

## **Rel 211Q Western Religious Traditions 03A**

Fall 2011

MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.

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### *Course Description*

This course will provide an introduction to the history, practice, and core doctrines of the religions originating in the Middle East, sometimes called the “western religions.” Following a discussion of preliminary questions in the academic study of religion, we will familiarize ourselves with ancient Mesopotamian religion as reflected in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and with Zoroastrianism, the still-existing tradition of ancient Persia. Both traditions have exerted remarkable influences on the development of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheistic religions. These three traditions will concern us in more detail in the subsequent section of the course. Here you will familiarize yourself with the major religious and philosophical traditions of these three faiths by focusing upon their key historical developments and contemporary forms. Of particular interest to us will be the interaction and interconnectedness of these traditions, particularly in the modern period. In the course’s final section we will deal with the question of whether it is justified to speak of an inevitable conflict between different religions, cultures, or civilizations in the light of the semester’s findings. We will acquaint ourselves with new religions such as Baha’i and discuss desirable and viable ways to accommodate the world’s growing religious diversity from a perspective of simultaneous commitment to one’s own worldview and respect toward beliefs and ways of life other than one’s own.

### *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 allow you to understand how people within these traditions view themselves and how these traditions in their interactions with each other have shaped human values and cultural traditions in and beyond the western world. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student enrolled in this course are:

- to gain factual knowledge of the historical forces and cultural traditions that have shaped and in turn have been shaped by the western religions,
- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of human religious activity and to think both empathetically and critically about the western traditions,
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications, and, of course,
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

## Readings

- Required Course Textbook: Willard G. Oxtoby and Amir Hussain (eds.), *World Religions: Western Traditions*, Third Edition, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. (available at the book store)
- REQUIRED SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: THE *EPIC OF GILGAMESH: AN ENGLISH VERSION WITH AN INTRODUCTION* (PENGUIN CLASSICS), TRANSL. N. K. SANDERS, REVISED EDITION, 1960 (AVAILABLE AT THE BOOK STORE).
- ADDITIONAL READINGS: PRIMARY AND OTHER SECONDARY READINGS WILL BE PHOTOCOPIED AND PROVIDED IN CLASS OR WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH BLACKBOARD.

## Blackboard

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. You would do well to 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.

## Course Requirements and Grading

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

- |                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Preparation and Participation | 10% |
| 2. Academic Journal              | 10% |
| 3. Lecture Presentation          | 10% |
| 4. Site Visit Paper              | 10% |
| 5. Midterm Inquiry Essay         | 15% |
| 6. Final Inquiry Essay           | 20% |
| 7. Academic Research Paper       | 25% |
| Project                          |     |
| a. First Paper (10%)             |     |
| b. Revised Paper (15%)           |     |

### 1. Preparation 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. My expectations of professionalism extend, of course, to classroom etiquette, including the use of cell phones during class. 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. Weekly **reading quizzes** on Blackboard (Bb) will give you an opportunity to test your comprehension and retention of important concepts and ideas from our textbook readings. Please note that you will need to login to Bb using the [Respondus Lockdown Browser](#).

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.

## **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 (see additional guidelines on Blackboard). Your lecture will be graded based on content, organization, and delivery. As you will be covering important course content, your audience's responsibility is to listen actively and attentively, take notes, keep track of main ideas, and think critically in order to evaluate and pose questions after the lecture. Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Blackboard). 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. Please also schedule a meeting with me within two days after your presentation for feedback and suggestions.

#### **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 about your observations as well as the interview. Please see the course schedule and Bb for deadlines and other details.

#### **5. Midterm Inquiry Essay (10%) & 6. Final Inquiry Essay (15%)**

The midterm and final essays on an assigned topic or theme (to be announced on Bb) encourage you to study one topic carefully and in its context, as you refine your ability to write clearly and argue persuasively. Both will be take-home essays of 1,200-1,500 words. I will post in advance on Blackboard, both for the midterm and the final, a set of essay prompts from which to choose your topic, 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).

#### **7. Academic Research Paper Project (25%): First Paper (10%), Revised Paper (15%)**

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. Your research paper must be 3,000-3,600 words.

The final, revised version of your research paper must be turned in on the last day of class. A few words about the writing process: You cannot expect to produce your best writing when you first get started. Thus, revising your work is an integral part of successful writing. Revising is a process of rethinking your paper and differs from simple proofreading. As you revise your paper you will have to reconsider your argument, review your evidence, refine your purpose, and reorganize your presentation. You will find that I indicated different dates and deadlines for these activities on the course schedule at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers. Please familiarize yourself with the additional guidelines and instructions on our Bb site.

### *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. Adrian Ivey or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact the Office of Disability Services to initiate the accommodation request process. More detailed information is available on the 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.

## ***Class Schedule***

Week 1 (8/24)

**Introductions to each other and the class**

Reading: Oxtoby (Foreword and Preface).

### **Academic Study of Religion**

Week 2 (8/29, 8/31)

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 1: About Religion) and Horace Miner's "Body ritual among the Nacirema" (Bb).

→ *Labor Day Holiday (Monday, September 5)*

Week 3 (9/7)

**What are Western Religions?**

Group Presentations (Textbook Inquiry Project)

### **Religions of the Ancient World**

Week 4 (9/12, 9/14)

**Ancient Mesopotamia: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 2: Religions of the Ancient World), *Epic of Gilgamesh* (entire epic), Genesis 6-9 (Bb, optional).

Week 5 (9/19, 9/21)

**Ancient Persia: Zoroastrianism**

Reading: re-view Oxtoby (Chapters 1 and 2) on Zoroastrianism; source texts on Zoroastrianism (Bb); web resources: TBA.

### **Abrahamic Traditions**

Week 6 (9/26, 9/28)

**Biblical Judaism and Written Torah, Rabbinic Judaism and Oral Torah**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 3: Jewish Traditions, pp. 68-113).

→ *Submit draft of midterm essay to peers for review (Monday, October 3)*

→ *Peer group reviews of midterm essay drafts by Wednesday, October 5 (Bb)*

→ *Turn in finished midterm essay on Bb (Friday, October 7)*

Week 7 (10/3, 10/5)

**Judaism: Holocaust and Theodicy**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 3, pp. 113-157); selections from Elie Wiesel's *Night* (Bb); selections from the biblical book of *Job* (Bb).

- *Turn in finished midterm essay on Bb (Friday, October 7)*
- *Midsemester Break (10/10-10/11)*
- *Midterm Deficiencies (10/12)*
- *Last day for dropping course without academic penalty (Friday, October 14)*

Week 8 (10/12)

### **Christian Origins & Research and Writing in Religious Studies**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 4, pp. 166-175).

- *Turn in research paper topic worksheet (Preparation Statement) on Bb (Monday, October 17)*
- *Library Workshop (Monday, October 17)*

Week 9 (10/17, 10/19)

### **Early Doctrinal Developments & Library Workshop**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 4, pp. 175-193 and 227-239).

Library Workshop: Monday, October, 17

- *Submit "Discover Your Research Topic" assignment (Sunday, October 23)*

Week 10 (10/24, 10/26)

### **Monastic Life, Protestantism, Fundamentalism**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 4, pp. 193-209, 209-227, and 239-259; selections from monastics (Bb)

- *Submit annotated bibliography (Sunday, October 30)*

Week 11 (10/31, 11/2)

### **Islam as a Monotheistic Creed: Muhammad and the Qur'an**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 5, pp. 268-283 and 291-305); Andrea Useem, "Islam, a Vocal Exercise of Faith," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47:13 (2000), A72 [Bb].

- *Submit thesis statement and outline (Friday, November 4)*

Week 12 (11/7, 11/9)

### **Variations within Islam: Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi Muslims**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 5, pp. 283-291 and 305-317); Prologue to Rumi's *Masnavi* (Bb).

- *Submit draft of research paper for peer review (Monday, November 14)*

### **Religion and Modernity**

Week 13 (11/14, 11/16)

**New Religions and Movements & Peer Reviews of Research Paper Drafts**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 7: New Religions and Movements).

In-class Peer Review: Wednesday, November 16

Week 14 (11/21)      No Class (Instructor at AAR)

- *Submit First Paper on Bb (Tuesday, November 22)*
- *Thanksgiving Recess (11/23-11/25)*

Week 15 (11/28, 11/30)

**Current Issues: Clash of Civilizations**

Reading: Oxtoby (Chapter 8: Current Issues); Samuel P. Huntington, “The Coming Clash of Civilizations” (Bb) and at least one response to Huntington’s thesis (Bb). Optional: Additional responses to Huntington (Bb).

- *Submit Site Visit Paper on Bb (Friday, December 2)*

Last Day of Class (12/5)

**Evaluations and Review**

- *Submit (Revised) Research Paper along with Memo and Abstract (Monday, December 5)*

**Final Essay: The Final Essay is due on Blackboard no later than Sunday, December 11 (11:59 p.m.).**