RST 351: Classics of Religious Literature

"One word of truth outweighs the whole world."

- Russian proverb

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Sessions: Tuesday/Thursday 12:30 - 1:45, Harris Hall 445

Office Hours : MW 10 - 11, 12 - 2, T/Thr 11 - 12:30, F 10 - 11

Office Email: Student email will be responded to within 24 hours

Texts: **Dakota**, Kathleen Norris

 Learning to Love, Thomas Merton

 The Other Side of the Mountain, Thomas Merton

 Dillard Reader, Annie Dillard

 Cross Creek, Marjorie Rawlings

 The Violent Bear It Away, Flannery O'Connor

 World-wide web sites for both assigned and free reading

Religious Studies is an academic discipline in which the **phenomenon of religion** in human experience is studied in a nonsectarian, unbiased manner using various kinds of historical-critical, analytical, comparative, phenomenological, interdisciplinary methodologies. Discussion should be conducted with honesty, enthusiasm, kindness, critical thought and respect for the worldviews and beliefs of others. This course is not only for learning, but is itself to be a model for how to learn, why to learn, and to learn to love to learn.

The following course explanation, in its totality, is a syllabus that is dynamic and flexible according to the needs of the learners and of the learning process. It is not presented as complete at the beginning of the study, but as an initial trajectory for the study. More specific guidance and resources will be available as needed along the way. You, the learner, have a key voice in the directions our study of world religions take so that our work will be significant for you and for the class as a whole within a learner/student-centered context.

Course Description
 Course Objectives
 Computing in this Course
 Writing Across the Curriculum
 Attendance Policy
 Drop Policy
 Course Evaluation
 Semester Schedule

Course Description

The theme of this course is **"Spirited Places."** Through reading nonfiction, especially in the form of journals, fiction and web exploration, through synchronous and asynchronous discussion, through reflection and writing, we will imaginatively participate in the spiritual insights of various persons as they portray their search for and experience of what religions call the sacred, that which is considered as the source, center and destiny of human life and existence,

that which is understood to be the virtue of all virtures. The role of "place" will be central, place is in the sense of nature, monastery, memory, self, faith.

This course is a reading, discussion and writing oriented course. Through the media of telecomputing we will be able to have a semester-long contemplative focus upon the writings, interpretation and evaluation of those writings, and upon our own thinking and thinking about our thinking. We will critically and creatively think about what is the nature and meaning of nature and experience   We will risk approaching universal human themes through specific, unique individuals and the stories they have to tell.

This is a course about stories and finding ways to express what one thinks, feels and experiences, and how evocative   and how language can be used to portray spiritual and human perceptions and perspectives.
Someone has said that "the
destiny of the world is determined less by the battles that are lost and won, than by the stories that are loved and believed in." We will read the stories of others and perhaps write more of our own stories along the way.

The goal is not the accumulation of information, but the growing into wisdom with the help of the writers, cultures and religious traditions we will encounter and engage.

Course Objectives
By the end of this course it is hoped and expected that each student will be able to read more deeply, interpret more analytically and creatively, think more critically, reflect for the purpose of integration, communicate in writing more precisely, concisely and imaginatively, express one's ideas orally to others with greater clarity, and, importantly, have had an enjoyable educational and personal time of it all.

Computing in this Course
Each student needs to have the basic ability to use email that is web-sensitive such as Netscape Messenger or Microsoft Outlook and to be able to find and utilize world-wide-web resources that are available for the study of religion and religions through use of a web browser such as Navigator (4.0 or higher) or Internet Explorer (4 or higher). The course will include sending and receiving email, web site readings and research, an electronic discussion list (with web archive) and electronic publication of student writings, both individual and collaborative.

The educational use of telecomputing will facilitate ongoing asynchronous discussion, submission and revision of student writings, peer review of student writings, collaborative group writings and projects, individual communication with the professor, or among students, and publication of an electronic course journal with student contributions.

Telecomputing tutorials are available as is guidance on how to **engage in respectful communication** on the Internet **(netiquette)**. In using web sources, please refer to **Documenting Sources from the World Wide Web**.

The purposes of the using of computer technology in this study are as follows:

- Participation in the archived, asynchronous class discussion list (mailserv)
- Anytime communication of questions, comments, problems, etc. with the professor/mentor via individual email
- Engage in a semester-long discussion with other learners in the course via the class discussion list
- Submit individual & collaborative writings electronically to the class list or professor
- Investigate relevant World-Wide Web sites
- Collaborate with other students in the course on projects/writings via email
- Expand opportunities for reflective participation in the study, beyond classroom time & place
- Encourage learners/students to become more central to the learning process and more responsible for their   own, and others', learning
- Develop computer skills
- Allow learning to become more enjoyable, valuable, enduring, self-directed, active and expansive beyond just a   transfer of information

Writing Across the Curriculum

This study is a **Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)**, writing-intensive, course where writing is fully integrated into all aspects of the learning and reflection process. In this process one's writing skills are further developed in the context of both learning to write and writing to learn. There are no exams in this course, but there are in- and out-of-class writings, a formal, revised essay, group writings, oral presentations or debates with written components. On-line **writing resources** are available. All writings are to be completely the work of the individual or the group doing the writing, thus avoiding all **plagiarism**.

Attendance Policy

Attendance at every class is expected and necessary to best benefit the act and art of learning through the discussion and writing orientation of this course on a very complex subject. Anyone not willing to be responsible for attending all classes is advised not to take this course.

Drop Policy

The official withdrawal policy is observed where the withdrawal ("W") period for an individual course begins January 18th and ends March 17th.

Course Evaluation

Discussion List & Writings	20%
Course Journal	30%
Group Project	20%
Final Essay (revision)	30%

* Voluntary participation in the writing, editing & publishing of issue of the course journal is available

All writings need to be received on time (allowing for computer system outages) for full evaluation.

Semester Schedule

"Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we canot know it." - Pascal

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