

Religion & Science RLGS 300

Alfred University Fall 2012

Class meetings: **Tuesday & Thursday 3:20 – 5:10 p.m.**
104 Perlman Hall

Professor: **Dr. Wakoh Shannon Hickey**

Office: **2nd floor, Kanakadea Hall**

Office Hours: **Tuesdays, 1- 2 p.m.; Wednesdays, 3-5 p.m.; Fridays, 9-10 a.m.**

Please note: The worst time to catch me is immediately before class, *especially* if you have significant questions or concerns, because I will be gathering materials for class. Usually I can talk briefly after class, and if you visit me during office hours or make an appointment, I will be able to give you the undivided attention you deserve!

Phone: **607-871-2704**
Email address: **wakoh@alfred.edu or hickey@alfred.edu**

OVERVIEW

What do we mean when we say "religion"? What do we mean by "science"? This course begins with those questions. We will examine relationships between the two from multiple religious and cultural perspectives, past and present. We will also consider what brain research can tell us about the nature of religious experience, and about the effect of religious beliefs on physical and mental health.

Why This Course Matters

Some people believe that “science” has made “religion” obsolete – or that it will do so eventually, or that it *should* do so. But neither is showing any sign of disappearing. Sometimes they seem to be at war; sometimes they seem to deal with separate issues; sometimes they are in dialogue; and sometimes they are blended. Recently, scientific research on the brain has shed new light on religious experiences and practices. Both religions and sciences offer important ways of understanding the world, our place in it, and its place in the cosmos. Both are shaped by particular historical and cultural conditions. Unfortunately, many discussions about science and religion assume that “religion” means Christianity — usually fundamentalist Christianity. (Islam and Judaism might be mentioned in passing.) This course addresses that bias by introducing several major religions, and considering their relationships with science in different times and places. It will help you see that relationships between religions and sciences have always been complex, and that people in different religious traditions are interested in different kinds of scientific questions. It is designed to help you develop critical-thinking skills, which will serve you throughout your life, and enable you to participate in discussions (and debates) about religions and sciences in thoughtful, informed, and respectful ways. It might even change your mind about a few things! Because the United States is both the most religiously diverse country on the planet, and among the most religious, it will help you to understand the people around you better, and help you understand the implications of political conflicts between science and religion.

Methods

Mostly we will participate in seminar-style discussions about the readings. Class meetings will also include some lecture (but not a lot), as well as videos, weekly writing assignments, and two exams, for which the class will collectively develop the questions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students should be able to do the following:

Level 1, Remembering:

- Define the basic ideas and practices of several major world religions.
- Describe different sub-groups within major religious traditions.

Level 2, Understanding:

- Explain different ways scholars have attempted to define “religion” or “religions.”
- Explain different meanings of the term “science.”
- Describe how members of different religious traditions have understood science, and how relationships between different religions and sciences have changed over time.
- Explain how social and cultural factors can affect the methods and results of scientific research.
- Explain what cognitive neuroscience is contributing to current understandings of religious experience and behavior.

Level 3, Applying:

- Explain how different theories of religion help one to understand and compare religious traditions.
- Discuss whether and how theories of religion might also apply to sciences.

Level 4, Analyzing:

- Identify the underlying assumptions and the evidence used to support different arguments about the relationship between religion and science.

Level 5, Evaluating:

- Explain why others’ arguments about the relationship between religions and science are persuasive to you or not, and defend your own position.

GRADING:

- Ten entries (of a possible 12) in an online reading journal, each graded on a three-point scale. Instructions and a grading rubric are available in BlackBoard, as well as below. (30 percent of final grade) You can skip two, or gain additional points for writing all 12.
- Ten entries (of a possible 12) in an online class-response journal, each graded on a three-point scale. Instructions and a grading rubric are available in BlackBoard, as well as below. (30 percent of final grade) You can skip two, or gain additional points for writing all 12.
- A midterm and a final exam, each worth 15 percent of the final grade. (30 percent total)

- Participation in class (10 percent of final grade). This includes arriving in class prepared (which means that you have: done the reading for the day; thought about it, developed three or four discussion questions, preferably at Learning Level 3 or higher; and produced a reading-journal entry for the day). It also includes actively participating in class conversations. Because this is a seminar-style class, arriving unprepared will make it impossible for us to have a productive discussion. It's fine if you don't understand something in the reading, but please write your questions in your reading journals.

Reading Journal to Be Completed by Sunday Evening at 10 p.m.

Each journal entry should be three to five paragraphs long. (A paragraph should be three to six sentences long and have a topic sentence; every sentence in the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence; and the final sentence should either transition to the next paragraph or conclude your discussion.) The first paragraph or two should summarize one to three main points from the day's reading. The remaining paragraphs should reflect on what you learned. What surprised you, and why? What bothered you, and why? What did you appreciate the most, and why? What questions did the reading raise in your mind? What connections can you make between what you read and other things you know or have learned from other classes?

You are strongly advised to write these entries in a Word document, and upload the text into Blackboard. Make at least three drafts of each entry: a rough draft to get your ideas down and find out what you have to say, a second draft to organize your thoughts more systematically for the reader, and a third draft to edit and proofread. These entries will be evaluated on the basis of organization, clarity, depth of thought, and polish (so grammar and spelling do count). Each journal entry will receive between 0 and 3 points: 0 = inadequate, shows little evidence of effort of care; 1 = poor, minimal effort; 2 = adequate effort; 3 = good effort. DO NOT wait until the last minute, because it will be clear that you did and the quality will reflect the amount of time and care you spend. A grading rubric for journal entries is available in Course Documents.

IMPORTANT: each journal entry is due by the date specified in the syllabus. Late entries will NOT be scored.

A Note on the Reading

This course requires significant reading every week. For most of the semester, the Tuesday readings come from Stephen Prothero's *God Is Not One*. This book is meant to give you a broad introduction to the religious tradition we will discuss that week. *I do not expect you to memorize a lot of details about each tradition, only to gain a general understanding of a tradition that may be unfamiliar to you.* The writing style is quite accessible. Most of the Thursday readings come from *Science and Religion around the World*. These will be more dense, and at times more dry. Again, I am less concerned that you remember minor details than that you gain a broad understanding of the author's main points, that you think about them and raise questions about them, and that you come to class ready to talk about them. *If*

you are pressed for time, use the method described in the handout “Efficiently and Effectively.”

Class-Response Journal to Be Completed by Friday Afternoons at 3 p.m.

On (10) Fridays by 3 p.m., you should make a class-response journal entry of three to five paragraphs, reflecting on how the class discussion addressed the questions you had at the beginning of the week, what new information or insight you gained from the discussion, what new questions may have been sparked, and what connections you made to other things you know or have learned. These will also be graded on a three-point scale.

The purpose of these assignments is to help you stay on track with the reading, and to make sure we can have good discussions in class.

Grading Scales

Excellent		Good			Adequate			Poor	
A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D
94-100	90-94	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66
10	9.5	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5
5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1	.5
3			2			1			

COURSE POLICIES

Academic or Other Difficulties:

If you are having academic or personal difficulties that affect your schoolwork, and/or you need information about support services available on campus, please see the professor right away.

PLEASE DON'T HIDE and DON'T WAIT. Help is available.

Disability:

If you have a disability and need an accommodation to help you succeed in class, please let the professor know right away. All such information will be treated as confidential.

A Note from Special Academic Services re: Students with Disabilities:

Alfred University is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you wish to request accommodations, please contact Dr. Aubrey Elmore at the Office of Special Academic Services in Crandall Hall, or call (607) 871-2148. Many accommodations require early planning; therefore requests should be made as early as possible. All requests will be reviewed timely.

Tutor Services/Requests:

The office of Special Academic Services offers individual and group tutoring. Please contact Beth Niles at (607) 871-2148 for more information. Also, contact the instructor for additional support.

Writing Help:

Whether you want help getting started on a writing assignment or need help with organizing and editing along the way, the Writing Center offers individual assistance at every stage. To make an appointment, go to <http://my.alfred.edu/writing> and click on the link “Sign Up Here.”

Religious Concerns:

Students who need to miss class in order to participate in the religious observances of their own traditions may do so, but they must make arrangements with the professor ***in advance***.

Athletes:

Students who must miss class to participate in athletic events must notify the professor at the beginning of the semester *and* by e-mail at least one week before each class to be missed, and must make arrangements to get notes from class, contribute to class teamwork, and/or submit assignments timely. The one-week requirement will be waived in case of unscheduled playoffs, but you should let the professor know as soon as possible of an expected absence.

Lateness and Absences:

You are expected to arrive in class on time and attend all class meetings. If unforeseen circumstances will make you late, please make every effort to notify the professor before class, or ask a fellow student to do so. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will be marked late, and every two late arrivals will count as the equivalent of an unexcused absence.

After the first week of class, you will be allowed **two** unexcused absences. After that, each unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by one increment, e.g., from a B+ to a B. *It is possible to do all the work and still fail the course because of unexcused absences.* Even if you have straight As on all assignments, if you accumulate 12 unexcused absences, you will fail the course automatically. The lower the grades on your assignments, the lower the number of unexcused absences that will produce a failing grade.

If you know in advance that you must miss a class because of a schedule conflict, notify the professor by phone or e-mail at least 48 hours in advance. Prearranged absences will not affect your grade (but you should get notes from a classmate, and complete assignments timely). If you are too ill to attend class, notify the professor no later than 9 a.m. the same day. If you miss more than three consecutive days of class because of illness, you will be asked to provide medical documentation.

Mobile Phones and Pagers:

Turn them off before class begins. If use your phone during class, the professor will collect and hold it until the end of class. If this occurs more than once you will be asked to leave class and will receive an unexcused absence for the day.

Reading Schedule:

Complete the assigned readings *before* we begin discussing them in class. Additional course materials will be available on BlackBoard.

Conduct/Misconduct:

The classroom must be a productive environment for everyone present. Participants hold a variety of religious, moral, and political beliefs. In college, as in society, a functioning community depends upon our ability to talk about such differences respectfully. You are encouraged to question or disagree with one another, but to do so politely. Insulting remarks about other's religious/moral/political beliefs or practices are not acceptable.

Because personal integrity is fundamental to both good scholarship and to good citizenship, you are also expected to uphold the university's standards for academic and personal integrity, as expressed in the Honor Code, the Student Code of Conduct, and the Academic Dishonesty policy. Cheating, plagiarism, or harassment will not be tolerated.

A violation of the Academic Dishonesty policy will result in a failing grade on the assignment and will be reported formally, in writing, to your dean and the University Provost. This will become part of your permanent academic record (unless you appeal and are exonerated by a Judicial Council). Two violations *in this course* will result in automatic failure of the course. If your dean and the provost receive two formal, written reports of academic dishonesty (from one or more instructors), you will be dismissed from the university. *You are expected to inform yourself about and abide by school policies regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and harassment.* If you have questions about these policies, ask the professor right away.

Alfred's Student Code of Conduct may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/student_policies.code_of_conduct_0708.cfm

Alfred's policy on Academic Dishonesty may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/academic_policies.academic_regulation_ug.cfm#700

Other campus policies and resources can be found here:

<http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/policies.menu.cfm>

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- ***God Is Not One* by Stephen Prothero**
- ***Science and Religion around the World*, ed. John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers.**
- ***Our Religious Brains* by Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger**
- ***Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* by Rick Hanson with Richard Mendius.**

Reminder:

If you're having difficulty with any part of the course, please meet with the professor right away. She'll be glad to help!

August	Topic of Class	Reading for NEXT class	Due
28 Tue	Introduction	Handouts	
30	"Science"	Prothero Introduction	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
September			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
4 Tue	"Religion"	S&RAW Intro, Ch. 12	
6	Religion and Science	Prothero Ch. 7	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
September			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
11 Tue	Judaism "Story of Survival"	S&RAW Chs. 1 & 2	
13	Judaism & Science	Prothero Ch. 2	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
September			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
18 Tue	Christianity	S&RAW 3, 4	
20 Thu	Christianity & Science	Prothero Ch. 1	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
September			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
25 Tue	Islam ("Empire of Faith")	S&RAW 5 & 6	
27 Thu	Islam & Religion	Prothero Ch. 6, S&RAW 10	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
October			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
2 Tue	African Religions & Science	Prothero Ch. 4,	
4 Thu	Hinduism	SRAW 8	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
October			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
9 Tue	Indic Religions & Science	Prepare for midterm	
11 Thu	Midterm	Prothero Chs. 3, 8	Midterm
October			Reading journal due TUESDAY 10 p.m.
16 Tue	Fall Break	SRAW 7	
18 Thu	Chinese Religions & Science	Prothero Ch. 5	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
October			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
23 Tue	Buddhism	SRAW Ch. 9	
25 Thu	Buddhism & Science	S&RAW 11, Hufford Handout	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.

NOTE: Schedule is SUBJECT TO CHANGE according to class needs.

October			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
30 Tue	Unbelief	Our Religious Brains Chs. 1-3	
1 Thu	Our Religious Brains	Our Religious Brains 4-6	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
November			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
6 Tue	Our Religious Brains	Our Religious Brains 7-8	
8 Thu	Our Religious Brains	Science & Gender (on BlackBoard)	Class response due Friday 3 p.m.
November			Reading journal due Sunday 10 p.m.
13 Tue	Science & Gender		
15 Thu	Film	Buddha's Brain (Entire)	Class Response due Friday 3 p.m.
November			
19-23	No Class: Happy Thanksgiving!		Reading Journal due 11/25 Sun 10 p.m.
November			
27 Tue	Buddha's Brain Parts 1 & 2		
29 Thu	Buddha's Brain Parts 3 & 4		Class Response due Friday 3 p.m.
December			
4 Tue	TBD		
6 Thu	Wrapping up		

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