



COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Religion 131

Fall 2017



Dr. Dan Capper
Office: LAB 340
Office phone: 601-266-4522
Office hours: 10-11 MWF and 2-3 MW
Email: Daniel.Capper@usm.edu

Catalog course description:

REL 131. Comparative Religion. 3 hrs. The study of religion as an aspect of human culture with attention to both Christian and nonChristian religions.

Course overview:

This course is a basic introduction to the variety of the world's religions as well as methods for studying them. No prior experience in religious studies is assumed. In rapid survey we will discuss the nature of religion; indigenous religions; and the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Readings include secondary literature, sacred scriptures, and autobiographical descriptions. Throughout we will learn and use concepts in comparative religion to highlight thematic convergences and divergences of different forms of religiosity, especially religious approaches to the question and meaning of death as well as religious mysticism. Attention will be paid to recognizing the mutual interactions between dimensions of religions such as ritual, doctrine, ethics, institutions, and especially religious experience. Students should leave the course with a better appreciation for some of the many manifestations of religion around the world as well as with intellectual tools for the future exploration of religious phenomena.

Course requirements are:

- (1) 3 non-cumulative tests. These tests will cover the material for that section including readings, films, and lectures. Each test will be worth 21% of the final grade.
- (2) 1 take home final exam. This is a typed essay of at least 10 pages' length. The final exam is worth 25% of the final grade and is due December 4..
- (3) Participation in discussion sections for 12 % of the final grade.

Makeup tests do not occur. DON'T MISS TESTS! Test absences will be excused only with written documentation of illness or a USM-sponsored event. They must be arranged in advance of the test. **No documentation, your grade will be zero. No advanced notice, your grade will be zero.** In case of an excused absence, the next test will count double.

Writing and speaking:

Keep in mind that you have support for both speaking and writing on the Southern Miss campus. For free, one-on-one tutoring in writing and speaking, visit the Writing Center and the Speaking Center. The Writing Center is located in Cook Library. For more information about their services, visit the web site: <https://www.usm.edu/writing-center>. I encourage you to consider using the Writing Center, regardless of your writing abilities. They will help strengthen your written argument.

For help with your presentations, you should plan to visit the Southern Miss Speaking Center. The Center is a free peer-tutoring center, focused on improving students' oral communication through consulting. Consultants (undergraduate and graduate students) meet one-on-one with students, at any stage of the speech-writing process, working on organizing, outlining, developing, and delivering speeches. The Center offers speaking handouts, a speaking library, and practice rooms to practice and record your speeches. For more information about the center, visit it at: Cook Library 117, <https://www.usm.edu/speaking-center>, 601-266-4965

Extra credit opportunity:

An optional paper may be written to raise grades. This paper is 8-10 pages in length, not including the required bibliography, and is a research paper, requiring study beyond the course materials. The grade on the paper cannot lower one's grade (unless one plagiarizes) and may raise a semester average by as much as one letter grade, depending on quality. The topic is of the student's choosing but must be cleared by Professor Capper by November 15 and is due no later than the last day of class, December 1. See the end of this syllabus for more information.

To fulfill course objectives, by the end of this course students will:

1. have and demonstrate suitable reading, writing, and other communication skills.
2. have and demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the development and inter-relationships of societies from a global perspective.
3. have and demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of artistic, creative, and cultural expression.
4. have and demonstrate a capacity for intellectual independence and analytical thought. Students will demonstrate the ability to seek and evaluate information by asking questions, to make judicious decisions by using judgments on evidence, to understand and assess various kinds of reasoning, and to use critical thinking skills in all areas of their lives.
5. have and demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of foreign cultures.

Academic honesty statement:

All students at the University of Southern Mississippi are expected to demonstrate the highest levels of academic integrity in all that they do. Forms of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to):

- Cheating (including copying from others' work)
- Plagiarism (representing another person's words or ideas as your own; failure to properly cite the source of your information, argument, or concepts)

- Falsification of documents
- Disclosure of test or other assignment content to another student
- Submission of the same paper or other assignment to more than one class without the explicit approval of all faculty members' involved
- Unauthorized academic collaboration with others
- Conspiracy to engage in academic misconduct

Engaging in any of these behaviors or supporting others who do so will result in academic penalties and/or other sanctions. If a faculty member determines that a student has violated our Academic Integrity Policy, sanctions ranging from resubmission of work to course failure may occur, including the possibility of receiving a grade of "XF" for the course, which will be on the student's transcript with the notation "Failure due to academic misconduct." For more details, please see the University's Academic Integrity Policy:

<https://www.usm.edu/institutional-policies/policy-acaf-pro-012> Note that repeated acts of academic misconduct will lead to expulsion from the University.

Disability statement:

If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, he/ she should contact the Office for Disability Accommodations (ODA) for information on appropriate policies and procedures. Disabilities covered by ADA may include learning, psychiatric, physical disabilities, or chronic health disorders. Students can contact ODA if they are not certain whether a medical condition/disability qualifies.

Address:

The University of Southern Mississippi Office for Disability Accommodations

118 College Drive # 8586

Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Voice Telephone: 601.266.5024 or 228.214.3232

Fax: 601.266.6035

Individuals with hearing impairments can contact ODA using the Mississippi Relay

Service at 1.800.582.2233 (TTY) or email ODA at oda@usm.edu (<mailto:oda@usm.edu>).

Course Web site:

Materials for this course, including syllabus, review sheets, electronic reserve readings, and other links, may be found online at:

<http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~w312788/REL131/index.htm>

This site provides essential course information. Some electronic readings require that you have Acrobat Reader installed on your computer. This software is free, simple, and small, and enables you to read a wide variety of Web documents. You can get this software from the course Web site.

Required texts for purchase:

Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions (also on reserve; call no. BL80.2 .S645 1991)

Required texts on paper reserve:

Ninian Smart, "Religion and Human Experience" BL80.2 .S6 1996

Joan Halifax, pages 65-91 from Shamanic Voices BL2370.S5 H34 1991

The Upanishads call no. BL1120.A3 M32

<http://www.san.beck.org/Upan7-Shveta.html>

Dhammapada call no. BL1411.D5 E76

The Essential Tao call no. BL1910.C63

Koran (in the Sacred Books of the East) call no. BL70.S23 1900

[http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~u312788/comprel/Koran reading.rtf](http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~u312788/comprel/Koran%20reading.rtf)

The Oxford Annotated Bible call no. BS191.A1 1965 N4

Whole Bible: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/r/rsv/>

Exodus: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=217012>

Matthew: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=4563978>

Class Schedule:

August 16-28: **What is religion?**

Reading: (1) "Religion and Human Experience," the first chapter in Ninian Smart, The Religious Experience (*on the course web site*)

(2) "Timeline of Religions" handout from course Web site

August 30-September 11: **Indigenous traditions / vision quest**

Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapters 1 and 9

(2) Joan Halifax, Shamanic Voices, pp. 65-91 (*on reserve*)

September 13: **Test #1**

September 15: **no classes** - attend extra credit event

September 18-27: **Hinduism**

Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 2

(2) Svetasvatara Upanishad, in The Upanishads (*on Web*)

(3) "Krishna and Radha" handout from course Web site

September 29: **Meditation in the world's religions**

October 2-11: **Buddhism**

Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 3

(2) Dhammapada Chapters 1, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 23 (*on reserve*)

(3) "Noble Eightfold Path" handout from course Web site

October 13: **Test #2**

October 16-23: **Chinese religions**

- Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 5
(2) "Chuang-tzu," Chapters 2-6 (pp. 69-115), in The Essential Tao (*on reserve*)
(3) "Passages from the Tao Te Ching" handout from course Web site

October 25-27: **Judaism**

- Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 7
(2) The Book of Exodus, Chapters 1-24 (Found in the Old Testament in the Bible) (*on reserve*)

October 30: **Religious dimensions of Halloween**

November 1: **Mysticism in the world's religions**

November 3: **Test #3**

November 6-15: **Islam**

- Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 6
(2) The Koran Suras (chapters) 1, 7, 76, and 88
(*Suras* entitled "The Exordium," "The Heights," "Man," and "The Overwhelming Event," respectively) (*on course Web site*)

November 20: **no class**

November 17-December 1: **Christianity**

- Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions, Chapter 8
(2) The Gospel of Matthew 3:1 - 8:17, 10:1-23, 15:10-39, 16:24 - 17:8, 26:17 - 28:20 (Found in the New Testament in the Bible) (*on reserve*)

December 1: **Extra credit paper due**

December 4: **Take-home exam papers due**

Grading scale:

90-100 A
80-89 B
70-79 C
65-69 D
below 65 F

Extra credit opportunity:

An optional paper may be written to raise grades. This paper is 8-10 pages in length, not including the required bibliography, and is a research paper, requiring study beyond the course materials. The grade on the paper cannot lower one's grade (unless one plagiarizes) and may raise a semester average as much as one letter grade, depending on quality. The topic is of the student's choosing but must be cleared by Professor Capper by November 15 and is due no later than the last day of class, December 1.

Your response should be in beautiful narrative English, 1" margins of double-spaced 11 or 12 point type, **with page numbers**.

Because this is a research paper, a good paper will have a thesis which will be defended, then evidence will be presented in defense of that thesis. Because of the academic nature of the paper, a paper which simply "proves" that one's own religion is the best will not be acceptable. Evidence must be based on fact, not opinion. In this research paper, as in the rest of class, we study and write about religion but we don't "do" religion. This paper is not about your religion but about those of other people.

In terms of research, you will need to consult bona fide scholarly authorities on religion. This means that using Wikipedia or other Web sources is insufficient, as these sources are not always reliable. To do research for this paper you will have to consult library resources in terms of books and scholarly articles. If you are not willing to put up the effort to consult library resources, there is not much point in your writing a paper, because a paper based purely on Web sources will not obtain any extra credit. It should be easy to find resources at the library's book catalog and electronically in the JSTOR database or Academic Search Premier database.

You must cite your sources. You may use any citation system that you wish as long as you consistently stick to one system. I recommend the system found in the Chicago Manual of Style. This book may be found in Cook Library Reference or at this Web site:
<http://www.lib.usm.edu/research/guides/turabian.html>

You must also have a bibliography or list of works cited at the end of your paper. This does not count towards your page count.

Students should be mindful not to plagiarize when constructing their papers. The Oxford English Dictionary defines plagiarism as, "the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another." An example of plagiarism would be copying and pasting information from a Web site into one's paper without complete attribution. Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty and will not be tolerated. Ideas and writings of others must be cited in the paper. Every paper will be checked for plagiarism with computer software. Following the U.S.M. Student Handbook, a student found plagiarizing may fail the course.