

REL 130A Introduction to Religions

Spring 2008
Asbury Hall 116
MWF 2:15-3:15

Office Hours: Wed 11:15-12; Thurs 2-3:30 or by appt.

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Course Objectives:

This course is designed to introduce students to the basics of some of the major religious traditions of the world. We will begin with some discussion of a number of approaches to the study of religions and then proceed with discussions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese Religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will not be able to treat any of these traditions in detail, but we will endeavor to understand something about the historical and social contexts from which these traditions emerged as well as their central texts, practices, beliefs, and institutions.

While I assure you that I have no underlying goal or expectation that you become any more or less religious, I strongly encourage you to make an effort to understand each tradition both from an insider's and an outsider's perspective. You are not required to agree with the ideas or practices we discuss, but you are expected to understand how those ideas or practices serve as a part of the religious tradition in question. At the same time you are expected to approach your own tradition (or those with which you are most familiar) with the same type of analysis that you apply to other traditions. What we are striving for is what has been called "empathetic objectivity," described by Dale Cannon in this way:

"EMPATHETIC OBJECTIVITY: the discipline of making real to yourself the inward life, the subjective reality, of the lives lived within traditions other than your own as they truly are (thereby discovering what is like yourself in the stranger) and coming to recognize and understand your own tradition objectively as one among others (thereby discovering what is strange about yourself)."¹

Required Books:

Oxtoby and Segal, *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*.
Fieser and Powers, *Scriptures of the World's Religions, 3rd Ed.*
Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Recommended). Also on Print Reserve at ROW.

Requirements:

- 1) **Attendance and regular participation in class discussions.**
- 2) **Forum Posts**

At least once each week (by Friday 7pm) you will be expected to post reflections and comments on our course moodle page in response to key issues discussed in the readings and in our discussion. You will be expected to participate in the ongoing discussion of these issues as we move through each unit. The goal with these posts is not to summarize what you have read or what we have discussed in class, but to reflect and react to the class materials and pursue issues or deeper understanding of things beyond what we can cover in class. You will receive one grade per unit based on all of your posts taken together.

¹ Comparative Religion Syllabus, Dale Cannon, <http://aarweb.org/syllabus/syllabi/c/cannon/R460.htm>.

3) Group Ritual Presentations

For each major unit, each group will research one ritual practice (prayer/worship, birth, marriage, death, annual festival) and present it to the class in 5-10 minutes. The presentations will take place on the day we read the *Practice* section of Oxtoby. The presentation should include either a short demonstration or images and a short description of the ritual itself (order of events, participants, objects, words, etc). You can use the wiki feature of moodle to facilitate your presentation if you wish. You should also include a brief explanation of how the practice relates to the beliefs and history of the tradition. I would recommend that you try to attend the practice of as many of the traditions as you can during the semester. For each unit the course website has links to local communities and information about times and directions. Please contact me if you are planning to go somewhere so I can facilitate your visit.

4) Midterm Exams

There will be two midterm exams that will include both a short answer section completed in class and a take-home essay. The in class exams are scheduled for Friday March 14 and Friday April 25. The questions for the take home exam will be distributed at the exam and will be due by midnight on the following Monday. Study guides will be provided.

5) Final Exam

Friday May 14, 1-4pm. A study guide will be provided.

Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty constitute serious offenses that undermine your education and violate DePauw policy on academic integrity and may result in penalties ranging from a lowered grade to course failure or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and must be completed specifically for this class. You may not turn in work previously written for another class. Any use of another's work without proper citation constitutes plagiarism and will be dealt with severely. The policy and discussion of each student's obligations and rights are in the Student Handbook.

Proper citation of secondary sources should follow one of the standard formats (MLA, Chicago, etc.) and include all of the following: author, title, publisher, place, date of publication, and page number. If you have further questions regarding plagiarism or citation styles ask me or consult Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College*.

Grade Breakdown:

Grades will be calculated and given letter grades according the following chart.

| <i>Assignment</i> | <i>Percentage of Final Grade</i> | <i>Final Grade Breakdown</i> | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Attendance and Participation | 10% | A | 93-100 |
| Forum Posts | 25% | A- | 90-92.99 |
| Ritual Presentations | 10% | B+ | 87-89.99 |
| Midterm Exam #1 | 15% | B | 83-86.99 |
| Midterm Exam #2 | 15% | B- | 80-82.99 |
| Final Exam | 25% | C+ | 77-79.99 |
| | | C | 73-76.99 |
| | | C- | 70-72.99 |

Course Outline: What follows is a basic program of the course. Some minor adjustments may be made during the semester at the discretion of the instructor.

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| Week 1: | | |
| M 28 | Introduction to the Course | |
| W 30 | Nature of the Study of Religion <i>Oxtoby, Introduction</i> | Kessler pp. 1-37 (on Moodle) |
| F 1 | Approaches to Religion | Fisher pp. 2-16 (on Moodle) |
| Week 2: | | |
| M 4 | Approaches cont'd | Fisher pp. 17-36 (on Moodle) |
| W 6 | Religion and world construction | Berger pp. 3-28 (Print Reserves in ROW) |
| F 8 | Religion and world maintenance | Berger pp. 29-51 (Print Reserves in ROW) |
| Week 3: | Theories of Ritual | |
| M 11 | Film: Sacred Rites and Rituals | |
| W 13 | Durkheim "Ritual, Magic and the Sacred" (text and questions on Moodle) Turner "Liminality and Communitas" (text and questions on Moodle) | |
| F 15 | Eliade "Ritual and Myth" (text and questions on Moodle) Rappaport "Obvious Aspects of Ritual" (text and questions on Moodle) Staal "Meaninglessness of Ritual" (text and questions on Moodle) | |
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| Week 4: | Hinduism | |
| M 18 | <i>Oxtoby</i> , ch. 5; <i>Origins</i> | <i>Fieser, Introduction; Vedas</i> |
| W 20 | | <i>Vedanta: Upanishads (22-26)</i> |
| F 22 | <i>Crystallization</i> | <i>Puranas and Epics</i> |
| Week 5: | | |
| M 25 | <i>Differentiation</i> | <i>Treatises on Dharma; Vedanta (26-30)</i> |
| W 27 | <i>Practice</i> | <i>Yoga, Devotional Literature</i> |
| F 29 | <i>Interaction and adaptation</i> | |
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| Week 6: | Buddhism | |
| M 3 | <i>Oxtoby</i> , ch. 8; <i>Origins</i> | <i>Fieser, Introduction; Life of the Buddha</i> |
| W 5 | <i>Crystallization</i> | <i>Life of the Buddha</i> |
| F 7 | <i>Differentiation</i> | <i>Mahayana Scriptures; Tibetan Scriptures; Chinese and Japanese Scriptures</i> |
| Week 7: | | |
| M 10 | <i>Practice; Cultural Expressions</i> | |
| W 12 | <i>Interaction and Adaptation</i> | |
| F 14 | Midterm Exam #1 | |
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| Week 8: | Confucianism / Daoism | |
| M 17 | <i>Oxtoby</i> , ch. 9; <i>Confucianism</i> | <i>Fieser, Confucianism</i> |
| W 19 | <i>Daoism</i> | <i>Daoism</i> |
| F 21 | Comparisons of Confucianism and Daoism | |
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| Week 9: | Spring Break March 22-30 | |

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| Week 10: | Judaism | |
| M 31 | <i>Oxtoby, ch. 2; Origins</i> | <i>Fieser, Introduction, Books of Moses</i> |
| W 2 | | <i>Conquest; Divided Kingdom; Post Exilic</i> |
| F 4 | <i>Crystallization</i> | <i>Rabbinic Writings</i> |
| Week 11: | | |
| M 7 | <i>Differentiation</i> | <i>Medieval Judaism</i> |
| W 9 | <i>Practice</i> | |
| F 11 | <i>Interaction and Adaptation</i> | <i>Recent Movements</i> |
| Week 12: | Christianity | |
| M 14 | <i>Oxtoby, ch. 3; Origins</i> | <i>Fieser, Introduction; Jesus' Birth and Ministry; Jesus' Death; New Testament Church</i> |
| W 16 | <i>Crystallization</i> | <i>Non Canonical Gospels; Early Statements of Faith</i> |
| F 18 | <i>Differentiation</i> | <i>Church Fathers, Saints, and Mystics</i> |
| | | <i>Protestant Statements of Faith</i> |
| Week 13: | | |
| M 21 | <i>Practice</i> | |
| W 23 | <i>Cultural Expressions; Interaction and Adaptation</i> | <i>Recent Sectarian Movements</i> |
| F 25 | Midterm Exam #2 | |
| Week 14: | Islam | |
| M 28 | <i>Oxtoby, ch. 4; Origins/Crystallization</i> | <i>Fieser, Introduction; Qur'an: Muhammad in Mecca; Qur'an: Muhammad in Medina</i> |
| W 30 | <i>Differentiation</i> | <i>Hadith; Sunni and Shi'i Writings; Sufi Writings</i> |
| F 2 | <i>Practice</i> | |
| Week 15: | | |
| M 5 | <i>Spread of Islam; Interaction and Adaptation</i> | |
| W 7 | Conclusions <i>Oxtoby, ch. 11</i> | |
| Week 16: | Final Exam | Friday May 15, 1-4pm |