

**RELIGION 101  
EXPLORING RELIGIONS**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

RELG 101 – Exploring Religions (3 credit hrs)

**Course Description:**

Introduction to the beliefs and practices of the world’s religions and to the methods scholars use to study them.

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course introduces students to the range and variety within the world’s religions. Students will gain familiarity with the distinctive doctrines, rituals, festivals, and transformative practices of specific religious traditions, both past and present, as well as with selected themes and ideas shared by many different traditions. The course serves as an introduction to various approaches in the academic study of religion. Using the insights of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, students will learn to read religious texts critically and to analyze the ways that the ethical and metaphysical assumptions of religious traditions influence contemporary social and political activities. Readings, lectures, discussions, and other in-class activities encourage students to consider how individuals and groups organize themselves around beliefs in the existence of god/s, spirits, and ancestors, and how recourse to such posited agents affects the legitimacy, authority, and authenticity of particular practices and institutions.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of RELG 101, students will be able to:**

1. Recognize and describe the key ideas and practices of several religious traditions
2. Discuss the ways in which human behavior is shaped by beliefs in a divine being or beings, spirits, ancestors, or other non-empirical agents
3. Read religious texts critically and analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse
4. Analyze and compare specific examples of religious social formation
5. Explain the main approaches, methods, and critical terms in the academic study of religion, and identify current issues and debates in the field
6. Articulate their own perspective on the current issues under examination and discuss the strengths and limitations of that perspective
7. Engage deeply and respectfully with views other than their own.

**SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. Philip Novak. *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995.

2. Willard Oxtoby and Alan Segal, eds. *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
3. Other readings mentioned in the following course outline will be available on the Blackboard site for the class [Include any other required materials]

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. **Quizzes:** Three quizzes (each quiz counting for 5% of the final grade) assess students' ability to articulate the central terms, ideas, practices, institutions, and cultural systems of varied religious traditions active throughout the world.
2. **Short papers exploring topics in readings and lectures:** The five short papers (typically one and one-half to two double-spaced pages in length) are written at regular intervals to provide an opportunity for students to analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse as encountered through the readings and the lectures. The assigned prompts emphasize the close reading of key passages.
3. **Independent project focused on comparison:** The individual project chosen by each student requires the student to compare two traditions by focusing on a single issue. Using the form of a report, the student chooses an apt framework to make a meaningful comparison in the field of religious studies; he or she explores religious and cultural difference by means of the comparison; reflects upon the implications of such difference; and, finally, considers ways in which the apparent conflict or disagreement might be addressed so as to facilitate humane dialogue and a resultant deeper mutual understanding.
4. **Midterm Exam:** The in-class, written midterm exam gives the student an opportunity to synthesize our study thus far. The student is to explain in essay form how religious traditions affect social, economic, cultural, and/or political formations, and, vice versa, how those formations shape, and influence the ongoing development of worldwide religious traditions.
5. **Final Exam:** On the in-class, comprehensive, final exam the student applies our study of various theoretical frameworks for analyzing the role of religion. The student is asked to use those frameworks to illuminate actual cases that we have discussed in the world. The exam thereby evaluates a student's grasp of the content that we have studied about religious traditions as well as his or her grasp of the methods used to examine those traditions. Potential essay questions for study will be distributed in advance.

### **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

**Week 1:** The Social Scientific Study of Religion: Points of Departure, Definitions & Approaches

- The Seven Dimensions of Religion
  - Ninian Smart. *The World's Religions*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pages 10-26.
- The Shifting Contours of the Object of Study: The Problem of Defining Religion
  - Jonathan Z. Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* edited by Mark Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pages 269-284.

- Talal Asad. "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Pages 27-54.
- The Unique Challenges Inherent in Studying Religion
  - Wilfred Cantwell Smith. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962. Pages 1-14.

**Week 2:** Christianity: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Christianity," chapter six of *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*
- "Christian Traditions," chapter four of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
- Gavin Flood. "The Asceticism of Love and Wisdom." In *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pages 175-207.
- QUIZ #1

**Week 3:** Christianity and the Study of Religious Symbolism within a Culture

- Signs, Symbols, and Cultural Systems as Applied to Religion
  - Clifford Geertz. "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. Pages 126-141.
  - Sherry Ortner. "On Key Symbols." *American Anthropologist* 75 (1973): 1338-46.
  - André Vauchez. "Medieval Man in Search of God: The Forms and Content of Religious Experience." In *The Spirituality of the Medieval West*. Spencer, Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1993. Pages 145-162.
  - Caroline Walker Bynum. "The Mysticism and Asceticism of Medieval Women: Some Comments on the Typologies of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch." In *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1991. Pages 53-78.
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE

**Week 4:** Judaism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Judaism," chapter five of *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*
- "Jewish Traditions," chapter three of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
- Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. "The Sabbath--An Island in Time." In *To Be a Jew*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. Pages 61-96.

**Week 5:** Judaism and the Study of Ritual

- The Many Sides of Ritual as a Doorway to the Study of Religion
  - Roy Rappaport. "Enactments of Meaning." In *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pages 104-138.
  - Mary Douglas. "The Abominations of Leviticus." In *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*. New York: Rutledge, 1966 (reprinted 2006). Pages 51-71.

- Rabbi Irving Greenberg. "Rebirth and Renewal: High Holy Days." In *The Jewish Way*. New York: Touchstone, 1988. Pages 182-216.
- QUIZ #2

**Week 6:** Islam: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Islam," chapter seven of *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*
- "Muslim Traditions," chapter three of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
- Annemarie Schimmel. "The Path." In *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. Pages 148-186.
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE

**Week 7:** Islam and the Relation between Society and Religion

- Sociology and Religion
  - Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]. Pages 1-12, 34-44.
  - Peter Berger. "Religion and World-Maintenance." In *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967. Pages 29-52.
  - Fazlur Rahman. "The Sharī'a." In *Islam*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. Pages 100-116.
  - John Renard. "Community: Society, Institutions, and Patronage." In *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Pages 143-182.
- MIDTERM EXAM

**Week 8:** Hinduism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Hinduism," chapter one of *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*
- "Hindu Traditions," chapter six of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
- Stephen Huyler. "Approaching God." In *Meeting God*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. Pages 46-63.
- Diana Eck. "The Image of God." In *Darsan: Seeing the Divine in India*. Third edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Pages 16-31.
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE

**Week 9:** Hinduism, Liminality, and Communitas

- Victor Turner. "Liminality and Communitas." In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969. Pages 99-130.
- McKim Marriott. "The Feast of Love." In *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*. Edited by Milton Singer. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966. Pages 200-231.
- John Stratton Hawley. "Pilgrimage to Brindavan." In *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992 [reprint of Princeton University Press 1981]. Pages 3-51
- QUIZ #4

**Week 10:** Buddhism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Buddhism," chapter two of *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religion*
- "Buddhist Traditions," chapter eight of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
- Robert Buswell, Jr. "The Practice of Zen Meditation in Korea." In *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Pages 149-160.
- Kaoru Nonomura. "The End and the Beginning." In *Eat, Sleep, Sit: My Year at Japan's Most Rigorous Zen Temple*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1996. Pages 11-45.
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE

**Week 11:** Buddhism, Psychology, and the Mind Sciences

- William James. "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness." In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Newton Abbot: Dover Editions, 2002 [reprint of 1902]. Pages 78-126.
- Matthieu Ricard. "Happiness in the Lab." In *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006. Pages 186-201.
- Rick Hanson. "The Self-Transforming Brain." In *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, & Wisdom*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2009. Pages 5-22.
- Francisco Varela. "Dreams and the Unconscious." In *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*. Boston: Mind and Life Institute, 1997. Pages 53-100.

**Week 12:** Religion and Science in the Modern World

- B. Alan Wallace. "Where Science and Religion Collide." In *Contemplative Science*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Pages 28-49.
- Sam Harris. "Introduction: The Moral Landscape." In *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. New York: Free Press, 2010. Pages 1-26.
- Andrew Newberg and Jeremy Iversen. "On the 'Neuro' in Neurotheology." In *NeuroTheology: Brain, Science, Spirituality & Religious Experience*, 2nd edition. Edited by Rhawn Joseph et. al. University Press, 2003. Pages 251-268.
- Massimo Pigliucci. "Neuro-Theology, A Rather Skeptical Perspective." In *NeuroTheology: Brain, Science, Spirituality & Religious Experience*, 2nd edition. Edited by Rhawn Joseph et. al. University Press, 2003. Pages 269-271.
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #5 DUE

**Week 13:** The Nature and Purpose of Comparison in the Study of Religion

- Why Do Comparison?
  - Jonathan Z. Smith. "Prologue: In Comparison a Magic Dwells" and "Epilogue: The 'End' of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification." In *A Magic Still Dwells* edited by Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Pages 23-46 and 237-242.

- Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. "Rationality, relativism, the translation and commensurability of cultures." In *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pages 111-139.
- Thomas Lewis. "Frames of Comparison." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2): 225-253 (2005).
- INDEPENDENT PROJECT FOCUSED ON COMPARISON DUE
- Week 14:** What Have We Learned about Religion? Retrospective and Synthesis
  - "The Nature of Religion," chapter one of *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*
  - Robert Bellah. "Religion and Reality." In *Religion in Human Evolution*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011. Pages 1-43.
  - Ivan Strenski. "The Proper Object of the Study of Religion: Why It Is Better to Know Some of the Questions Than All of the Answers." In *The Future of the Study of Religion* edited by Slavica Jakelić and Lori Pearson. Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2004. Pages 145-172.
  - Wesley Wildman and Robert Cummings Neville. "On the Nature of Religion: Lessons We Have Learned." In *Religious Truth* edited by Robert Cummings Neville. Albany: SUNY, 2001. Pages 203-218.
- FINAL EXAM according to University exam schedule