

Introduction to Major Religious Traditions—Syllabus

RS 225- F8
Fall, 2009 2:00-3:50P.M.
Regina 2
4 Credits

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Course Description

A study of the basic beliefs, rituals, scriptures, and moral codes of seven major living religious traditions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam including contemporary examples of indigenous religions. Lectures are supplemented with video clips, field trips, and interviews with members of these traditions.

Texts

Mary Pat Fisher, **Living Religions**. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008.

Philip Novak, **The World's Wisdom, Sacred Texts of the World's Religions**: New York, HarperCollins, 1995.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the basic components of the major religious traditions (beliefs, scriptures, rituals, and ethics).
2. To appreciate the varieties of religious experience in the world today.
3. To be able to provide an in-depth definition of religion and its various dimensions
4. To recognize, interpret, and appreciate the influences of the major religious traditions on art and culture and in turn the cultural influence on religion.
5. To appreciate, understand, and critically evaluate the role of women in each of the historical world religions.
6. To understand the possible strengths and weaknesses or liabilities of each religion.
7. To compare and contrast beliefs, scriptures, rituals, and ethics of the various religions.
8. To understand the importance of social justice concerns in each of the world's religions.
9. To improve writing and critical thinking skills.

Requirements/Assessment

Attendance (100 points or 10% of the grade):

This course will be successful, interesting, and challenging to both student and instructor only if there is full, conscious, and active participation of all students and the instructor. This means students reading the assignments in advance and thoughtfully thinking about the material and being prepared to discuss and raise questions during class sessions.

Class attendance is expected unless one is ill or there is a personal or family emergency. Please inform the instructor of any necessary absences ahead of time and in writing or email. In the case of last minute absences please acknowledge in writing or email your absence ASAP after you return to class and turn in any missed written work at the next class session. If you are absent from class you miss nearly two hours of class instruction. **These 100 points are forfeited after four excused absences or two unexcused ones.**

Class Discussion (250 points or 25% of the grade):

Fruitful discussion in class depends upon thoughtful and critical reading of the assigned texts in advance of the class session. Class discussion is not primarily recitation of the material in the assigned readings. Fruitful discussion includes raising intelligent questions about the assigned texts, seeing connections with previous material studied, listening intently to what your classmates and instructor have to say, making comparisons and contrasts when appropriate, and critically evaluating the studied material in terms of its relevance, strengths, and liabilities. Sometimes students will be given specific written or oral assignments to enhance class discussion. These assignments will be evaluated and will count as part of class discussion points.

Class Projects/Presentations (200 points or 20% of the grade)

To make the course more interesting and to facilitate class discussion and deal with important questions, students in the class will be divided into small collaborative groups with two students in each group. Each group will be responsible for a 10-15 minute presentation sometime during the semester. Each group will need to meet outside class time to plan the format for its presentation. In addition students will hand in to the instructor a 6-8 page paper addressing their individual part of the project/presentation. Consult the following list of possible projects/presentations from which students can choose:

Role of Shaman in Indigenous Religions (do not neglect contemporary period)
In-depth analysis and interpretation of one of the selections from the Upanishads (Novak, pp. 9-24)
Hindu practice of yoga

Life and teachings of Gandhi
Caste in Hinduism (ancient and present)
Transcendental Meditation (TM)
Buddhist Meditation
Buddhism and the fine arts
Fine arts in Daoism
Dali Lama
Buddhist attitude toward nature
Revival of Confucianism in Contemporary China
Creation Narratives in Genesis 1 & 2
Prophecy in Ancient Israel (Include relevance for the present)
Jewish attitude toward the arts
Anti-Semitism (Origin and current practice)
Holocaust
Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah and Hasidism)
Dead Sea Scrolls
Zionism
Parables of Jesus
Christian Mysticism
Eastern Orthodox Church
Martin Luther
Council of Trent
Second Vatican Council
Feminism in Christianity
Islamic Art and Architecture
Rumi
Malcolm X

The guidelines for the projects/presentations are as follows:

1. Each student will be assigned a partner with whom to work on a selected project or topic.
2. Other topics may be selected by students if approved by the instructor.
3. Students should give a 10-15 minute oral presentation in class (total time for two students) and each student should hand in to the instructor a 6-8 page written paper. Each student is responsible for his/her own paper. Papers should reflect the perspective of the individual oral presentation.
4. Presenters should try to engage the students in such a way as to elicit discussion and questions. Be creative!
5. Students may have notes for their oral presentations, but students should not read their written papers. Merely reading your written paper will result in a lower grade even if the content is excellent.
6. Provide your classmates with an outline of your presentation.
7. You may use the Internet as part of your presentation. Make sure the technology has been checked out and is working before your presentation. Be aware that everything on the Internet is not necessarily true.

8. Each group should meet with the instructor before its presentation to let him know how you are going to approach the topic and so that he may give input.
9. Insofar as possible presentations should be given when the topic logically fits in the course. For example, a report dealing with Gandhi should be given while dealing with Hinduism.
10. Once students have chosen a topic the instructor will assign a date when it is due. Written reports are due at the time of the oral presentation.
11. Separate grades will be given for the oral presentation and the written report.
12. Class members will be asked for their evaluation of each presentation which will be used in part to guide the instructor in determining the grade.
13. Both in the oral presentation and the written paper sources need to be noted. In the written report enough information has to be given in case the instructor wants to check your sources.

Announced and unannounced short quizzes will be used as necessary to encourage keeping up-to-date in the reading. Grades here will be figured as part of the class discussion grade. **No make-up quizzes will be allowed for unexcused absences.**

Hour Examinations (300 points or 100 points per exam, 30% of the final grade):

There will be three hour examinations. Exams will include a variety of types of questions including: matching, multiple choice, true and false, identification and essay. Generally at least one third of the examination will be essay. Students will always be able to select questions for which they feel best prepared. **For the specific content that will be covered on each exam check with the appropriate sections in the study guide.**

Final Take Home Examination (150 points, 15% of the final grade):

The final examination will be a take home examination due on December 14 at the latest. An important part of the purpose of the take home exam is to help students integrate the material and make intelligent comparisons and contrasts. Consult the part of the syllabus on Fundamental Questions in the Study of the Major Religious Traditions. The take home exam will be essay and will be handed out by December 1. Take Home Final Exam should be approximately 6-8 pages. **Students may discuss the essay questions with their classmates, but the final written product must be their own. Plagiarism will result in students receiving a zero grade for the exam.**

Extra Credit (15 points for Visiting Different Worship Experiences up to a maximum of 60 points).

Students may attend Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim worship services or other programs and receive up to 15 extra points for each visit for a maximum possibility of 60 points. **The visit should not be to a service or program representing your own personal faith perspective. At each service get a service bulletin and let someone in authority sign it to confirm your attendance. You should also do a 2-3 page reflection paper on your experience.** These reports should be written in such a way

that someone unfamiliar with these religions would be able to grasp at least superficially what was going on in the service or program attended. The report should stress those parts of the service or ritual that you were able to understand and contain a personal reflection on the service or meeting.

The institutions the instructor recommends you visit are as follows:

Local Hindu Service (varies each semester)

Buddhist Tradition---Deer Park Buddhist Center, Oregon, WI.
<http://www.deerparkcenter.org>

Jewish Tradition---Temple Beth El (Reform), 2702 Arbor Drive, Tel. 238-3123,
<http://www.templebethelmadison.org>

Beth Israel Center (Conservative)
1406 Mound Street, Tel. 256-7763

Shamayim Reconstructionist Congregation
849 East Washington Avenue
Tel. 257-2944

Islamic Tradition---Madison Islamic Center, Orchard Street
http://www.sit.wisc.edu/~msa/islamic_center/

Grading:

Grade Scale:

Attendance	100 points (10%)	94-100 A
Class Discussion	250 points (25%)	88-93 AB
Class Projects/Presentations	200 points (20%)	82-87 B
Oral-100		
Written-100		
Hour Exams	300 points (30%)	76-81 BC
Take Home Final	150 points (15%)	69-75 C
		63-68 CD
		57-62 D

Extra Credit +60 points for Visiting Worship Services (15 pts. per visit)

All extra credit work must be turned in by December 9.

Written assignments are due on time. Examinations can be made up when it is an excused absence.

All written work turned into the instructor must be typed.

Please turn in printed copies of all assigned written work. Do not send assignments via email.

Study Guide

Study questions, key terms and important names will be provided for the Fisher text in a printed Study Guide that will be distributed to all students. **Being familiar with the material in the printed study guide is the best way to prepare for class, examinations, and the final take home examination.** In addition a compact disc entitled “The Sacred World, Encounters with the World Religions” accompanies the Fisher textbook, **Living Religions**.

Fundamental Questions in the Study of the Major Religious Traditions

(These are questions we will try to reflect on in class discussion at least at the end of each unit. These types of questions will be addressed in the final take home examination)

- 1) In the major religious traditions being studied this semester what are the different concepts of the Divine, the Sacred, or Ultimate Reality? What are the varieties of ways in which deity, sacred power, and ultimate value are experienced and conceived in each particular religious tradition? Which view seems most attractive or not attractive to you? Why?
- 2) How do each of the major religious traditions being studied understand how our world and its natural and social order came into being? Here we are dealing with the question of **cosmogony** or an account of the emergence or creation of a world order. A related issue is the relationship of science and religion.
- 3) How do each of the major religious traditions understand the nature of the human predicament? What are the causes of human ignorance, distress, and strife and the fact that many human beings agree that life is not what it should be? As human beings we are overwhelmed from time to time by a sense of our own alienation or of our own weakness and inadequacy through feelings of hostility and estrangement, or by a profound disquiet caused by shame, moral guilt, and failure. How do human beings deal with these feelings? How do enlightenment, reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace address the human predicament?
- 4) How does each major religious tradition deal with the question of **theodicy** or the explanation of evil in the world? As you think about this question, also deal with how persons endure and deal with evil and chaos.
- 5) In each of the religious traditions being studied how are persons to live in relation to the Sacred and our fellow human beings? What are the foundations of ethical and moral actions? How has the moral tradition been shaped in each particular religious tradition?

- 6) In each of the religions being studied how would you characterize the practical religious life? What determines the nature of the practical religious life?
- 7) In each major religious tradition what are the ways and goals of enlightenment, salvation, transformation, or liberation? How are the characteristics and issues of the human problem addressed? (see question 3)
- 8) In each religious tradition what are the essential elements in its understanding and practice of sacred ritual? How do various forms of symbolic expression and communication of the sacred or divine contribute to the practice of sacred ritual? How do the human life cycle and the fixed points of the yearly calendar manifest itself in the practice of ritual?
- 9) What is the status and role of women in each religious tradition being considered? How has the role changed through the development of this specific tradition including contemporary trends?
- 10) What is the relationship between myth and ritual? How is this issue illuminated by the relationship of religion and culture in each specific tradition?
- 11) What is the role of scripture or sacred writings in each of the traditions?

Academic Honesty

As members of a scholarly community dedicated to healthy intellectual development, students and faculty at Edgewood College are expected to share the responsibility for maintaining high standards of honesty and integrity in their academic work. Each student should reflect this sense of responsibility toward the community by submitting work that is a product of his or her own effort in a particular course, unless the instructor has directed otherwise. In order to clarify and emphasize its standards for academic honesty, the College has adopted this policy.

The following are examples of violations of standards for academic honesty and are subject to academic sanctions: Cheating on exams; submitting collaborative work as one's own; falsifying records, achievements, field or laboratory data, or other course work; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting work previously submitted in another course, unless specifically approved by the present instructor; falsifying documents or signing an instructor's or administrator's name to any document or form; plagiarism*; or aiding another student in any of the above actions.

*Plagiarism, which is defined as the deliberate use of another's ideas or words as if they were one's own, can take many forms, from the egregious to the mild. Instances most commonly seen in written work by students in order from most to least serious are:

- borrowing, buying or stealing a paper from elsewhere; lending or selling a paper for another's use as his or her own; using printed material written by someone else as one's own;
- getting so much help on a paper from someone else, including a college tutor, that the student writer can no longer legitimately claim authorship;
- intentionally using source material improperly, e.g., neither citing nor using quotation marks on borrowed material; supplying an in-text citation but failing to enclose quoted material within quotation marks; leaving paraphrased material too close to the original version; failing to append a works-cited page when sources have been used;
- unintentional misuse of borrowed sources through ignorance or carelessness.

Sanctions recommended for plagiarism are an "F" on the assignment and/or an "F" in the course. More serious violations may be referred to the Academic Dean's Office for appropriate action. (Catalog, p. 37)

Services for Students with Disabilities

Services for students with disabilities are coordinated through Learning Support Services. Interested students should contact that office for assistance. It is recommended that all information, including disability documentation, be submitted at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the semester for which services are being requested. Requests for some services such as alternative textbook formats and sensory impairment accommodations may require more notice. (Catalog, p. 33)

Learning Support Services

The Learning Support Services staff provides academic services that promote independent and cooperative learning in order for students to perform effectively and efficiently in the classroom. The LSS staff offers students the following:

- Peer tutoring in most introductory undergraduate classes.
- Services for students with disabilities.
- Study skills and learning strategies assistance. (Catalog, p.33).

Introduction to Course

This instructor believes in using a variety of teaching strategies in a 100 minute class session: lecture, discussion, collaborative groups, oral reports, case studies, guest speakers, and videos. Each class session will provide an opportunity for questions from the class. The instructor welcomes questions at any time. **If you have suggestions on how the class can be made more interesting, share them in writing or orally with the instructor.**

In considering any world religion it is important to understand and appreciate the sacred writings and scriptures of each of the religions. This is why the reading in Novak's

anthology is so important. The instructor will not lecture on these writings. They will be the basis for class discussion.

Course Outline and Assignments (Fall, 2009)

Dates	Topics	Assignments
Aug. 26	Introduction to Course; Review of Syllabus; General Definition of Religion	
Aug. 31	Why Religious? Sacred Relationships; Worship, symbol, and Myth; Absolutist and Liberal Interpretations; Historical-critical study of scriptures; Religion and science; Women in Religion; Negative Aspects of Organized Religion	Living Religions (LR), pp. 1-31.
Sept. 2	Continued Discussion of LR, chapter 1; Introduction to Indigenous Religions; Indigenous sacred ways; cultural Diversity; Circle of right relationships; Spiritual specialists; Mystical intermediaries	Review LR, pp. 1-31. LR, pp. 32-55
Sept. 9	Group observances; Contemporary issues	LR, pp. 56-71
Sept. 14	Introduction to Hinduism; Strands of Indian Religion; Indus Valley Civilization; Vedic Religion; Rig Veda	LR, pp. 72-79; Novak, pp. 1-9
Sept. 16	Upanishads; Major Philosophical Systems	LR, pp. 79-85; Novak, pp. 9-24
Sept. 21	Theistic Paths: Saktas, Saivitas, Vaishnavites, Epics & Puranas; and Bhagavad-Gita	LR, pp. 85-96; Novak, pp. 24-40
Sept. 23	Hindu way of life: rituals, caste, duties, life goals, puja, guru, festivals and	LR, pp. 97-107; Reflect on how Hinduism would answer fundamental

Sept. 23 (Continued)	pilgrimages. Hinduism in the modern world; Global Hinduism; Hindu identity; Hinduism and the arts. Final Reflections on Hinduism	questions.
Sept. 28	EXAMINATION ON THE NATURE OF RELIGION, INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS, AND HINDUISM; Introduction to Buddhism; Life and legend of Buddha	PREPARE FOR EXAM; LR, pp. 134-140; Novak, pp. 49-65.
Sept.. 30	Dharma: Four Noble Truths, Rebirth; Theravada Buddhism; Specific Teaching; Meditation and Devotional Practices	LR, pp. 140-154; Novak, pp. 65-77.
Oct. 5	Mahayana Buddhism: Bodhisattvas, Emptiness, Three Bodies of Buddha; Zen Buddhism; Pure Land Buddhism; Nichiren and Lotus Sutra; Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet; Dali Lama	LR, pp. 154-169; Novak, pp. 77-86.
Oct. 7	Buddhism in the West: Socially engaged Buddhism; Fine arts in Buddhism; Final Reflections on Buddhism	LR, pp. 169-181; Reflect on how Buddhism answers the fundamental questions.
Oct. 14	Introduction to Chinese Religion and Daoism & Confucianism. Daoism---Way of Nature and Immortality. Dao Deh Jing	LR, pp. 182-186; LR, pp. 186-199; Novak, pp. 145-164.
Oct. 19	Zhuangzi; Later Developments; Confucianism---the practice of virtue; Life of Confucius; Analects; Neo-Confucianism; Later Developments; Fine Arts	LR,, pp. 199-211; Novak, pp. 111-137.

	in Daoism and Confucianism	
Oct. 21 Oct. 21 (continued)	Comparison of Confucianism and Daoism; Final Reflections on Chinese Religions	Review Daoism and Confucianism Reflect on how Daoism and Confucianism answer the fundamental questions.
Oct. 26	Introduction to Judaism; Biblical Judaism.	LR, pp. 235-252; Novak, pp. 175-191.
Oct. 28	Prophetic Judaism; Rabbinic Judaism; Talmud; Judaism in the Middle Ages; Jewish Mysticism	Novak, pp. 191-213; LR, pp. 252—262
Nov. 2	Judaism & Modernity; Branches of Judaism; Holocaust; Zionism and Contemporary Israel; Torah	Novak, pp. 213-224; LR, pp. 262-275
Nov. 4	Sacred Practices: Sabbath, Jewish Holy Days, Contemporary Judaism; Jewish Feminism; Fine Arts in Judaism; Final Reflections on Judaism.	LR, pp. 275-294; Reflect on how Judaism would answer the fundamental questions.
Nov. 9	EXAMINATION ON BUDDHISM, CHINESE RELIGIONS, AND JUDAISM ; Introduction to Christianity; Christian Scriptures; Life and Teachings of Jesus	LR, pp. 295-309; Novak, pp. 227-253.
Nov. 11	Life and Teachings of Jesus(cont.); Crucifixion; Resurrection & Ascension;	LR, pp. 309-330; Novak, pp. 253-274
Nov. 16	The Early Church; the Eastern Orthodox Church; Medieval Roman Catholicism; Prot. Reformation;	LR pp. 330-341
Nov. 18	Roman Catholic Reformation; Importance of Enlightenment; Second	LR, pp. 341-375

Nov. 18 (continued)	Vatican Council; Beliefs and Practices in Contemporary Christianity; Fine arts in Christianity;	
Nov. 23	Reflection on Fundamental Questions of Christianity	Review Christianity; Reflect on Christianity and the fundamental questions.
Nov. 30	Introduction to Islam: Pre-Islamic Arabia; Prophet Muhammad; Qur'an, Central Teachings	LR, pp. 376-392; Novak, pp. 281-296.
Dec. 2	Five Pillars; Sunnis and Shi'as; Shariah; Sufism	LR, pp. 392-406; Novak, pp. 296-331.
Dec. 7	Jihad; Expansion of Islam; Islamic Culture; Islam and the West; Islam in the U.S.; Resurgence of Islam; Islam & Politics; Future of Islam;	LR, pp. 406-433
Dec. 9	Fine Arts in Islam; Islamic Radicalism; Gender Relations and Role of Women in Islam; Reflections on Final Questions of Islam	Review Islam. Reflect on Islam and Final Questions.
Dec. 14 (Tentative)	EXAMINATION ON CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM; TAKE HOME FINAL ALSO DUE	Study for exam and finish final take home