

Introduction to World Religions

Dr. Gisela Webb. RELS 1402

Description: The goal of this course is to introduce the student to a variety of the world's religious traditions. But this is an immense task. We must narrow down our goal! The content of this course will primarily consist in looking at Indian, Chinese, and Abrahamic religious traditions, focusing on 1) their conceptions of ultimacy, 2) their conceptions of human nature, 3) their conceptions of spiritual transformation. In addition to understanding the theoretical framework of the traditions we study, we will look at examples of how these religious concerns are expressed in literature and the arts. An additional constant goal of the course is to develop an awareness of the tools (the methods, language, and philosophical assumptions) that we bring to the study of religious traditions. A new tool we will be integrating into our studies is heightened awareness and use of the new technology that will aid in our research on the development of religions past and present.

The following is a list of topics and readings for the semester. The syllabus may be adjusted depending on the progress and/or needs of the class.

1. Introduction to the comparative study of religion. Goals and expectations of the course.

What is religion Mircea Eliade, Archetypes and Repetition in *Readings WR*.

2. Read Black Elk Speaks and Journey to the Divine Proximity (Readings WR).

Some Religions of the East. **Hinduism and Buddhism. Primary questions of investigation: What is the language of ultimacy in the Hindu tradition? What is the nature of reality such that Brahman is known? What can be said of the problem of human existence and its overcoming from this perspective? From the Buddhist perspective?**

Read and discuss the Katha Upanisad (*Readings WR*)

3. Katha Upanisad, cont.

Seven Centers of Consciousness (*Readings WR*)

4. Finish **Seven Centers of Consciousness**. Conclude Hinduism.

Begin Buddhism. Read Huston Smith chapter on Buddhism.

5. Buddhism. Readings selections.

Finish Buddhism.

6. No Classes

7. Foundations. Begin Analects of Confucius. (*Readings WR*) **In the case of both Confucian and Taoist thought, the primary questions of investigation are: what is the conception of human nature and the **perfected human** and what are the ontological, societal, and aesthetic implications of jen (humanity)?**

8. Begin Taoism. Read selections from the Tao te Ching (*Readings WR*)

9. Continue Taoism

Chinese Art

10. Review for exam

Midterm exam

11. No classes. Spring/Easter Break week.

12. The Abrahamic Traditions. **Questions for investigation: Conceptions of God (Issues of Transcendence and Immanence). What is the nature of reality such that one can **know** God? (Questions on reason and revelation) What can be said about the problematic of human existence and its overcoming in the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?** Read the Tenakh/Hebrew Bible Sections and **Sabbath** from *Readings in WR*

13. Conclude Judaism. Read Selections from New Testament in *Readings in WR*

14. Finish Christianity. Begin Islam. Read Huston Smith, **Islam**

15. Islam. Quran selections in *Readings WR*

Islamic and Christian art. Slides

16. Quran selections, Hadith and Mystical Poetry selections **Everyone is Speaking of Peace** in *Readings WR*. Review for final

Required texts:

Gisela Webb, *Readings in World Religions*

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*

Expectations/Requirements/Grading:

1.) Attendance and participation are essential for doing well in this class. You need to bring to class the four-fold attitude of curiosity empathy, critical thinking, and self reflection. Asking questions when you don't understand or agree is crucial. Discussion, and debate are welcome as long as it is done with respect and empathy. **DISRESPECT TOWARD TEACHER OR OTHER STUDENTS AS DEFINED BY THE TEACHER WILL RESULT IN SEVERE GRADE PENALTIES OR EXPULSION FROM CLASS.** Do not miss class even if you have not completed the assignment.

2.) Grading: Your final grade will be determined as follows: Midterm exam: 33.3% Final Exam 33.3%. The third "third," or 33%, of your grade your "homework participation grade" is obtained by averaging your attendance grade, your homework grade, and your research paper (i.e., they are each worth 11% of your total grade). Note on the "homework participation grade": Your attendance grade is determined as follows: "Excused" absences still count as absences. You are either here or you're not. If you have an extended illness, personal, job, or family crisis, you should call me or come and see me immediately. Attendance will be taken and it will affect your grade. I call role at the beginning of each class. Each time you are absent when I call role, I mark the date. If you come in late, you are responsible for coming to me at the end of class to remind me to cancel the absence mark. Your attendance grade is determined by dividing how many classes there were during the semester into the number you actually attended (e.g. $20/25=80=C+$). Tardiness will also affect your grade. Your homework grade is determined as follows: divide how many homeworks assigned into how many you turned in on time. For example, 10 assignments divided into 8 done and handed in on time = 80% You have a C+ for your homework grade (11% of your total grade). Homework papers are opportunities for you to respond to and raise questions about the readings. They also let me know whether you are reading and how much effort you are putting into extracting meaning from them. A late paper receives half the credit of a punctual one. Copying someone else's homework even once gets you a zero. Your research paper is worth 11% of your total grade (one third of the

("homework participation grade") Each student will be required to visit a religious service other than their own and write a research/response paper on it. Requirements for the paper will be discussed in class., but basically your paper will consist of three sections: the historical development of the religious community and its beliefs, an in depth description of the service you attend, and finally your reflections on and response to the service (including your observations on your own response). The paper will be due on April 29. Use proper essay form and spell check. Be sure on your paper to put name of place you visited, its address, phone, and a contact person (e.g., clergy name). Cite sources. Plagiarizing your research paper or cheating on an exam will result in an F for the course. Nobody should fail this course. Everyone can do well if they do their assignments, attend class, ask questions, and see me for special tutoring if we are covering something in class that doesn't make sense to you or if you missed a lecture.

Office and hours: Fahy 305. Hours will be announced the first day of classes. Telephone:973-761-9461

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