

Rel 100Q Introduction to Religion 11J

Fall 2011

TTh 11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

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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 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 familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences in religious worldviews;
- 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

- James C. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008.
- Alex Healy. *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973.
- John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- Lis Harris. *Holy Days*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Additional primary and secondary sources will be made available on Blackboard. 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)*.

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.

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. Lecture Presentation	10%
4. Site Visit Paper	10%
5. Two Inquiry Essays (15% each)	30%
6. Final Inquiry Essay	20%
7. Writing Portfolio	10%

Course Requirements

1. Attendance 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. Emailing, chatting, or web-browsing are not allowed. This includes the use of cell phones and other wireless devices 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 and 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. 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. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments. That 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 in order to fully understand the argument in the text.

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 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-to-ten minute lecture presentation based on your topic in order to deepen the class' understanding of the subject (see additional guidelines on Blackboard). 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.

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. & 6. Inquiry Essays (IE): IE 1 (15%), IE 2 (15%), Final IE (20%)

The inquiry essays (see course schedule for dates) 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 inquiry essays will be take-home essays of 1,200-1,500 words. I will post in advance of each assignment a set of essay prompts from which to choose your topic, as well as guidelines 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. Support for your writing will also come from your peers through a peer review process (see guidelines on Bb).

7. Writing Portfolio (10%)

The portfolio allows you to exhibit your efforts, progress, and achievements as a thinker and writer in the academic study of religion this semester and gives you a chance to reflect on your own learning by identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as growth over time. Your task for the portfolio is to choose **three (3) pieces of writing** from this semester that demonstrate your development as a scholar of religion in relationship to the central learning goals for the course. In a **reflective essay of 1,000 words**, you will make an argument about your development as a scholar of religion and explain why you have chosen the works you have and how they show your development. It will be important for you to remember that the portfolio is not just a collection of your work this semester, but a deliberate *selection*. In other words, you should think carefully about which pieces you choose to include and spell out in the reflective essay the reasons that justify their inclusion. (Additional guidelines will be made available on Bb.)

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. Adriane Ivey or the ESL program headed by Ms. 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.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (8/26)

Introductions to each other and the class

Reading: Syllabus. Livingston (Preface, pp. xv-xvii).

I. The Nature of Inquiry in the Academic Study of Religion

Week 2 (8/30, 9/1)

What is the academic study of religion?

Reading: Livingston (Part I) and Miner's "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (Bb). Web

Resources: [UNC Handout about Religious Studies](#).

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

II. Religion and Race: African-American Islam

Week 3 (9/6, 9/8)

Introduction to the Varieties of Islam

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 13, Bb). Reference Works: "Islam in North America" (ERA).

Week 4 (9/13, 9/15)

Malcolm X, Black Nationalism, and the Nation of Islam

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 10-16. Reference Works: "Nation of Islam" (ERA), "Fard, W. D." (CAR), "Muhammad, Elijah Karriem" (CAR). Livingston (TBA).

Week 5 (9/20, 9/22)

Malcolm X's Hajj Experience

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, chapters 17-19. Reference Works: "Muslim Pilgrimage" (ER) or "hadjdj" (EI2). Web Resources: TBA. Livingston (TBA).

— *Optional Field Trip to Masjid Al-Islam (Friday, September 23 [tentative])*

Week 6 (9/27, 9/29)

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

Reading: TBA. Web Resources: TBA. Reference Works: TBA.

— *First Inquiry Essay Prompt available (Bb) on Thursday, September 29*

— *First Inquiry Essay due Monday, October 3 (11:59 p.m.)*

III. Religion and Colonialism: Religions of Native Americans

Week 7 (10/4, 10/6)

Introduction to Native American Religions

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 2). Black Elk Speaks (Preface, Chapters 1-2).

Reference Works: “Black Elk” (ER or CAR), “Lakota Religious Traditions” (ER). Livingston (TBA).

— *Midsemester Break (October 10-11)*

Week 8 (10/13)

Black Elk’s Great Vision

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 3-14). Livingston (TBA).

— *Last day for dropping course without academic penalty (Friday, October 14)*

Week 9 (10/18, 10/20)

Black Elk and the Ghost Dance Movement

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 15-22). Reference Works: “Ghost Dance” (ER), “Wovoka” (ER), “Shamanism: North American Shamanism” (ER). Livingston (TBA).

Week 10 (10/25, 10/27)

Black Elk Speaks and Neihardt’s Authorship

Reading: Black Elk Speaks (Chapters 23-26). Reference Works (TBA).

— *Second Inquiry Essay Prompt available (Bb) on Thursday, October 27*

— *Second Inquiry Essay due Monday, October 31 (11:59 p.m.)*

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

Week 11 (11/1, 11/3)

Varieties of Judaism: The Hasidic Movement

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward (Chapter 11, Bb); Livingston (Chapter: Sacred Scripture); Holy Days (Chapters 1-2). Reference Works: “Chabad-Lubavitch” (ERA).

Week 12 (11/8, 11/10)

Holy Days: Hasidic Life and Spirituality

Reading: Holy Days (Chapters 3-6). Reference Works: “Devekut” (EJ). Livingston (TBA).

— *Optional Field Trip to Chabad at Emory (Friday, November 11 [tentative])*

Week 13 (11/15, 11/17)

Holy Days: Religion in Modernity

Reading: Holy Days (Chapters 7-15). Livingston, Part IV (Religion in Modernity). Web Resources: [Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace](#), [Chabad at Emory](#).

— *Submit Site Visit Paper on Bb (Sunday, November 20)*

Week 14 (11/22)

Inquiry Design Presentations

- *Thanksgiving Recess (November 23-25)*

Week 15 (11/29, 12/1)

Defining Religion and Peer Reviews

Reading: TBA

- *Exchange Drafts of Final Inquiry Essay with Peer Group Members (Tuesday, November 29)*
- *In-class Peer Review of Inquiry Essay Drafts (Thursday, December 1)*

Last Day of Class (12/6)

Evaluations and Review

- *Turn in Final (Revised) Inquiry Essay on Bb (Tuesday, December 6 [11:59 p.m.])*
- *Submit Portfolio on Bb (Tuesday, December 13 [12:00 noon])*