

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

- (1) James C. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008.
- (2) Alex Healy. *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.

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, test 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 (5% each)	15%
5. Midterm Essay	15%
6. Final Essay	15%
7. Academic Research Paper Project	25%

Course Requirements

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

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 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. 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 Bb). Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Bb). 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. Three Tests (15%; 5% each)

Three times during the semester we will have a quiz based on names and terms of importance for understanding the subject of the course (see course schedule for dates and times). The names and terms will be drawn from a larger list to be distributed in advance on Bb. Additional guidelines and samples of answers that would qualify for different grades can be found on Bb.

5. Midterm Essay (15%) & 6. Final Essay (15%)

The midterm and final essays on an assigned topic (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 the midterm and final essay will be take-home essays of 1,200-1,500 words. I will post in advance on Bb, both for the midterm and the final, a set of essay questions 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. 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%)

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.

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

Week 1 (1/13)

Introductions to each other and the class

Reading: Syllabus

➤ *MLK Jr. Holiday (Monday, January 17)*

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

Week 2 (1/18, 1/20)

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](#).

II. Religion and Race: African-American Islam

Week 3 (1/25, 1/27)

Introduction to the Varieties of Islam

Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 13 (Bb).

Week 4 (2/1, 2/3)

Malcolm X (1)

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

Week 5 (2/8, 2/10)

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

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

➤ *Field Trip to Masjid Al-Islam (Friday, February 11)*

Week 6 (2/15, 2/17)

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

Reading: Livingston, Part II.

Week 7 (2/22, 2/24)

Tuesday: Group Presentations of Inquiry and Test I

Thursday: Introduction to Native American Religions. Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 2 (Bb/for Thursday)

- *Midterm Essay Prompts available on Bb*
- *Post drafts of midterm essays (minimum of 1,000 words) on Tuesday, March 1 (11:30 a.m.; use wiki function on Bb).*
- *Review midterm essay drafts in your peer group by Thursday, March 3 (use wiki function on Bb)*
- *Final copy of midterm essay due Friday, March 4 (11:59 p.m.)*

III. Religion and Colonialism: Religions of Native Americans

Week 8 (3/1, 3/3)

Black Elk (1)

Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*, Preface, chapters 1-11. Reference Works: "Black Elk" (ER or CAR), "Lakota Religious Traditions" (ER)

- *Last day for dropping course without academic penalty (Friday, March 4)*
- *Spring Break (3/7-3/11)*
- *Research Paper: Turn in Preparation Statement on Bb (Tuesday, March 15)*

Week 9 (3/15, 3/17)

Black Elk (2) and Library Workshop (Th)

Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*, chapters 12-25, postscript. Reference Works: Neihardt, John

- *Library Workshop (Thursday, March 17)*
- *Research Paper: Turn in worksheet "Discover Your Topic" on Bb (Tuesday, March 22)*

Week 10 (3/22, 3/24)

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

Reading: Livingston, Part III. Reference Works: “Ghost Dance” (ER), “Wovoka” (ER), “Shamanism: North American Shamanism” (ER)

- *Research Paper: Turn in first set of three annotations on Bb (Tuesday, March 29)*

Week 11 (3/29, 3/31)

Tuesday: Group Presentations of Inquiry and Test II

Thursday: Varieties of Judaism. Reading: Hopfe and Woodward, chapter 11 (Bb)

- *Research Paper: Turn in annotated bibliography (minimum 6 sources) on Bb (Tuesday, April 5)*

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

Week 12 (4/5, 4/7)

Varieties of Judaism + Holy Days (1)

Reading: H/W (cont.); *Holy Days*, chapters 1-5. Reference Works: “Chabad-Lubavitch” (ERA), “Zaddik” (EJ), “Devekut” (EJ)

- *Research Paper: Turn in thesis statement/outline on Bb (Tuesday, April 12)*

Week 13 (4/12, 4/14)

Holy Days (2) and Religion in Modernity

Reading: *Holy Days*, chapters 6-15. Livingston, Part IV (Religion in Modernity). Web Resources: [Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace](#), [Chabad at Emory](#)

- *Field Trip to Chabad at Emory (Friday, April 15)*
- *Research Paper: Exchange Drafts of RP with Peer Group Members (Tuesday, April 19)*

Week 14 (4/19, 4/21)

Religion in Modernity, with Inquiry Session, and Test III (Tuesday 4/19)

- *In-class Peer Review of Research Paper Drafts (Thursday, April 21)*

Week 15

Last Day of Class (4/26): Evaluations and Review

- *Research Paper: Turn in Final Paper on Bb with memo (Tuesday, April 26 [11:59 p.m.])*
- *Final Essay: Submit Final Essay on Bb (Monday, May 2 [5:00 p.m.])*