Course Description

This course focuses on analyzing religious diversity in greater Boston and asking how religious practices and beliefs unite and divide communities. Through their architecture, engagement with sacred texts, religious laws, and forms of worship, we investigate how religious communities express human connection with the divine and with one another. We pay particular attention to how sacred space and sacred objects are created and connect individuals with their spiritual ancestors and their ancestors’ geographical and cultural traditions in Boston and beyond. At the core of the course is the comparative study of religious symbols and space and how they are amended when traditions come to Boston in the architecture of buildings, in home altars, and in daily practices. We examine Jewish, Christian, Unitarian-Universalist, Muslim, Native American, Buddhist, and Spiritual traditions separately and also consider how practitioners negotiate with one another in shared spaces such as universities. This class is being taught as one part of programming in the Mandel Humanities Center related to questions about the relationship between the human and the inhuman.

Religion is at the heart of cultural expression and identity, binding people together and distinguishing them from others. In the high-tech world of greater Boston, it shows no sign of disappearing. Boston has long been a city in flux, but sharp increases in the number of immigrants living in Boston since the 1965 Immigration Act has made the city...
much more religiously diverse. Immigrants seeking to maintain transnational cultural and religious ties mingle with established residents on a spiritual path that echoes New England Transcendentalism. Non-religious secularists and those wishing to participate in immigrants’ own religions share public spaces and sidewalks. In a world of machines that extends into the human body itself, people continue to seek the groundedness and rootedness of sacred space and religious community in Boston and beyond.

In greater Boston, as in other urban centers, the high level of religious pluralism leads both to cooperation and conflict. Inter-faith collaborations address social injustice, racism, poverty, and the environment. At the same time, international conflicts impinge on local communities, as when a lawsuit was filed to prevent the construction of the Islamic Society of Boston’s Cultural Center in Roxbury. Local hospitals, prisons and universities decide whom to hire as chaplains to serve their religiously diverse populations, and public schools and negotiate which, if any, holidays to recognize on their yearly calendars. We investigate this diversity in this course with particular attention to the ways people engage with religious architecture, sacred texts, religious laws, and forms of worship as they seek, individually and in groups, to develop connections with the divine and with one another in Boston.

Course Learning Objectives:

By the conclusion of this course students will:

- Be familiar with a range of religious traditions and the places and ways in which they are practiced in the greater Boston area
- Be able to compare and contrast, verbally and in writing, the ways members of different religious traditions conceptualize sacred space, mark it as sacred, construct it, and interpret it.
- Be able to identify sacred texts from a range of traditions and describe how traditions differently approach text, interact with it, treat its physical embodiment, and use it liturgically.
- Be able to articulate and point to examples of how differences are negotiated when individuals or religious institutions come into conflict around questions of cooperation and coexistence.
- Be able to articulate a range of arguments on how best to balance claims of the free exercise of religion in a religiously pluralistic society with other claims.

Course Readings:

The following required books are available in the bookstore.


These books are also on reserve in the library. All other required course readings are available through LATTE except for those listed with web addressed that can be located on the web.

**Course requirements:**

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for us and your fellow classmates. Your class attendance counts as 5 points towards your final grade. If you miss zero or one class, you will receive 5 points. If you miss 2 classes, you will receive 2 points. If you miss 3 or more classes, you will receive 0 points. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email us about at least once week in advance. We will take attendance by having you sign the attendance sheet that will be passed around during each class session. It is your responsibility to make sure you sign this sheet. Signing the attendance sheet for someone else is a violation of your academic integrity (and the related Brandeis policies) and will be treated as such.

2. **Reading.** All course readings must be done before coming to class each week. The class will be divided into three groups (A, B and C). Each week, the people in one of these three groups will be required to post a response to the readings that is 200–250 words. This response must be posted on the LATTE site by Friday at 3:00 PM the week before the relevant class discussion (i.e., if your group is to post responses for class on February 7, your response must be posted by 3 PM on February 4). Each posting should demonstrate that you have read and understood at least three of the readings for that week (or three chapters from one book for the weeks we are focusing on individual monographs). You should summarize and synthesize the readings noting common themes and differences as well as raise questions for discussion. You may wish to tie the readings of the week into readings from earlier weeks and class discussions. Everyone in class is required to read all of these postings before coming to class each Monday. You will be assigned your group (A, B or C) on the first day of class. By the end of the semester, you will have posted 4 responses to the LATTE site on your assigned dates. You will receive 4 points for each LATTE post that is thorough and posted on time for a total of 16 points.

3. **Class Participation / Engagement** is required. Although this is a large class, there will be ample opportunity for discussion and participation. You will get out of this class what you put in, and the course will be more enjoyable for all of us if you are actively engaged. If you do not feel comfortable speaking in class, we encourage you to talk with us about class materials during office hours, send related news articles to the class through the class email list, and otherwise creatively engage with this material. You will receive 9 points if you are regularly
engaged in class. Feel free to check in with either of us at any point during the semester if you are concerned about this part of your grade.

4. Written Assignments: You will write two papers (4–6 double spaced pages each, in Microsoft Word format) in response to detailed assignments we distribute well in advance of the paper deadlines. The first paper assignment will be distributed on January 31st and is due to be posted on LATTE on February 24th. The second will be distributed on February 28th and due on March 24th. Your paper should be uploaded to the LATTE site by 5 PM on the day it is due. Each paper is worth 20 points. You will lose one full letter grade (2 points) for each 24 hours after the due date the assignment is turned in (i.e., if you would have received an 18 but your paper is turned in within the first 24 hours after it is due, you will receive a 16, etc.). We only give extensions in the event of personal or family emergencies. If you are facing such a situation, please notify us and your class dean (http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/advising/) so we can make arrangements and be sure you are getting the support you need. We expect you to properly cite and reference any books or articles you refer to when completing your paper. We will talk in detail about this when the first paper assignment is distributed. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to ask. You are encouraged to visit the Writing Center for additional support and guidance: http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/writingcenter/index.html

5. Final Exam. You will have a take-home final exam. The exam will be designed to assess what you have learned in discussions and course readings and to see how well you can apply what you have learned to new questions and problems. You may use your lecture notes and course materials when completing the exam. The final exam will be distributed on April 27th and due to be posted on LATTE on May 6th by 5 PM. Your completed exam can be no more than eight double-spaced pages (12-points, Times New Roman in Microsoft Word format). The final exam will be worth 30 points.

6. Final grades will be based on your class attendance (5 points), class participation (9 points) and LATTE postings (16 points), first paper (20 points), second paper (20 points), and final exam (30 points). You can add up your points at any time during the semester to see how you are doing. Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

- 94–99 A
- 90–93 A-
- 87–89 B+
- 84–86 B
- 80–83 B-
- 77–79 C+
- 74–76 C
- 70–73 C-
- 67–69 D+
- 64–66 D
- 60–63 D-
- 57–59 F

7. University Policy on Academic Accommodations: If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact
Professor Cadge or Professor Brooten and give her a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

8. University Policy on Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person—be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner—without proper acknowledgment of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student. Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities (available at: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srs/pdfs/rr2010.pdf), may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification. This policy also applies to your LATTE postings.
Course Outline

I. Introducing Concepts and Thinking about Central Questions

January 24. Introductions

In class we will together read:

- “Adding Eid” Case Study Materials Parts A and B, The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. (copies distributed in class)
- We will visit the Brandeis chapels as a class with Brandeis Chaplains Rabbi Elyse Winick and Rev. Walter Cuenin.

Reading (after class, if you are not able to do it beforehand; we will also refer to these readings later in the semester):

- Nehemia 8 (Bible: read online at http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt35b08.htm or http://bible.oremus.org/).

January 31: How are Sacred Spaces Used? How Do We “Read” Them?

LATTE postings by Group A

Reading:

Overviews


New England

Guest Speaker:
Charles McClendon, Sidney and Ellen Wien Professor in the History of Art, Brandeis University (first half of class)

**Paper Assignment 1 Distributed**

**February 7: How are Sacred Texts, Objects and Liturgical Speech Part of Religious Traditions? How Do We “Read” Them?**

LATTE postings by Group B

**Reading:**

- Genesis 1–3, 16, 21 (the latter two Sarah, Hagar, Abraham; Bible, read online at http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0101.htm or http://bible.oremus.org/).
- Qur’an 14:37 (traditionally thought to refer to Hagar; read online in three different translations at http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/014.qmt.html).
- Nehemiah 8 (Bible: read online at http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt35b08.htm or http://bible.oremus.org/).

In class we will view “Finding God in the City of Angels” (2010) a documentary comparing the uses of scriptures in religious communities in Los Angeles. For more information see: http://www.findinggodinthecityofangels.com/.

**February 14: Boston’s Religious History and Demographics**
LATTE postings by Group C

Reading:

- Please read the background materials posted on LATTE about the “Pork and Shellfish incident” at Brandeis.

Guest Speakers:

Imam Dr. Talal Eid, Muslim Chaplain, Brandeis University (first half of class)
Alex Kern, Protestant Chaplain, Brandeis University

February 21 no class

February 24, 5 PM: First paper to be uploaded to LATTE

February 28: Religious Groups Negotiating Shared Space: An Example

LATTE postings by Group A

Reading:

As a class today we will visit Wellesley College to learn about the programming and physical facilities devoted to religious and spiritual life on campus. We will leave Brandeis promptly at 2:10 PM by bus and will return by 5 PM. Meeting location at 2:10 PM TBA.

II. Religions in Boston

March 7: Buddhism in Greater Boston

LATTE postings by Group B

Reading:

- Timeline of Buddhism in Greater Boston:
- Overview of Buddhism in Greater Boston:
  http://pluralism.org/pages/wrgb/resources/buddhism/essay

If you are interested in more general background information about the Buddhist tradition or Buddhism in America, consider consulting the following:


For information about immigrant Buddhist groups in Boston see the following about Cambodian-American Buddhists as an example:


Guest Speaker:

Narayan Liebenson Grady, Guiding Teacher, Cambridge Insight Meditation Center (first half of class)
March 14: “Spirituality” in Cambridge

LATTE postings by Group C

Reading:
- Please read one or more of the responses to this book written by scholars on the Social Science Research Council’s Book Blog: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/the-new-metaphysicals/.
- Also bring an artifact about one of the groups Bender describes in Cambridge (i.e., a newspaper, blog posting, description of a group meeting from the web, etc.) to class. The more interesting the artifact the better!

March 21: Islam in Greater Boston

LATTE postings by Group A

Reading:

In preparation for our class visit to the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center please also review the following:
- Overview of the controversy surrounding the building of the mosque: http://www.pluralism.org/pages/wrgb/resources/islam/isbcc
- The webpage of the people who will be leading our tour: http://masboston.org/live/.

If you are interested in more general background information about the Muslim tradition or Islam in America, consider consulting the following:
As a class today we will visit the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (also known as the Roxbury Mosque) to learn about the building, the basic tenets of the religion, its practices, etc. We will leave Brandeis promptly at 2:10 PM by bus and will return by 5 PM. Meeting location at 2:10 PM TBA.

March 24, 5 PM: Second paper to be uploaded to LATTE

March 28: Judaism in Greater Boston

LATTE postings by Group B

Reading:


April 4: Christianity in Greater Boston: Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Adaptations

LATTE postings by Group C

Reading:
- Targoff, Ramie. Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 14–35. (Targoff focuses on the theology that led to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, later used by Anglican Bostonians; as you read, consider not just the specific historical period, but also the more general issues about liturgy that Targoff raises: ancient language versus the vernacular, and individual spiritual devotion versus words spoken in unison.)


As a class today we will visit the Vilna Shul, the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill, the Old West Methodist Church, and the Old North Church. We will leave Brandeis promptly at 2:10 PM by bus and will return by 5 PM. Meeting location at 2:10 PM TBA. We will be joined by Ellen Smith, Associate Professor and Associate Director, Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program, Brandeis University.

April 11: Christianity in Greater Boston continued

LATTE postings by Group A

Reading:
- Troy Perry’s account of the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church: http://ufmcc.com/overview/history-of-mcc/.


Guest Speaker:
Mark Jordan, Richard Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School (first half of class). He will speak about, “Ethnography and Ethics: How to Write Spirituality and Sexuality at the Metropolitan Community Church.”

April 18 and April 25 no class

April 27: Native American Religions in Greater Boston
LATTE postings by Group B

Reading:
- Pluralism Project Cape Wind Project case study (posted on LATTE)

If you wish to read about Native American religion in the news, we recommend:
- [www.indiancountrytoday.com](http://www.indiancountrytoday.com)
- [www.newsfromindiancountry.com](http://www.newsfromindiancountry.com)
- [www.indianz.com](http://www.indianz.com)

*Symposium on Native American Religion in New England (second half of class)*
- Bettina Washington, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Wampanoag of Gayhead (invited)
- Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), Harvard University

*Distribute Final Exam*

May 2: Unitarian Universalism in Greater Boston and Wrap Up

LATTE postings by Group C

Reading:
- Browse the webpages of the Old Ship Church, First Parish in Hingham--the oldest wooden building in the United States used continuously for ecclesiastic purposes.
- Other reading, a film, and a possible guest speaker to be announced.

*Final Exam Due by 5 PM on May 6th.*