

REL 100 Introduction to Religion, 4398
Oxford College of Emory University, Fall 2006
Humanities Hall 206
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11:15am

Mullen and Pohl
Office hours: TBA, Seney Hall first fl.
emullen@emory.edu
fpohl@emory.edu

Course Description

This study will serve as a basic introduction to religion as an academic field of study. We will employ major categories of the discipline with which to better penetrate and analyze the specific religious traditions that are our foci, three major religious and philosophical traditions: Buddhism, Islam, and Native American Traditions. The class will focus upon the traditions' key historical developments and diverse, contemporary forms. The course will begin with an exploration of Native American thought and religious traditions and will continue with Buddhist and Islamic traditions. Any study of cultural traditions has as an aim an understanding of the basic assumptions and practices of different peoples. A fundamental aim of this course is also an informed appreciation of and respect for the diverse traditions studied. Of particular use will be these comparative religious studies topics: Concepts of the Divine or Ultimate Reality, Ethics, Ritual, Cosmogony, Anthropology, Eschatology, Soteriology and Theodicy. 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 further develop 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, we do 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 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 and your participation grade. This equally applies to the amount of writing expected of you. One's final grade will be calculated according to the following:

Attendance and Participation	10%
Test I	10%
Test II	10%
Test III	10%
Research/Site Visit/Interview Paper	20%
2 Reflection Papers	20% (10% each)
Final Exam	20%

(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 either of us 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 our lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, peer reviews and in-class writing. We expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. While we 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 run by Dr. Adrian Ivey or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell.

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. We will circulate a list with available dates for presentations at the beginning of the semester.

Reflection Papers

This short paper (3-4 pages, roughly 900-1,200 words, 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 Thursday, October 12. The second may be turned in any time before 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. The first test (Thursday 9/28) will cover the material from the introductory sessions up to and including our discussion of Native American traditions. For the second test (Thursday 10/26) you will be expected to demonstrate your knowledge of Buddhist traditions. The third test (Thursday 11/30) will cover Islam. You will also have one Final Examination in the final exam week. The exam is cumulative and will test your skills in using the vernacular of comparative religious studies. In preparation for it you will have to look back at the entire semester and reflect on the material, including Native American, Buddhist and Islamic traditions, 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 (roughly 3,000-3,600 words, use 12pt font and one-inch margins). The paper due date is December 12 (in class). Late papers will be penalized. Any topic, tradition, or text relating to our course is permissible. Please see one of us for approval of your topic and for help in finding sources before the fall break (see course schedule). 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. 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. Please see one of the professors not only for approval of your topic but also for help in finding resources. Note: You must have cleared your topic with one of us by **Thursday, October 5**. 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. Around the middle of the semester you will write a progress report on your research to-date. 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. Your progress report is due on **Thursday, November 2**. You have the option of turning in a rough draft of your paper to be read and helpfully critiqued by one of your professors. Such a rough draft review with useful suggestions for improvements allows you to revise your paper before turning in the final draft that will be graded. If you choose this optional help, the rough draft due date is **Tuesday, November 28**. Please remember that your professors are available to help you at any time in the semester. If our office hours are not convenient for you, please make an appointment or email us.

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.

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 (and you) are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do we, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; we trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

Required Course Texts

1. Black Elk and John G. Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.
2. Walpola Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1974.
3. Annemarie Schimmel. *Islam: An Introduction*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

These texts are available in the bookstore. Primary and other secondary readings may be made available either as hardcopy or electronically online.

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Events

- Week 1 (8/31, Thursday only) Introductions to each other and the class
- Week 2 (9/5, 9/7) What is the Study of Religion? Elements of a Religious Worldview
Reading: Livingston Chapter 1
- Week 3 (9/12, 9/14) Native American Traditions; the Concept of the Divine or Ultimate Reality
Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*
- Week 4 (9/19, 9/21) Lakota and Sioux practices: Ritual is Reality
Reading: Hopfe and Woodward Chapter 2: “Native American Religions” (to be supplied)
- Week 5 (9/26, 9/28) Test I on Tuesday
Begin Buddhism
- Week 6 (10/3, 10/5) Introduction to Buddhism: Siddhartha Gautama and the Four Noble Truths
Reading: *What the Buddha Taught*
Last week to have your Research Paper topic approved
- Week 7 (10/12, Thursday only due to Fall Break) Buddhist Cosmogony? Karma and Samsara Theodicy
Reading: *What the Buddha Taught*, continued
Reflection Paper 1 due
- Week 8 (10/17, 10/19) Buddhist Ethics: The Eightfold Path and Karmic Exchanges
Reading: selection from Buddhist scriptures (to be supplied)

(October 18: Midterm reports due from professors)

Week 9 (10/24, 10/26) From Vajrayana to Ch'an and Zen: Nondualism and the place of logic
Buddhist Meditation: Ritual, Ethics, and Soteriologies
Reading: Chandrakirti's Sevenfold Reasoning and Zen poetry (to be supplied)
Test II on Thursday

Week 10 (10/31, 11/2) Islam: Community, Prophet and Koran
Reading: Schimmel's *Islam*
Progress Report due on Thursday

Week 11 (11/7, 11/9) Islam: Schisms and Islamic Sciences Development
Reading: *Islam* continued

Week 12 (11/14, 11/16) Islam: Sufism and Modernity

(Week of 11/20: No class due to the American Academy of Religion Meeting and Thanksgiving Break)

Week 13 (11/28, 11/30) Islam, continued
Rough Drafts of Research/Site Visit/Interview Papers due (optional) on Tuesday
Test III on Thursday

Week 14 (12/5, 12/7) Religion and Modernity: Challenges
Romanticizations and Demonizations of Religious Peoples
Reading: Orientalism handouts (to be supplied)

Week 15 (12/12, Tuesday only) Review for Final
Research/Site Visit/Interview Papers due in class

Exam Week (12/14-12/20) Final Exam: Friday, December 15, 2:00-5:00.
Reflection Paper 2 due at 2:00