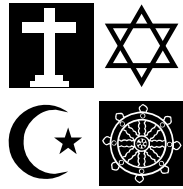


Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



RELS 340: Global Ethics and the World's Religions, Summer 2007

Section: 001 Mondays & Wednesdays, 8-12noon, 5/21-6/21

Course Instructor: Prof. Peter McCourt, M.T.S.
 pmccourt@vcu.edu
 Faculty mailbox: 2nd floor, Lafayette Hall, School of World Studies, 312 N.
 Shafer St.
 627-5010 (secretary)

Office Hours: Arranged appointment via e-mail or after class.

TEXTS

REQUIRED:

- *Ethics for the New Millennium*, H.H. The Dalai Lama
- *The Illustrated World's Religions*, Huston Smith
- *What is Religious Studies?*, K. Swenson and E. Nelson
- **Other Readings** (available on our Blackboard page- you may print them out or bring a laptop to class to follow along in class)

RECOMMENDED:

- *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue*, edited by Steven Rockefeller and John C. Elder.

N.B. You need to obtain the books/other readings. The essays are based on these materials.

There is no way to pass without having them and actually reading them!

A great resource for ordering books is: www.virginia21.org/cheaperbooks/

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits.

A critical survey of ethical concepts and issues in the thought and practice of major religious traditions. Comparison of ethical perspectives on selected themes and attention to cooperative efforts towards a global ethic.”

THIS SECTION IS A SERVICE LEARNING COURSE; IT REQUIRES OUTSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE WITH A LOCAL AGENCY FOR 20 HOURS TOTAL.

COURSE GOALS

1. Investigate a variety of religious ethical traditions, and also the primary religious narratives.
2. To consider what it means to be an ethical human being.
“An unexamined life is not worth living.” - Socrates

Becoming attuned to one’s own reality, to awaken (as did the Buddha!) to the true nature of one’s life is, of course, a continuous journey. However, consciousness is the first step. . . And in these first steps, we begin to identify (at least in part) the cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts of religious systems and of our own ethical systems.

3. To recognize the interconnectedness of our private and communal lives and how these have ethical dimensions, including the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the places we shop, how we travel, the ways we spend our money and time, etc. and how these relate to what Sulak Sivaraksa calls the “religion of consumerism”.
4. To explore the plurality of religious perspectives on the planet and to develop the ability to ‘bracket’ our own preconceived ideas in hopes of moving beyond ethnocentrism.

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY. . .

5. To open ourselves to transformation; “ The principle desired outcome of instruction is to empower the learner to perceive through his or her relation with reality that reality is really a process undergoing constant transformation.” Paulo Friere, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

EVALUATION (there are 4 components)

1. **Attendance/Participation**

20%

Basic requirement of this course. You must be present at each session, for the full session, so that we can gain from your insights and experience and you can benefit from ours and the class as a whole.

In order to make our time together as productive and engaging as possible, every student must: 1) attend all classes, being present in body, mind, and spirit; 2) take notes on the lectures, handouts, videos, and on the reading assignments so that you can pose questions and make comments about these materials in class and in your writing assignments; 3) complete reading and writing assignments prior to the start of the class in which they are due; 4) participate in class discussions, exercises, and presentations with good cheer!

2. **Weekly quiz on readings**

15%

3. **Writing Portfolio**

25%

A series of 2-3 page **Reflection/Response Essays** to SPECIFIC readings are required throughout the course; topics are assigned in class. These essays take the place of a Midterm and a Final Examination. All essays should be typed using standard 1" margins, 12pt Times New Roman font; references can be parenthetical (i.e. noted within the body of the paper). If you use material other than our reading material, you need to include footnotes. Essays are due at the beginning of class on the assigned day via Blackboard. Late essays are not normally accepted. If unavoidable circumstances arise, the student may REQUEST consideration for submitting late papers. The instructor reserves the right of decision. Consult www.mla.org/publications/style for directions on referencing authors and other media and footnotes.

4. **Group Project**

35%

Students are assigned groups and will be assigned a specific ethical topic to research and to relate to religious traditions. Group members will also be responsible for participating in a small service project with a local social agency affiliated with their research topic (3 hours). The group projects will be presented during a regular class session. Visuals ('power-point', videos, posters, pictures, maps, etc.) greatly enhance your presentation. Each group will have 30 minutes for their presentation. These presentations are considered exam material. Each group member must have a speaking role in the presentation. A complete discussion of projects will occur at selection time. The class period prior to the day of your presentation, each student is required to submit a **Service Learning Journal** of her/his own work with their local agency, according to criteria to be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard page. A final entry must contain the research and material you contributed to the Group Project.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

This class is a cooperative effort based upon interaction in the classroom. Attendance is taken each class session. It is the student's responsibility to make sure her/his attendance is noted each session. Students are expected to be in class, on time, and remain in class until the session is concluded, unless arrangements are made with the instructor BEFORE the start of class.

If a student misses two weeks of class (after the add-drop week) unexcused, the student's grade will be dropped one letter. If a student misses three weeks of class (after the add-drop week), the student cannot receive credit for the course. **To CLARIFY: You may have only ONE Unexcused absence before it lowers your grade!**

Your participation in this course is vital to its success. Your completion of assigned readings and your diligence in "keeping up" with the work will be evident to the instructor in your assignments and questions/discussion. SO, COME, PREPARED, EACH WEEK, and TURN ASSIGNMENTS IN ON-TIME or even early!

VERY TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

(Tentative means that I can make changes and so you need to be in class in case that happens)

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTIONS 5/21 & 5/23

Me, you, the syllabus; the subject of Ethics and Religion;
(NO CLASS 5/28)

SECTION 2: JUDAISM 5/30 & 6/4

The Narrative of Judaism: From Slavery to Freedom
Ethics in Judaism

SECTION 3: CHRISTIANITY 6/6

The Narrative of Christianity: WWJDD (What Would Jesus Defend/Defy)?
Ethics in Christianity

SECTION 4: ISLAM 6/11&6/13

The Narrative of Islam: Monotheism with a Capital M
Ethics in Islam

SECTION 5: BUDDHISM 6/18

The Narrative of Buddhism: The Man Who Woke Up
Ethics in Buddhism

SECTION 6: GROUP PROJECTS 6/20

Plagiarism, Cheating, and the Honor System at VCU

“If an instructor believes that a student has cheated, then the instructor must report the incident to an honor system administrator... According to the honor system manual, a professor can't offer the student optional penalties. One reason might be the concern that a student would get less punishment than she (/he) deserves.”

“If an instructor has strong evidence that a student has cheated, the instructor must still present the evidence to the administrator in order for him to gather all relevant evidence, speak to all parties involved, confront the student with the accusation, etc. In short, the administrator needs to investigate and get all the data to prove that the student is guilty. I suppose it's something like getting a second opinion in medicine, except that the administrator spends much more time in trying to determine if the student is guilty. The student is innocent until proved guilty and it takes time and a certain process to establish guilt or innocence. So the instructor who thinks the student plagiarized should not record an F for the student, but whatever grade the paper would get were it not plagiarized. Then it's my job and the instructor's to go through the process of determining guilt or innocence.”

-E. Coleman, Ph.D., University Honor System Administrator, Fall 2003

NOTE WELL: Under no circumstances will plagiarism or cheating of ANY kind be tolerated in this course!

Please consult the VCU Resource Guide (student handbook) for further information.
<http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/>

VCU CREED

Philosophy for an Academic Community

Academic institutions exist, among other reasons, to discover, advance, and transmit knowledge and to develop in their students, faculty, and staff the capacity for creative and critical thought. At Virginia Commonwealth University, members of the academic community should strive to exemplify the following specific ideals in addition to other worthy ideals:

TO DEMONSTRATE ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY.

One who is committed to this ideal respects and observes the VCU Honor System and practices honesty, loyalty, and faithfulness in personal relationships.

TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND PROPERTY OF OTHERS

A commitment to this ideal respects all aspects of the personal rights of others and refrains from all forms of theft, vandalism and destruction of the property of another.

TO BE OPEN TO OTHERS' OPINIONS.

This ideal requires one to listen to the opinions of others and respect the right of all persons to a free and open exchange of ideas and opinions.

TO UPHOLD ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY.

The University is committed to educating its students in an atmosphere of freedom of expression, critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and scholarship to permit students to realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment to learning and service.

TO APPRECIATE DIVERSITY AND TO VALUE AND LEARN FROM THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH PERSON.

The University values racial and cultural diversity in its community to enhance and enrich a stimulating environment for teaching, learning, research, and creative expression.

TO UPHOLD THE RIGHT OF ALL PERSONS TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT AND TO REFRAIN FROM ALL FORMS OF INIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND ILLEGAL DISCRIMINATION.

One who is committed to this ideal practices courtesy and consideration toward others and refrains from any action that denigrates another person.

TO DEMONSTRATE AND RESPECT INTELLECTUAL COURAGE IN SITUATIONS

THAT DEMAND IT.

Commitment to this ideal requires one to uphold the highest standards and ideals of teaching scholarship, research, and intellectual integrity.

Approvals:

Academic Campus Student Government Association: December 6, 1993; March 4, 1996; September 14, 1998; February 22, 1999.

VCU Medical Campus Student Government Association: Fall 1998, February 1999.

University Council Committee on Student Affairs: March 23, 1999

Faculty Senate: June 4, 1996; February 2, 1999

University Council: May 11, 1999

Board of Visitors: May 14, 1999

"Poverty is the worst form of violence."

Mahatma Gandhi

"If you want peace, work for justice."

Pope Paul VI

"Act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God."

Book of Micah 6:8

"God enjoins justice, kindness, and charity to one's kindred, and forbids indecency, abomination, and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed."

The Qur'an 16:90