

# **RELS 325: Themes of Adult Life in the World's Religions**

Spring 2002, Section 02, Saturday 9:10am to 1:00pm, Biological Sciences 144

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To log on to course website, go to: <http://curriculum.calstatela.edu:8900>

## **What is this Course About?**

This course addresses Theme F of the general education requirement. To quote from the university catalog, the course strives to give students a grasp of the “major life issues that confront individuals in maturity and adulthood,” and to help them understand a variety of “religious, literary and philosophical concepts of age and aging.”

This course looks at how religions wrestle with the basic human realities of growing up, being an adult, and facing suffering, aging, and dying. All religions must answer these fundamental questions of life and death. They must give meaning to our lives, our pains, our joys, our deaths. Religions around the world have answered these questions in different ways, deeply embedding their answers into cultures where they have flourished. This course focuses on two great cultures (ancient India and the Lakota Nation) and their religions. Though both these cultures have changed greatly over the years, the problems they face remain our own. Further, both cultures are present in our own fragmented culture, and may show us new/old ways of wrestling with aging, wisdom, suffering, and dying: things we are reluctant to face.

This is a course in comparative religion and in doing comparative religion we study religions from an academic perspective. This means that in this course we will look at religions not from a personal religious perspective, but from a view that honors all religious experience. This will probably be new to you and I realize you may not know anything about any religions but your own. That's fine. Even if you were not raised with a religion, it's fine. Comparative religion is basically about being open minded and clear eyed. So just keep an open mind and the course will introduce this new way of seeing and knowing religion.

## **Texts for the Course**

There will be two types of required readings for this course: two books and a set of online readings. I've chosen two very different books. Each brings religious traditions to life in its own way. Each takes us on a journey of religious discovery. We follow the

lives of Siddhartha and of Oglala/Lakota women. As they learn, we'll learn with them. The books are:

*Siddhartha*, by Hermann Hesse

*Oglala Women*, by Marla Powers

In addition to these books, we'll read other texts online. You'll find a list at the end of this syllabus. The books are available at the bookstore; you will read the other texts online or borrow them from the library reserve. You may also print them out. All students in the course will need to open a WebCT account and be able to use it to access these texts, lecture notes, and study sheets for the exams, and to participate in the class discussions. This means internet ability will be mandatory in this course.

### **Course Requirements**

This course is both a Theme F (Human Maturity and Aging Processes and Problems) upper division general education course and a diversity course, so there are several university-mandated requirements for it. There are also two prerequisites: completion of general education Block A, and one course from Block C. I add that we will be covering some primary text readings; you will have to comprehend them and their language can be difficult. I want to be very clear with you on what I want from you, so here are the specific requirements. Grades will be based on points earned out of a total of 100 possible points in the quarter. Note that this is an upper division course about complex and meaning-laden experience; to excel in this course, students will need not only to be correct, but to be thoughtful, to work creatively with the material.

### **Online Discussion and Class Participation**

WebCT allows for class discussion and I want this to be an integral part of your learning experience. To encourage you to help each other think through course issues, each student's online participation will be evaluated by two other students, twice during the quarter. I will evaluate your online participation, including your evaluations, and your in-class participation. All told, this participation will be worth 26 possible points.

### **Midterm**

The midterm will consist of several short answer questions and one longer answer question. These will cover class material through the fifth week and all the readings on Hinduism and Buddhism. By the fifth meeting I will put on the website a study sheet, a list of questions from which all but one exam question will be chosen. The last question will require a longer answer and will *not* be on the study sheet. Bring a bluebook. The midterm is worth a total of 24 possible points.

### **Paper**

In a way, the paper is the culmination of your course work. In it you will take the questions of the course beyond the classroom and the computer. The assignment will be

to interview a senior citizen about his or her life and religious experience, then analyze those words and stories using any of the visions of the life cycle we've covered in class. You may choose any senior citizen, but make sure he or she is someone you can spend some time with, who will be honest with you, and who trusts you. We will talk more about this paper in class.

The paper must be at least 1000 words, typed and double-spaced. Grammar and writing style are an integral part of paper writing and will be a factor in your grade here. Make sure to keep a copy of your work on disk or make another hardcopy. A "lost" paper means lost points. It will be due in class in the ninth week. Please just staple your paper; do not use plastic covers. The paper is worth 26 possible points.

**Final**

Like the midterm, the final will consist of short answer questions. Some will cover the whole course, but most will concentrate on material and readings of the final four weeks. I will hand out a list of questions from which about six of the final's questions will be chosen. The other two questions will require longer answers and will *not* be on the study sheet. Bring a bluebook. The final will be worth 24 possible points.

**Totals**

There are a total of 100 possible points for the quarter. To help you chart your progress in the course, here is a worksheet for totaling points:

	<b>My Points</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>
<b>Class Participation</b>		
Week Five Evaluation		8
Week Ten Evaluation		8
Overall Work		<u>10</u>
Total		26
<b>Midterm</b>		<u>24</u>
<b>Paper</b>		<u>26</u>
<b>Final</b>		<u>24</u>
<b>Course Total</b>		100

Course grades will be based on total points scored and will be broken down thus:

- A     90-100 points
- B     80-89 points

C	70-79 points
D	60-69 points
F	below 60 points

This grading system is simple, so as the course goes on you should all know how you are doing. If you're not sure, please ask. Every point you lose brings you down from 100, so if you've missed 12 points, you can still earn 88 points, a B. On the other hand, if you've missed 29 points, you can still get a C, but just barely. Remember, you cannot count on a perfect score on the final! Plan ahead. Everybody is happy when the teacher gives good grades, so please give me reasons to do so. In borderline cases, I will give a higher grade to students whose class participation or whose class work is especially active and sincere, who engage the class and make it personal. Go for it.

### **Incompletes, Make-ups, etc.**

Students who for good reason (e. g., serious illness, family emergencies) fail to complete the course requirements, may take an incomplete for the course and make up the work for credit at a later time. This must be specifically requested. Outside of this formal process, students must complete *all* the requirements to pass the course. Late papers will lose three points if turned in Monday, then one point per day thereafter. Remember, you may turn in assignments via email.

### **WebCT**

Much necessary material for this course is online, on the WebCT site. The material will include study sheets for the midterm, detailed instructions for the paper, and notes for lectures. There will also be a discussion area where we all can ask questions about the course and provide answers to help each other. Participating in this discussion will be crucial to doing well in the course. All students will have to create WebCT accounts and sign up for the course. I will demonstrate how to do this. If you have trouble, check out <http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/cetl/fitsc/webct.htm>, where you'll find guides to help you.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Week One: What is Religion?**

Religion as part of life. Definitions and dimensions of religion. Introduction to the course and the online reader. Video: "Harold and Maude."

Reading: none

#### **Week Two: Hinduism and the Life Cycle**

The ashramas and Hinduism. Video "Hinduism: 330 Million Gods."

Reading: *Siddhartha* 3-39; "Hinduism"

#### **Week Three: Buddhism and the Life Cycle**

The life of the Buddha. Basic Buddhism. Video: "Little Buddha."

Readings on Buddhism

**Week Four: *Siddhartha* and His Life**

*Siddhartha*, the novel. Contrasting Hinduism and Buddhism.

Reading: *Siddhartha*, all

**Week Five: Erik Erikson and the Eight Stages of Life**

Erik Erikson's psychological vision of the life cycle. Shakespeare on the life cycle. First evaluations due.

Reading: "Erikson" (by Professor C. Boeree)

**Week Six: Midterm**

Short answer questions. Video: "The Plains, Part I: All Our Relations."

Reading: none (study instead!)

**Week Seven: Local Religion**

Elements of local religion. How the life cycle and culture shape each other. Video: "The Plains, Part II: Fields of Grass, Seas of Blood."

Reading: *Oglala Women* 23-52; "Oglala/Lakota Religion 1"

**Week Eight: Oglala/Lakota Religion**

Introduction to *Oglala Women*. The Oglala life cycle.

Reading: *Oglala Women* 53-103; "Oglala/Lakota Religion 1"

**Week Nine: The Destruction of a Life Cycle**

Issues of gender. Changes during the time of the reservations. Video: "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse." Paper due.

Reading: *Oglala Women* 173-214; "Oglala/Lakota Religion 2"

**Week Ten: Rites of Passage, our Life Cycle**

Our contemporary society and its rituals. Finding meaning. Video: an episode of "The Simpsons." Review. Second evaluations due.

Reading: "Rites of Passage"

**Final Exam**

June 15, at 1:30pm, in the normal classroom. Short answer questions.

**Reading Assignments in Addition to the Two Books**

(Note: all the following are also contained in the online readings already on the website. I give you the direct addresses here for your own exploration.)

## **Hinduism**

The great Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, chapters 3-6

<http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/gita.htm>

Mircea Eliade, "Observing Sacred Time," *Parabola*, Spring 1990, 15,1: 21-28

## **Buddhism**

"Aging," from the *Dhammapada*

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/dhp/11.htm>

On death coming to crush us. The "Pabbatopama Sutta," "The Simile of the Mountains," from the *Samyutta Nikaya* III.25

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sam/sn3-25.htm>

A Tibetan Buddhist approach to helping people die mindfully

[http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/dying\\_p.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/dying_p.htm)

An interview with Sogyal Rinpoche, a Tibetan teacher

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/living.htm>

## **Erikson**

Professor C. George Boeree's web page on Erik Erikson

<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/erikson.html>

## **Oglala/Lakota Religion 1**

Charles Alexander Eastman (a Lakota), *The Soul of the Indian*, chapters 2, 3, and 6

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgibin/browse-mixed?id=EasSoul&tag=public&images=images/modeng&data=/lv1/Archive/eng-parsed>

## **Oglala/Lakota Religion 2**

Interview with Arthur Amiotte, *Parabola*, Winter 1990, v15,4: 38-50

Paul Conklin, "Living in the Shadow of Wounded Knee," *U.S. Catholic*, 1998, 63,10: 26-30

Diane Bell, "Desperately Seeking Redemption," *Natural History*, March 1997, 106,2: 52-53

## **Rites of Passage**

Katherine Froggatt, "Rites of Passage and the Hospice Culture," *Mortality*, Jul97, 2,2: 123, 14p

Cassandra Halle Delaney, "Rites of Passage in Adolescence," *Adolescence*, Winter95, 30,120: 891, 7p

Sloane, L.; Washington, F. (real author is Mathews as noted above), "Help Begins in the 'hood (cover story)," *Newsweek*, 5/18/92, 119,20: p34, 2p

### **For Further Information Online**

Mike Madin's Academic Info Religion Gateway:  
<http://www.academicinfo.net/religindex.html>

The Rutgers University Religion Department Virtual Religions Index:  
<http://religion.rutgers.edu/vri/index.html>

Gene Thursby's page, Religion Religions Religious Studies:  
<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/rel/>

For other sacred texts, see David Wiley's page Religion:  
<http://davidwiley.com/religion.html>