**RS 337: WORLD RELIGIONS**

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**Course Description**

Why study World Religions? By exploring basic beliefs, values, and practices among major religious traditions, beginning with their roots in ancient societies, we become more aware of our own culture, beliefs and assumptions. In addition to an enhanced self-awareness, this course will promote an attitude of deep, respectful listening toward individuals and groups whose beliefs, convictions, and practices are different from our own. The course will explore the historical and cultural symbols, customs, and rituals from the literature and practice among some of the religions originating in India (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism), China and Japan (Confucianism, Taoism), and the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The course emphasizes the universality of religious experience as intrinsic dimension of the human person and explores the impact of religion on the world and on human beings today.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

As a course in the General Education Curriculum, students will:

- Learn the historical origins and developments of World Religions
- Learn past and current practices in World Religions
- Understand the main beliefs in World Religions
- Identify the connections between World Religions and our contemporary world
- Explore the role of World Religions in today’s world
- Enhance their own sense of empathy and respect and their ability to listen
- Become familiar with some of the primary texts of World Religions' Scriptures

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1In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author’s context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.
In addition to content (factual learning), the course aims at promoting critical thinking and respectful understanding, by incorporating experiential and reflective components. While no previous knowledge of World Religions is required for this class, maximum respect for people of all creeds and convictions is required at all times as a prerequisite to learning and developing the ability to dialogue. The Golden Rule – essential core belief in every World Religion - is fundamental for this course: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.” It encourages us to respect each person as we would want to be respected, therefore it requires first and foremost:

- **Respect** for yourself and others, and for the different ways of thinking and believing.
- **Openness** to the different Religions of the World (as an essential element in order to learn about them, and become enriched by them).
- **Personal responsibility** for assignments, attendance, promptness to class and participation. Each student’s contribution to the atmosphere of the class is essential.

**Course Materials**

- *Nostra Aetate*.

Further readings of primary texts and other sources will be indicated throughout the course and will be made available on Blackboard (the course website). You will also be required to watch videos and documentaries pertaining to the different World Religions in preparation for class discussion.

- We will work on case studies throughout the semester. The case studies were prepared by Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC).
- You will be asked to follow regularly the weekly TV program, “Religion & Ethics” on PBS (available also online).
Course Assignments

Class attendance and participation

Class participation grade consists of your contributions to class discussions and assessment of group work. Participation requires keeping up with the readings, asking questions (in class, after class, during office hours, or on Blackboard discussion board), visiting the course Blackboard page, and sharing thoughts about the material covered in the course. Participation will be worth 20% of your final grade. You are expected to attend all classes.

Attendance at all tests/quizzes is required

Lecture and assignment schedule may be altered as needed. In-class papers and quizzes will be given at the beginning of the period. Regardless of your attendance, YOU are fully responsible for all notes, handouts, assignments, and announcements (including those related to changes in the scheduling of assignments, quizzes, etc.). I will post as much as possible on Blackboard and you should check it regularly. Please make sure you have access to Blackboard by the first week of classes.

Written Assignments

Assignments are graded on both content and presentation (which includes using proper English and correct spelling!). Papers must be properly referenced using MLA style. Improper referencing often results in (unintentional) plagiarism - so be careful.

Extra Credit

Possibilities for extra credit can be attained by attending religious or inter-religious events, conferences, liturgical ceremonies which will enhance the knowledge and experience of the World Religions. If you come to know about any of these events and are interested in participating, please let me know in advance. Usually a 2 pages double-spaced reflection/response is required for the extra credit to be given.

Assessment of Student Learning

- 20% Participation: as explained above, participation is essential and worth 20% of your final course grade.
- 30% Written assignments: Written assignments are given throughout the semester. They are worth 30% of the final grade. They are to be submitted on Blackboard via Turnitn. No printed assignments will be accepted.
- 25% Quizzes: There will be 5 quizzes on the material covered in the precedent weeks both from the textbook and from the lectures (worth 25% of the final grade).
- 25% Final exam: the final exam is cumulative test on all the religious studied during the semester. It is worth 25% of the final course grade.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1
Tuesday:
- Topic: Introduction to the Course
- Take Religious Literacy Quiz

Thursday:
- Topic: World Religions and Interfaith Understanding
- Written Assignment: Self-reflection Journal entry. Reflect on your experience and answer the following questions (min. 300 words). What was/is the role of religion in your family? When was the first time you realized that people have religious traditions different than yours? Explain how that happened. Were you ever made fun of or disrespected or discriminated against because of your religion? What was it like? If you never experienced this personally, did you witness someone else being made fun or discriminated against because of their religion? Describe what happened and try to offer an interpretation.

Week 2
Tuesday: No class

Thursday:
- Topic: Models and skills for interfaith understanding and dialogue
- Readings: Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions*, “Point of Departure”; *Nostra Aetate*; Part 1 of assigned case study (on Blackboard)

Week 3
Tuesday:
- Topic: Models and skills for interfaith dialogue
- Reading: Prothero, *God is Not One*, “Introduction”

Thursday:
- Topic: The study of World Religions
- Reading: Read Brodd Ch 1
- Writing Assignment: Write a 1-2 page, double space, Times Roman font 12 essay based on you reading of Huston Smith, Stephen Prothero and *Nostra Aetate*. Briefly restate in your own words the position of each one with respect to religion and the relationship among religions. Compare and contrast them. Explain at least some implications of these positions. Finally, state your own position with supporting evidence from the texts.
Week 4
Tuesday:
- Topic: Indigenous Religions
- Reading: Brodd Ch 2 – Watch The Lakota Legends in Dreamkeeper

Thursday:
- Topic: Indigenous Religions
- Reading: Article on Yoruba Religion by Prothero

Week 5
Tuesday:
- Topic: Hinduism
- Quiz 1
- Reading: Brodd Ch. 3

Thursday:
- Topic: Hinduism
- Watch Mystic India

Week 6
Tuesday:
- Topic: Buddhism
- Reading: Begin reading Ch 4 (up to “Buddhist Teachings” included)

Thursday:
- Topic: Buddhism
- Finish reading Ch 4 – Prepare questions
- Writing Assignment: Watch one of the two documentaries (or both!) about the Buddha (links on course website) and then, in 2-3 pages, double spaced, reflect on the life of Buddha and Buddhism. How does the life of the Buddha lead to a deeper understanding of Buddhism? What is attractive in Buddhism and in the teachings of the Buddha? Is there something that everybody can relate to? Did your opinion of Buddhism change after watching the documentary (and reading the textbook)? How? What questions did the documentary and the readings raise in your mind?
**Week 7**

Tuesday:
- Topic: Zen Buddhism
- Reading: Brodd, Ch 9
- Watch *Little Buddha*

Thursday:
- Topic: Sikhism
- Quiz 2
- Writing Assignment: Brood, Ch 6

**Week 8**

Tuesday:
- Topic: Guest Lecture on Buddhism
- Reading: Brodd, Ch 11
- Writing Assignment - Reflection: How did the guest lecture enhance or change your understanding of Buddhism? What are two or three insights you will take away from the lecture? What will you tell your family or friends about it?

Thursday:
- Topic: Judaism
- Reading: Brodd, Ch 12
- Watch *Snow in August*

Saturday:
- Visit to Buddhist Temple: This visit is scheduled on a Saturday and is not mandatory. However, if you go on this visit and do the short reflection paper you will receive extra credit.

**Week 9**

Tuesday:
- Topic: Judaism
- Quiz 3
- Reading: Bible, Exodus 1-15

Thursday:
- Topic: Judaism
- Reading: Victor Frankl, *Man Searching Meaning*, 1-100
- Watch *The Pianist or The Devil’s Arithmetic*
Week 10

Tuesday:

- Site visit to Jewish Temple
- Prepare questions for site visit
- Written Assignment on Temple Visit: Submit a brief reflection (1-2 pages, double spaced) on our visit to Temple Congregation Sons of Israel. Below are some questions may help you as you write your reflection. You may add your own comments and connections. Remember to link our visit with what you read or learned in class. 1. What were my expectations before the visit? 2. Was this my first time at a Jewish place of worship? 3. What did I find interesting/intriguing? 4. What did I find strange or unusual? 5. What connections did I see between what we saw/learned and the content of the course? (very important) 6. What did I learn? 7. What questions do I still have? What am I still pondering about? 8. What is my overall impression? 9. Have my views changed as a result of our visit to the Temple?

Thursday:

- Topic: Christianity
- Quiz 4
- Reading: Brodd, Ch 13

Week 11

Tuesday and Thursday:

- Topic: Christianity
- Readings TBD

Week 12

Tuesday:

- Topic: Islam
- Brodd, Ch 14
- Writing Assignment: Posted on Course Website

Thursday:

- Topic: Islam
- Watch Documentary on Prophet Muhammad Online
**Week 13**

Tuesday:
- Topic: Islam
- Quiz 5
- Writing Assignment: Read the Chapter on Sufism and watch the documentary on Sufism. In a 1-2 page double-spaced paper (due Wednesday), answer the following questions: How is Sufism related to Islam? How does the documentary enhance your understanding of Sufism? What do the characters in the documentary emphasize? What is your overall impression? What questions do you still have?

Thursday: No Class

**Week 14**

Tuesday:
- Site Visit to Mosque
- Reading: Article on BB
- Watch *Arranged*

Thursday:
- Topic: Religions Today
- Writing Assignment: Answer these questions on the short film “Hidden in Time”. Feel free to add any comments or reflections in addition to your answers. 1-2 pages, Times Roman, double spaced. Questions: 1. What moments of the film were surprising? 2. What made me think? 3. What were my initial expectations? Did they change throughout the film? 4. What memories or connections did the film elicit? 5. Was I ever a victim of prejudice? 6. What image/s in the film stood out for me? Why? (You can select one or more images from the powerpoint that has stills from the film and include it in your essay) 7. What question/s does this film raise in my mind?

**Week 15**

Tuesday:
- Topic: Religions Today
- Written Assignment on Mosque Visit: Submit a 1-2 page, double spaced reflection (Times 12 font) on our visit to the Mosque. Some of the following questions may be helpful: 1) What were my expectation before the visit? 2) What did I learn? 3) What questions do I still have? 4) Is there anything that surprised me? Why? 5) What is the main learning I am taking away from this visit?

Thursday: Last Class – Conclusions and Review

**Week 16**

Final Exam TBD