Religion 102: Introduction to World Religions

M/W/F, 12:30-1:20, MHH G20

3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Dr. Alex Snow, [Joseph.Snow@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Joseph.Snow@mail.wvu.edu)

Office Hours – M/W/F 11 am -- Noon, Room 252 Stansbury Hall

"The telling question of a person's life is whether or not she is related to the infinite." — Carl Jung

“[Religion]...will mean orientation--orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate

significance of one's place in the world.” — Charles H. Long

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the comparative study of world religions. We hope to explore the ways that religious traditions construct worlds of meaning, analyze the human situation, and speak of power and mystery. We shall address the multi-religious contexts in which Americans and many other peoples live today in the 21st century, and consider how people with different religious beliefs and practices can cultivate respect for, and dialogue with, diverse traditions of others. Such inquiries can sometimes be disorienting, for the sense of religion many of us might feel in the United States has been mediated largely through the monotheistic histories contained within Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Jainism, as well as Indigenous religions and New Religious Movements, may have very different sets of assumptions, notwithstanding a multiplicity of divinities, an absence or abundance of scriptural authority, as well as historically and contextually specific ritual practices. With the more recent spread of religious pluralism and the movement toward inter-faith dialogue, many of these traditions will seem very much like an "other" way of being in the world. In order to learn about these other religions in a reflective way, we'll attempt to keep two important perspectives in mind: Imaginative Sympathy—Please take seriously the worlds of peoples involved, assume that religious thoughts and/or practices carry real meaning for any person or group under consideration; and Critical Distance—Try to raise questions that may not be raised by the participants, such as, what effect does this faith/practice have on the participant? On society? What kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon? What are the conceptions of human nature that texts and practices envision? What does a given dimension of any tradition show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare?

Course Learning Objectives

* To understand better what we mean by the nature and scope of “religion” and to think more critically about the subject;
* To use the historical contexts of various cultures to think imaginatively about the nature of religion as a basic response to and expression of the human condition;
* To become aware of the diversity of perspectives, concepts, and theories used within the study of religion; and
* To achieve fluency in describing and interpreting contextually diverse manifestations of religion, while simultaneously developing skills in critical analysis and oral expression by reading, talking, and writing about religion.

Required Texts

1. Living Religions, Mary Pat Fisher, Pearson, 10th Ed.

Schedule of Readings

August CHAPTER SUBJECT

Wednesday 17th First Day of Class

Friday 19th ONE Religious Responses

Monday 22nd ONE Religious Responses

Wednesday 24th THREE Hinduism

Friday 26th THREE Hinduism

Monday 29th THREE Hinduism

Wednesday 31st THREE Hinduism

September

Friday 2nd THREE Hinduism

Monday 5th No Class – Labor Day Recess

Wednesday 7th FOUR Jainism

Friday 9th EXAM #1

Monday 12th FIVE Buddhism

Wednesday 14th FIVE Buddhism

Friday 16th FIVE Buddhism

Monday 19th FIVE Buddhism

Wednesday 21st FIVE Buddhism

Friday 23rd SIX Daoism

Monday 26th SIX Daoism

Wednesday 28th SIX Daoism

Friday 30th SIX Confucianism

October

Monday 3rd SIX Confucianism

Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)

Wednesday 5th SIX Confucianism

Mid-Semester

Friday 7th SEVEN Shinto

Monday 10th EXAM #2

Wednesday 12th EIGHT Judaism

Yom Kippur (Day of Special Concern)

Friday 14th EIGHT Judaism

Monday 17th EIGHT Judaism

Wednesday 19th EIGHT Judaism

Friday 21st EIGHT Judaism

Monday 24th NINE Christianity

Wednesday 26th NINE Christianity

Friday 28th NINE Christianity

Monday 31st NINE Christianity

November

Wednesday 2nd NINE Christianity

Friday 4th EXAM #3

Monday 7th TEN Islam

Wednesday 9th TEN Islam

Friday 11th TEN Islam

Veterans Day (Day of Special Concern)

Birth of Baha’u’llah (Day of Special Concern)

Monday 14th TEN Islam

Wednesday 16th TEN Islam

Friday 18th ELEVEN Sikhism

Monday 21st No Class – Fall Recess

Wednesday 23rd No Class – Fall Recess

Friday 25th No Class – Fall Recess

Monday 28th TWO Indigenous Sacred Ways

Wednesday 30th TWELVE New Religious Movements

December

Friday 2nd THIRTEEN Religion in the Twenty-First Century

Monday 5th Last Day of Class

Monday 12th Final Exam (2p-4pm)

Course Requirements

Readings: In order to truly grasp the purpose of this course, reading is vitally important. Students are expected to complete required readings prior to the class for which they have been assigned.

Participation: Your participation will serve as the foundation for the majority of classroom interactions. Students are strongly encouraged to take an active role in classroom discussions. This class is designed to illicit opinions, debates, etc, thus your participation is paramount to the success of the course.

Conduct: The classroom is designed to be an environment where everyone feels comfortable. Students are expected to act in a professional manner. Specifically, students are required to treat both myself and your peers with empathy and respect. There exists no context where a student should feel unsafe or fearful within the confines of my classroom. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices: In order to limit classroom disruptions, as well as protect against academic misconduct, the use of cell phones, messaging devices and any other non-authorized electronic devices is prohibited in the classroom.

Notes: You are responsible for taking your own notes. I will not provide copies of my notes, nor will the notes be posted online (unless my lecture includes a great deal of material that cannot be found in the course readings). Please do not ask me to provide you with missed notes – please contact another class member to acquire any missed work.

Course Evaluation

Grading: Final grades will be based on 4 multiple-choice Exams, as well as potential in-class writing and class participation. The exams will constitute a major portion of your course grade. These exams will be designed to reflect material discussed in both lectures and reading--so it is to your advantage to familiarize yourself with all the class material. The criteria below will be used for any writing:

1) Clarity: The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset.

2) Engagement with the material: Responses are to be related to the reading material. They are not “reviews” of what has been stated in the book, but are your critical analyses of the reading—seriously taking-up what you consider to be the ‘key’ issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class.

3) Creativity: The ‘work’ of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well-argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself.

Attendance, Quizzes, and Class Participation: Attendance is mandatory for full comprehension of this course. Lectures and reading will be intimately related to each other but oftentimes quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class, as both will reflect in your performance on the Quizzes and Exams. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students during discussions. Also, attendance could influence your performance in the exams; especially, since there will be information in the lectures that you will not find in your textbooks. Besides the material from textbooks, everything else covered in class including lectures, power point slides, discussions, videos, information written on chalk board, etc., can potentially be on the exams. You are expected to attend the class on time and stay until the end of the class; coming in and going out during the class is rude, disruptive, and distracting to other students as well as me. If there are any exceptional circumstances to be considered please let me know before the class starts. The Student Instruction Committee of the Faculty Senate with the support of the Office of the Provost recommends the following social justice statement:

“Students who will miss an examination or a field trip due to a Day of Special Concern absence should notify their instructors at the beginning of the term. Faculty are instructed to make reasonable accommodation for students who miss scheduled exams or field trips as a result of such observance.”

Make-Up Exam Policy: There will be very few opportunities for make-up examinations. All University sanctioned absences will be allowed but under the following circumstances, it is your responsibility to notify me in person of your absence prior to the actual absence. As for other absences, if you are ill on the day of an examination, it is your responsibility to notify me prior to the absence. If you fail to notify me within the actual class window, then I will assume that you just failed to attend.

Final Grades will be determined as follows: Exam 1 25%

Exam 2 / Midterm 25%

Exam 3 25%

Exam 4 / Final 25%

100% Total

Course Grading Scale:

A — 360-400 pts.

B — 320-359 pts.

C — 280-319 pts.

D — 240-279 pts.

F — 239 points and below

Academic Integrity: Dishonesty and/or plagiarism are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in appropriate academic discipline and an unforgivable “F” may be given for the entire course. Please see the following: <http://eberly.wvu.edu/current_students/advising_resources/avoiding_plagiarism>. I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing actions, please see the students conduct code at [University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31](http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code), or <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Contact/E-mail Policy: All emails should include your full name, course number, and section (these can all be in your “signature”); If you are including an assignment or other time-sensitive material, do not assume that I received it until I respond (if something is sent and doesn’t come through on time, you will need to forward the already-sent mail); You must turn in a hard copy of any assignment sent by email, unless I’ve specifically said otherwise; I will usually respond to emails within a few hours during the week, but if you email me at night/on weekends I may not respond until the next morning/weekday; Please follow normal rules of grammar, including spell-checking your emails—in general: remember that your emails contribute to people’s impression of you and of your work!

Inclusivity Statement

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Adverse Weather Commitment Statement

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use his or her best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions, you should contact me as soon as possible. Similarly, if I am unable to reach our class location, I will notify you of any cancellation or change as soon as possible (at least 1 hour before class starts), using MIX/Gmail to prevent you from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If you cannot get to class because of weather conditions, I will make allowances relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests, quizzes, or other assessments.

Changes in the Course Syllabus

The instructor has the right to make changes in the syllabus throughout the semester as deemed necessary and appropriate. I will let you know of any such changes.

Student Services

I am always available to discuss students' concerns and progress during individual appointments. As well, WVU has the following services for students needing additional assistance:

WELLWVU Students Center of Health WVU Writing Center

<http://www.wvu.edu/~cocenter/> [http://english.wvu.edu/centers-projects/writing-center](https://email.uoit.ca/owa/redir.aspx?C=KPML8omIY0yhOx6qmtZbqrtrVGrcytBIuES4IgJrWQu7V72BBbWvMAxAr_TADffR-7FqO3uK8Uw.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fenglish.wvu.edu%2fcenters-projects%2fwriting-center)

WVU Student Support Services/TRIO Office of Student Life

<http://sss.wvu.edu>/ <http://www.studentlife.wvu.edu>

Course Description from WVU Undergraduate Catalog: RELG 102 - Introduction to World Religions. 3 Hours. This course explores five of the most widely practiced world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Students are introduced to the history and basic tenets of each faith.

Please check out the Following Websites:

* WVU Program for Religious Studies – <http://religiousstudies.wvu.edu/>
* WVU Religious Studies Club on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/268696159888365/>
* WVU Religious Studies and Study Abroad on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/133862393434286/>