

Religions of the World (640:024:04): Fall 2010

Instructor: Dr. Kenneth Atkinson

Dates: MWF

Office: Baker 154

Time: 11:00-12:00 p.m.

Office Phone: 273-6990

Location: Lang Hall 211

Office Hours: I maintain an open door policy for your convenience. Feel free to drop by my office whenever my door is open. I am always happy to talk with students.

E-mail: Kenneth.Atkinson@uni.edu My policy is to answer your message once I have received it. I try to check my e-mail throughout the day, so if you have not heard back from me please be patient.

Mailbox: Baker Hall 135. I check my mailbox each day in case you want to drop something off for me to read.

Course Web Site: <http://www.uni.edu/atkinson> Visit my web site frequently for class updates and links to sites of interest.

Instructor's Professional Web Site: <http://northerniowa.academia.edu/KennethAtkinson>

Required Text: Hopfe, Lewis M. and Mark R. Woodward, Religions of the World. 11th Edition. (Vango, 2009) (paper) ISBN-13: 978-0-13-606177-9

Course Description:

Why do people kill in the name of God? Can different religions exist peacefully together? Why do we suffer? What do the different world religions teach about the afterlife? Is it possible to be religious and not believe in God? Do I have to be religious to be in this class? If you are interested in these questions, then this is the course for you. My goal in this class is to introduce you to the exciting field of the academic study of religion and the world's major religions. Whether you know a little or a great deal about religion, I believe that you will find this course a fascinating introduction to the major religions of the world and how they affect you today. We will not only study the good side of religion, but we will also explore together the origins of contemporary religious violence in order to help you understand the important role that faith continues to play in world conflicts.

In this class we will not merely read about religion, but we will examine the major teachings and traditions of the world's major religions by actually reading portions of their sacred texts. As we progress through this course, you will realize the important role that religion continues to play in today's increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society. For this reason, it is more important than ever for you to acquire a basic knowledge of world religions since issues of nationalism, violence, terrorism, and discrimination frequently involve religious misunderstandings. By the end of this class you will have gained a basic understanding of the world's major religions that will help you work with other people, and assist you in overcoming religious and cultural intolerance.

As part of UNI's "Liberal Arts Core," this class is designed to provide you with a broad range of intellectual skills that will enable you to think critically about other religions, and help you understand the religious dimensions of current world events that affect you no matter where you may live. Because the world is rapidly becoming a smaller place, religious conflicts will increasingly affect your life. Knowing something about other religions, especially their foundational texts and practices, has now become essential for all citizens of our global community. Like all classes that make up the "Liberal Arts Core," the purpose of this course is to open your mind to new ideas, teach you how to acquire knowledge, and enable you to successfully apply what you have learned to new circumstances you will encounter throughout your life.

Course Objectives:

Each of the major living religions of the world possesses sacred, or holy, books and/or oral traditions. Because it is impossible to understand any of these religions without reading from their books, or learning their sacred stories, we will spend much time in this class discussing the role that sacred scripture (both written and oral) plays in contemporary religious practice. You will find that each of the world's religions that we will explore together in this class wrestles with their sacred texts and/or oral traditions. Moreover, all the world's major religions are engaged in a debate over how to adapt ancient scriptures and traditions to the modern world. For this reason, it is essential for you to know something about scriptural texts and religious traditions to understand the diversity of religious faith, and to get along with those who practice other religions. You will find some of these texts and oral traditions confusing or puzzling. This is because they reflect cultures that are foreign to those in which you have been raised. If you find yourself perplexed when reading some of these texts you are making progress, for my goal is to expose you to other religions, cultures, and new ways of thinking. In class we will discuss and examine together these books or stories and make them appear less strange. After carefully reviewing all the major textbooks, I have chosen Nigosian's book because it is one of the best organized, most accurate, and current works available. I am confident that it will provide you with all the historical background and primary texts necessary to understand the major religions of the world. This book, moreover, is reasonably priced and worth the cost. I hope that you will keep it after the course as a reference work to consult in the future. My goals in this course are:

- To provide you with a basic understanding of the foundational beliefs and practices of each of the world's major religions.
- To help you appreciate the richness and diversity, as well as the commonalities, of each of the world's major religions.
- To help you learn how each of the world's major religions began, and how they have adapted and changed over time.
- To introduce you to other cultures, religious practices, and different ways of thinking.
- To make you aware of the need for religious dialogue in our contemporary world in order to overcome ignorance and prejudice.

Course Requirements:

(A) Attendance/Class Participation (approximately 10% of grade). This course requires your active participation. Because you have chosen to take this class, I assume that you want to learn as much as possible about world religions and the academic study of religion. If so, then please be certain to arrive on time ready to share your ideas and thoughts on the assigned readings. As a member of this class, please be respectful of other people regardless of whether or not you agree with their opinions. I also expect you to remain open to

new ideas throughout this course, which is the first requirement of the academic study of religion. Because attendance is critical to understand the material and texts that we will study, I will deduct a few points for more than three unexcused absences when I determine your final grade. I assume that you will miss a few classes due to illnesses, university activities, or other life issues. Only unexcused absences will be penalized, so if you have a good reason for missing class I will not count your absence. If you are sick, you do not need to obtain a note from a doctor or nurse to prove your illness. I will trust you, so just let me know that you were ill, and I will not count your absence. Whether your absence is excused or not, you are required to keep up with the readings and lectures. If you miss a class, I suggest that you obtain copies of the notes from a fellow student. I am always happy to sit down with you and go over any material at any time. I am pleased to have you in my class if you are involved in any university program (sports, ROTC, student government, etc.) that may occasionally prevent you from attending this course. Please provide me with a letter by September 3rd about your activity or program, the name and phone number of a contact person, and the projected number of absences.

(B) Religion in the News (approximately 10% of grade). In order to help you understand the importance of religion in our contemporary world, you will give a brief presentation on some current event that involves one of the world religions that we are studying in this course. You will find your article on the Arts & Letters Daily web page, which contains materials and links from news sources representing the best of liberal and conservative media. The major portion of the Arts & Letters site contains articles, reviews, and essays about the humanities and culture with short descriptions of their respective contents. The left-hand column of this web site contains links to magazines, wire services, and newspapers. Your presentation does not have to be on a religion that we have discussed in class. It must deal with one of the religions on this syllabus. I will randomly assign you a date when you must give your presentation. If you want to receive full credit, you must do all of the following: a. Go to the Arts & Letters Daily site (<http://www.aldaily.com/>) and search for an article that deals with religion. This web site changes every day. You may have to search through several of the magazines, articles, or links to find something relevant. If you have any questions about this assignment, I am always happy to help you. b. Print a copy of the article (write your name at the top) and hand it to me before you do your presentation. c. Before your presentation you must turn in a two page single-spaced summary that includes the following: • A description of the article's content. • Your opinion of the article (Is the article clear? Does the author support his/her claims with sufficient evidence? Does the author understand the topic?). • A brief explanation of why the article is relevant to the class. d. In class you must summarize the article in a two-five minute presentation. Be certain to do the following: • Tell the class where you found your information. • Give a clear summary of the article. • Explain to the class why you believe this topic is important. e. At the end of your presentation you must answer any questions from your fellow classmates.

(C) Quizzes (4 total; approximately 40% of grade). There are four quizzes. Each quiz covers the assigned readings and the lectures. All quizzes are worth 40 points. There are no make-up quizzes. The quizzes will cover major events, people, places, and vocabulary from the assigned readings and material presented in class. Because we have much material to cover in this class, I may not discuss each reading in depth. I like to include a few questions on material in Hopfe and Woodward's text that I did not explain in class to reward you for reading the assigned chapters. You are always free to ask me questions in class about any of the assigned readings to help you prepare for the quizzes.

(D) Exams (4 total; approximately 40% of grade). There are four (4) exams in this class. Each includes identifications of events, terms, names, quotations, multiple-choice, and sentences for you to complete with the appropriate word. You must be present for the exams: no make-up exams will be given unless you have an excused absence in advance or some legitimate emergency! The exams are not cumulative.

General Comments: I am required by the university to provide you with the following information.

- Grading:** When I calculate your final grade, I will look at how you have improved during the course. I like to see evidence of intellectual development over the course of the semester. I will reward you for your contributions to the class discussions and your regular attendance. If you simply show up for each class, do the readings, and participate in class discussions, as well as study the assigned materials, you should have no trouble receiving an excellent grade for this course.
- Reading:** In addition to the readings listed on this syllabus, I will periodically send you short readings about current events by e-mail. These will be sent to your university e-mail account. You must have access to your assigned UNI e-mail address for this class. If you need help with your university e-mail account, please consult the ITS home page for assistance (<http://www.uni.edu/its/us/faqs/email/email14.htm>). Make certain that you periodically delete old messages since these accounts are rather small.
- Final Exam:** Note the Final Examination Schedule in your Fall 2010 Schedule of Classes (page 17) or the UNI website (<http://www.uni.edu/registrar/calendars/final-exam-schedule-spring-2010/fall-2010>). Please read this information and keep this chart handy since some exams are scheduled for different dates and times. I am required to adhere to this schedule unless you follow the procedures described on page 17 of your Fall 2010 Schedule of Classes. It is a good idea to hold onto this book since it contains much useful information. Pay particular attention to the Liberal Arts Core requirements on page 18 of this book or the UNI website (<http://www.uni.edu/vpaa/lac/>). I am always happy to answer any questions you may have about this chart or the university. The final exam is not a cumulative test, but only covers the last portion of the course.
- Policy on Late Work:** All assignments must be completed for class on the day listed on the syllabus. Late submissions will not be accepted. No exceptions! If you do not show up for an exam, presentation, or quiz, you will receive zero points for that exam, presentation, or quiz.
- Disabilities and Assistive Testing Services:** Assistive Testing Services are provided to enrolled students approved by the University of Northern Iowa Office of Disabilities Services for accommodations. Alternative testing formats, as well as auxiliary aids such as readers, scribes, or assistive technology, are available. Tests are to be scheduled in advance with the Department of Academic Services -- Examination Services office. The test service is provided for University course tests and final examinations (not quizzes) to students enrolled in classes that are unable to provide the approved accommodations (i.e. extended time, large print options, reader/recorder, or computer testing). Course testing accommodations are based on disability documentation as determined by the University of Northern Iowa Disabilities Services. I will make every effort to accommodate disabilities. Please contact me if I can be of assistance in this area. All qualified students with disabilities are protected under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 42 U.S.C.A., Section 12101. The ADA states, "no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity." Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodations through Student Disability Services. The Office of Disability Services is located in 103 Student Health Center (319-273-2676 [Voice] or 319-273-3011 [TTY]). Email: disabilityservices@uni.edu. See pages 10-11 of your Fall 2010 Schedule of Classes for more information or consult the Office of Disability Services website (<http://www.uni.edu/disability/>).
- Discrimination:** It is the policy of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or any other basis protected by federal and/or state law. Further details concerning UNI's policies may be found in your Fall 2010 Schedule of Classes (pages 12-13). For additional information, visit: <http://www.uni.edu/equity>,
- Plagiarism:** Any attempt to present someone else's work as your own is plagiarism, and may result in an "F" for the course. The University of Northern Iowa has a very specific policy statement related to the issue of plagiarism. This policy statement can be found in several places on the UNI website, but it is most prominent in the UNI Student Handbook in Section 3.01 "Academic Ethics/Discipline"

(<http://www.uni.edu/pres/policies/301.shtml>). You should become familiar with the Academic Ethics Policies found at this website or in the University Catalog.

•Weather Policy: My policy is to conduct class as long as the university is open. You will find additional information on my weather policy, as well as your local weather, on my web site. I do not expect you to risk your life to attend this class. If you feel that it is not safe for you to attend class, then please stay home. I will trust your judgment and allow you to make up any assignments you have missed without penalty. Just let me know that you could not attend class due to the weather and I will not count your absence. For UNI's weather policy, see: <http://www.uni.edu/pres/policies/407.shtml>.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

H & W=Hopfe and Woodward, Religions of the World

DATE CLASS TOPIC ASSIGNMENT

Week 1—The Study of Religion

August 23 Class Introduction

August 25

The Academic Study of Religion H & W Chapter 1

August 27 Prehistoric Religion

Week 2—Religions of Oral Cultures

August 30 Native American Religions H & W Chapter 2

September 1 African Religions H & W Chapter 3

September 3 Other Indigenous Religions

Week 3—Judaism

September 6 Labor Day Holiday

September 8 The Beginning of Monotheism H & W Chapter 11

September 10 Jewish Scriptures: The Bible Quiz # 1

Week 4—Contemporary Judaism & Zoroastrianism

September 13 The Rabbinic Period

September 15 Judaism under Christianity and Islam

September 17 Zoroastrianism H & W Chapter 10

Week 5—The Beginning of Christianity

September 20 Jesus of Nazareth H & W Chapter 12

September 22 Early Christianity

September 24 Exam One

Week 6—The Development of Christianity

September 27 Christian History and Beliefs

September 29 Eastern and Western Christianity

October 1 Contemporary Christianity

Week 7—The Beginning of Islam

October 4 The Life and Teachings of Muhammad H & W Chapter 13

October 6 The Qur'an October 8 Islamic History Quiz # 2

Week 8—The Development of Modern Islam and Baha'i

October 11 Islamic Teachings and Practices

October 13 Contemporary Islam

October 15 Baha'i H & W Chapter 14 (Web)

Week 9—Hinduism

October 18 The Origins of Hinduism H & W Chapter 4

October 20 The Teachings of the Vedas

October 22 Exam Two

Week 10—The Development of Modern Hinduism

October 25 After the Vedas October 27 Hindu Systems of Thought

October 29 Hinduism Today Week 11—Buddhism November 1 The Life of Buddha H & W Chapter 6

November 3 The Development of Buddhism

November 5 Buddhist Teachings Quiz # 3

Week 12—Modern Buddhism November 8 Buddhist Divisions

November 10 Contemporary Buddhism

November 12 Exam Three

Week 13—Jainism & Chinese Religions

November 15 Jainism H & W Chapter 5

November 17 Basic Concepts of Chinese Religions H & W Chapter 8 November 19 Confucianism Week 14
— Thanksgiving Break

November 22-26 No Class .

Week 15—Chinese Religions & Shinto

November 29 Practices of Confucianism December 1 Taoism

December 3 Taoist Movements Quiz # 4

Week 16—Shinto, Sikhism, and Interreligious Dialogue

December 6 Shinto H & W Chapter 9 December 8 Sikhism H & W Chapter 7

December 10 The Dialogue Between Religions Dialogue Decalogue
(<http://www.usao.edu/~facshaferi/DIALOG00.HTML>)

Week 17—Final Exam Week December 14 (Tuesday) Exam Four 10:00-11:50 p.m. Note: This is not our normal meeting day.