Seney Hall 115B

Hours: MW 1:30-2:30 p.m., or by appointment

General Education Program Requirements: This course fulfills the HSC (History, Society, Culture), Q (Ways of Inquiry), and CWR (Continuing Writing) requirements.



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.

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 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.
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Readings

- **Course textbooks:** (1) James C. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008; (2) Alex Haley. *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973; (3) John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988; (4) Lis Harris. *Holy Days*. New York: Touchstone, 1995. The textbooks are available in the campus bookstore.
- **Additional readings:** 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, 2nd ed. (EI2)*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ)*.

You will be expected to have the assigned readings with you, whether from the textbook or the Canvas files, in class each day. Please include the printing of online documents as part of your book budget.



Canvas Learning Technology

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Canvas as well as readings and documents located there. You would do well to acquaint yourself with the features Canvas offers 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.



Course Requirements and Grading

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

1. Preparation and Participation	10%
2. Reading Responses	10%
3. Site Visit Paper	10%
4. Inquiry Essay I	20%
5. Inquiry Essay II	20%
6. Final Inquiry Project	30%

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)

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 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 must 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 two 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.

Midpoint Reflections: In order to give substantial focus to your observations, questions, and ideas in our class, I will be asking each of you to take a turn doing a "midpoint reflection" – one of you each class session. Roughly half-way through our class, we will shift gears and turn the time over to you. You will summarize **one** key point or idea from the discussion so far, and then direct our attention to **one** question or issue you feel has NOT been covered enough in the discussion to that point. (This might be something you noticed in your own reading that seemed striking, puzzling, moving, or annoying. Or it might be one of the study questions that we have not yet had time to address.) You should plan on using **no more than 1-2 minutes** for both of these steps combined. After you raise your question/issue, the other class members will join in discussion with you on that topic and ones related to it that occur to them. I will be completely **silent for at least 5 minutes** during this time in order to let you facilitate the discussion and encourage you to talk among yourselves. After 5 minutes I may re-join, summarize the discussion, or I may just let the discussion keep rolling along. The object of this activity is to enable us to take a fresh turn in our class discussions, to focus on questions or angles that might not otherwise occur to us as a whole group, and to receive contributions to the discussion from all members of the class.

2. Reading Responses (10%)

For this class, you are asked to write short analytical responses to the assigned readings (250-300 words). This task 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 the discussion function on Canvas to collect your entries which also allows us to read and comment on each other's writing. [See Canvas for more details](#) (<https://canvas.emory.edu/courses/35818/assignments/66754>).

3. Site Visit Paper (10%)

For this paper (1,000 words, +/- 10%) you are required to attend a public worship service or a religious ceremony in a religious tradition other than your own. 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. [See Canvas for more details](#). (<https://canvas.emory.edu/courses/35818/assignments/66756>)

4.-5. Inquiry Essay I and Inquiry Essay II (20% each, 40% total)

The analysis 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 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 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 Canvas for more details](#) (<https://canvas.emory.edu/courses/35818/assignments/66719>).

6. Final Inquiry Project (30%)

Your final assignment asks you to write 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 analysis 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. [See Canvas for more details](#). (<https://canvas.emory.edu/courses/35818/assignments/66751>)



Policies

Attendance

You must be present for class meetings to do well in the course. You should aim to arrive to class meetings a couple minutes early having read the assignment and taken notes, including at least two questions or observations to contribute to discussion. 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 should plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy. My expectations of professionalism extend to classroom etiquette. This includes such behavior as arriving on time, staying in the classroom until an official break or the end of the class period, and packing up only when class has finished.

Devices in Class

You may utilize laptops and tablets in their capacity as learning aids during class. You may not use them for communicating, browsing, gaming, doing schoolwork for other courses, or otherwise departing from the task at hand during the brief periods of the week we will spend together. Your phone should be powered down, or in airplane mode, and stowed during class. If you find yourself needing to access the day's reading on your phone, or are expecting a time-sensitive call, announce it before class begins.

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 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.

Academic Integrity

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. See the Honor Code:

 <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code>
(<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code>)

Access, Disability Services, and Resources

The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) works with students who have disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, students must contact OAS and complete the registration process. Faculty may not provide disability accommodations until an accommodation letter has been processed; accommodations are not retroactive. Students registered with OAS who receive a letter outlining specific academic accommodations are strongly encouraged to coordinate a meeting time with their professor to discuss a protocol to implement the accommodations as needed throughout the semester. This meeting should occur as early in the semester as possible. Contact OAS for more information at (770) 784-4690 or oas_oxford@emory.edu (mailto:oas_oxford@emory.edu). Additional information is available at the OAS website at <http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/students/index.html> (<http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/students/index.html>).

Affirmative Action & Sexual Harassment

All persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by university policies. Discrimination against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, gender, sexual orientation, or veteran status is unacceptable.

Religious Holidays

Instructors are encouraged, not required, to accommodate students' academic needs related to religious holidays. Please make every effort to negotiate your religious holiday needs within the first two weeks of the semester; waiting longer may compromise your instructor's ability to extend satisfactory arrangements. If you need guidance negotiating your needs related to a religious holiday, the College Chaplain, Rev. Lyn Pace, ppace@emory.edu (<mailto:ppace@emory.edu>), Candler Hall 202, is willing and available to help. Please be aware that Rev. Pace is not tasked with excusing students from classes or writing excuses for students to take to their professors. Emory's official list of religious holidays may be found at http://www.religiouslife.emory.edu/faith_traditions/holidays.html (http://www.religiouslife.emory.edu/faith_traditions/holidays.html).