

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: Islam, Native American Religions, 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. Such 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.

Course Objectives

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. 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 information about the historical forces and cultural traditions in different world religions,
- to familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences in religious worldviews,
- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of human religious activity and to think both empathetically and critically about the world's religious traditions,
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications, and
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

Required Readings

- (1) James C. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008.
- (2) *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Author: Alex Healy. Ballantine Books, 1973.
- (3) *Black Elk Speaks*. Author: John Neihardt. University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- (4) *Holy Days*. Author: Lis Harris. Touchstone (Simon & Schuster), 1995.
- (5) 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

You do not need to have any prior experience with the academic study of religion to take this class. I do, however, 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 and master 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, quiz and exam grades, performance in paper assignments and your participation grade. The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

1. Preparation and Participation	10%
2. Academic Journal	10%
3. One (1) Lecture Presentation	10%
4. 3 Tests (10% each)	30%
5. Academic Research Paper Project	20%
6. Final Essay	20%

1. Attendance and Participation including Student Notes, Peer Reviews, and Presentations (10%)

Participation: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. Reading assignments for each week are due at the beginning of the week unless noted otherwise. Assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. 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, discussions with your professor about your work, and in-class writing. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. I will call on you often to ask about the content of assigned readings, and you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion in class on your own. 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. Lateness will be counted as absence. 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.

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.

Inquiry Sessions and Break-out Groups: Break-out groups in class will discuss the Livingston reading assignment contents, including the categories, methodologies and theories in Livingston's chapters, and apply the knowledge to what has been learned via the previous readings on and discussions about Islam, Native American traditions, and Judaism. How do the vocabulary, categories and theories explained in Livingston's book apply to the religious beliefs, practices and lives we read about in the three traditions? What works? What fits? What doesn't? What can be improved? Specific class sessions during our study of the Livingston reading will be designated for work in break-out groups and for short, five-minute presentations from each group. In many cases it will be necessary for you to meet with your peers outside of class to complete the assignment and to prepare the subsequent in-class presentation.

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.

Content: In your journal entries you will respond to the assigned readings. These responses are meant as free reflection opportunities and provide you with outlets for your thoughts pertaining to the topics raised in the sources. Each journal entry should (1) briefly quote or summarize one passage in one assigned text for that one day, and (2) record your honest and informed reflections on the reading, connecting it to some other concept or topic relating to the course (for example, an earlier reading or discussion from our class, an item in the news, something you have studied in another course, or a concept or theory from this or another class to which the text can be related). Your entries should engage the ideas expressed in the text in some direct and thoughtful way. Therefore it is essential that you do not merely summarize the position maintained by the author, but offer your own analysis and reflections, making connections between the readings and some other phenomenon. I usually post study questions or topics for each week's reading on Blackboard, but you are free to formulate your own response.

Although most of the journal entries will focus on the readings, there are two exceptions: (1) one journal entry must reflect on a site visit to a religious community in the Atlanta metropolitan area, including Oxford and Covington (see additional guidelines on BB); (2) another entry may be written in response to an approved event outside of class such as a film, lecture, or performance relating to the subject of the course. For these special event items, you will need to think about how to relate the event to themes discussed in class.

Format and Due Dates: Journal entries should be 250-300 words long and must be written in response to the week's assigned readings. Since the readings are due at the beginning of the week (unless noted otherwise), you must post your journal entries to Blackboard before the week's first class session. The only exceptions are entries on films, site visits, and approved outside events which are to be turned in before the very next class. Late postings will not be accepted. The journal entry for the last day of class is required of everyone. No journal entries can be posted after the final class session.

Grading: These entries will be graded as either satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U). A satisfactory grade means that you posted the entry on time and followed the instructions fully. I do not grade journals for thesis and organization, as I do other written work. Rules of grammar and style, however, still apply. Put forth your best effort as there will be no opportunities to re-write unacceptable journal entries. You are free to explore a variety of writing styles and voices and do not have to arrive at some finished view or conclusion. The entries are thus informal in the sense that they are exploratory. You control how well you do on the journal assignment, since your grade is determined by how many acceptable journal entries you submit (ones graded with an "S," that is). Here is the scale:

A=14 entries (scattered over at least 11 weeks);

B=11 entries (scattered over at least 9 weeks);

C= 8 entries (scattered over at least 7 weeks);

D= 6 entries (scattered over at least 5 weeks);

F= 4 or fewer entries.

(Plus and minus grades may be given depending on the overall quantity and quality of the posts.)

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 the religious traditions we study. 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-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. Three Tests (30%; 10% each)

Careful reading of assignments provides the foundation for productive inquiry sessions and break-out group discussions. Three tests will cover the reading assignments in detail. You will be quizzed upon the terms, concepts, theorists and theories found in the Livingston readings and on the events and peoples in the other readings required up to that testing period. Bring an examination blue book, available in the bookstore, and a pen with blue or black ink to the tests.

5. Academic Research Paper Project (20%)

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. It is of greatest importance that you choose a topic of interest to you. The research paper should ideally use both primary source material and appropriate secondary and theoretical studies to focus more closely on a particular subject. You can find a list of recommended resources on the [research guide](#) available on the library web page. Your paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed.

Format, Length: Your research paper must be 2,400-3,000 words. Use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout. Consistently follow the **MLA (Modern Language Association)** system for manuscript format and documentation as set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009). There are several good websites that deal with MLA style (see Blackboard/Assignments/Writing Tips).

Revising and Grading: 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. Please see the appropriate handouts (e.g., Editing and Proofreading, Revising Drafts) on the [UNC Writing Center](#) web page for more information. In order to increase intentionality in the writing process, your research paper will develop in stages over the course of the semester and will go through a series of evaluations and revisions.

Stages of the Writing Process: The research and writing process consists of different stages and includes a wide variety of activities such as making a decision about your research topic, preliminary research to discover pertinent and critical aspects about the topic, narrowing the research question, locating the appropriate references and texts, devising an outline and initial bibliography for your paper, presenting your initial findings to a group of peers and eliciting feedback from them, writing a preliminary draft, and finally editing and revising your paper before you turn in your final draft. 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.

- Wednesday 10/6: **Preparation statement** on research paper topic (BB)
- Wednesday 10/6: **Library research workshop**
- Friday 10/15: **Discover Your Topic** (worksheet, BB)
- Friday 10/22: **Three annotations** (BB)
- Friday 10/29: **Annotated bibliography** (6 sources, BB)
- Sunday 11/7: **Thesis statement and outline** (BB)

- Friday 11/19: Exchange **drafts** for peer review (minimum of 2,400 words, completed bibliography without annotations)
- Monday 11/22: In-class **peer reviews** (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- Monday 12/6 (last day of class): Turn in **final revised paper**. Late papers will not be accepted.

6. Final Essay (20%)

Format and Content: Instead of an in-class final, you will write a final essay to showcase your abilities as a writer and thinker in the academic study of religion. The final essay will be a take-home essay of 1,200-1,500 words. Please use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout. I will post additional guidelines on Blackboard on how to write 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.

Due Date: Your final essay must be submitted through Blackboard no later than Wednesday, December 15 (5:00 p.m.). Late submissions will not be accepted.

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.

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.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS, TOPICS, AND EVENTS

I. What makes a religion scholar? And who's asking?

Week 1 (8/25, 8/27)

Introductions to each other and the class

Reading: Syllabus and Miner's "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (BB)

Week 2 (8/30, 9/1, 9/3)

What is religion and what is the academic study of religion?

Reading: Livingston, Part I

Labor Day (9/6)

II. Religion and Race: African-American Islam

Week 3 (9/8, 9/10)

Introduction to the Varieties of Islam

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 13(BB)

Week 4 (9/13, 9/15, 9/17)

Malcolm X (1)

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 10-16.

Week 5 (9/20, 9/22, 9/24)

Malcolm X (2) and African American Muslims after the Rejection of the Nation of Islam

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 17-19.

Field Trip: Masjid Al-Islam (tentative)

Week 6 (9/27, 9/29, 10/1)

Forms of Religious Experience and Expression, with Inquiry Sessions and Break-out Groups

Reading: Livingston, Part II

Week 7 (10/4, 10/6, 10/8)

Test I, Library Workshop, Introduction to Native American Religions

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 2 (BB/for Friday)

Test I (Monday 10/4)

Library Workshop (Wednesday 10/6)

Research Paper: Turn in your preparation statement on BB (Wednesday)

Fall Break (10/11-10/12)

III. Religion and Colonialism: Religions of Native Americans

Week 8 (10/13, 10/15)

Black Elk (1)

Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*, Preface, chapters 1-11

Research Paper: Turn in worksheet "Discover Your Topic" on BB (Friday)

Wednesday, October 13: Midterm deficiencies due

Friday, October 15: Last day for dropping course without academic penalty

Week 9 (10/18, 10/20, 10/22)

Black Elk (2)

Reading: Black Elk Speaks, chapters 12-25, postscript

Research Paper: Turn in first set of three annotations on BB (Friday)

Week 10 (10/25, 10/27, 10/29)

Elements of a Religious Worldview, with Inquiry Sessions and Break-out Groups

Reading: Livingston, Part III

Research Paper: Turn in annotated bibliography on BB (Friday)

IV. Religion and Secular Live: Hasidic Judaism and the Lubavitcher Movement

Week 11 (11/1, 11/3, 11/5)

Test II, Varieties of Judaism

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 11 (BB/for Wednesday)

Test II (Monday 11/1)

Research Paper: Turn in thesis statement/outline on BB (Sunday 11/7)

Week 12 (11/8, 11/10, 11/12)

Holy Days (1)

Reading: *Holy Days*, chapters 1-5

Week 13 (11/15, 11/17, 11/19)

Holy Days (2)

Reading: *Holy Days*, chapters 6-15

Research Paper: Exchange draft with peer group members (Friday)

Field Trip: Chabad at Emory (tentative)

Week 14 (11/22)

In-class peer review of research paper drafts

11/24-11/28 Thanksgiving Recess

Week 15 (11/29, 12/1, 12/3)

Religion in Modernity (with Inquiry Sessions and Break-out Groups) and Test III

Reading: Livingston, Part IV

Test III (Friday 12/3)

Last Day of Class (12/6): Evaluations and Review

Research Paper: Turn in Research Paper (BB)

Submission Deadline for Final Essay: Wednesday, December 15 (5:00 p.m.)