

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

RL 101-01 (Fall 2008)

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DESCRIPTION

A basic introduction to the scriptures, history, thought, practice, and diverse expressions of the world's larger religious traditions

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD AND THE LIBERAL ARTS TRADITION

The liberal arts tradition, as I understand it, is premised on the assumption that a true education requires more than the mere mastery of trade-specific data, but also the cultivation of a variety of valuable **cognitive** and **social** abilities. Among the **cognitive** skills a teacher in the liberal arts tradition assays to nurture are the capacity to think and learn independently, and to critically assess one's own presuppositions, perspectives, and biases, as well as those of others (including teachers and the authors of course texts). In addition, the liberal arts tradition seeks to foster academic facility in formulating, evaluating, and expressing arguments, as well as in seeking, classifying, and organizing information. The liberal arts tradition, however, is not merely about cognitive skills, but also entails the development of certain **social** qualities, the most noble among them being respect, an empathetic imagination, and counter-conventional thinking (i.e., the ability to envisage how, in the words of a Buddhist text, it "might be otherwise"). Challenging students to wrestle with the viewpoints, values, and worldviews of other people is one of the most efficient ways to achieve these goals of a liberal education. RL101 exposes students to several of these worldviews in a sustained fashion. If it is successful, the course will do more than just purvey information about the world's religions, but will also facilitate a sincere, thorough, and reorienting *encounter* with the traditions and those who adhere to them.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By then end of the semester, you should have gained from this course....

1. A body of useful and accurate *factual knowledge* about the world's religions and the people who follow them around the world, as well as here in Indianapolis.
2. The ability to *apply/employ that knowledge* effectively in discussions (in and out of class) about "the big questions" of life and about the study of religion.
3. An awareness of the beauty and value inherent in *encountering and engaging* the world's varied religious traditions and the people who follow them.
4. Greater *empathy*, that is, the ability to see the world through the eyes of different religious people.

Each of the assignments in this course contributes to the achievement of one or more of these course objectives. The course assignments are as follows:

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE

The following six components will comprise the grade for this course:

1. Participation (15%)

Helps the student achieve course objectives #2 and #4

Students will be expected to attend the class regularly, to ask informed questions, and to respect each other, the professor, and guest lecturers (if there are any). Students will also participate in periodic class discussions. If these discussions are to be successful, students will need to have carefully read the assigned texts. All readings should be completed by the date under which they are assigned. A large portion of a student's participation grade will be determined by the extent to which the student's participation in these discussions demonstrates his or her engagement with and understanding of the course materials. Students who never speak in class cannot get higher than 16/20 (80%) on the participation grade, even with perfect attendance. Students can increase their participation grade by visiting their professor in his office for informal conversation or help with/conversation about the course. **Attendance policy:** *I do not take attendance in class, but I do expect regular attendance. If you are absent frequently enough that I (and others) notice, your participation grade will suffer (unless those absences are caused by hospitalization or some other traumatic personal or family event). Mild illnesses and/or fatigue in general do not constitute an excusable reason for absence, so you should do what you can to avoid them.*

2. Bhagavad-Gita Reflection Paper (15%)

Helps the student achieve course objectives #3 and #4

By class time on 9/23, students will submit, by e-mail, a short essay (1000-1200 words, roughly 3.5-4 double-spaced pages in a typical font) on the *Bhagavad Gita*. The paper should be divided into two sections. In the first section, you should talk about your objections to the text, answering the following questions: What kind of questions/objections does this text raise in your mind? The text makes assertions about reality, about life, about our duties and the path to spiritual success. Which of its assertions do you object to and why? Assume the text is trying to convince you to believe something. At which points has it failed to convince you? In the second part of the paper, you should then try to get inside the mind of a hip, young Hindu-American. Drawing upon what you know about Hinduism (from your textbook and the professor's lectures), imagine how this hip, young Hindu-American might answer your objections and questions. Essentially, in this second section, you are to try to answer your own objections as a Hindu of your own age and in your own context might answer them.

3. Quizzes I and II (10% each, 20% total)

Helps the student achieve course objective #1

Students will take two examinations during the semester. They are cumulative, that is, each will include information from the entire semester until that point, so that those who do poorly on the first examination have a chance to improve their scores on the second.

4. Religion in Indianapolis Group Presentation (15%)

Helps the student achieve objectives #1 and #3

Each student will work with around six other students to explore Indianapolis's religious diversity. Each student will visit at least 2 institutions/communities. But students in a group should not all visit the same institutions/communities so that groups can speak about at least three institutions/communities when they give their presentation. After conducting the visits, the groups will give a presentation to the class on their assigned religion/religions, and will receive a grade based on its quality. The class presentations should answer questions such as: How many and what kind of people in Indianapolis are affiliated with this tradition/these traditions? Where and when do they meet? What are their services like? What are their celebrations like? What are their ceremonies like? What do their services, celebrations, or ceremonies mean to participants? Why do people adhere to this religion (and not others)? What are their religious meeting places like? Do services generally take place in a public or private space? Is their community growing or shrinking? What is their relationship to other religious communities in Indianapolis? To Americans in general? To gain this kind of information, students must plan to arrive early, stay late, make contacts, and have conversations with people associated with the communities/institutions. While the

presentations should be polished, scholarly, and well-organized, students are encouraged to tell illustrative stories about their own visiting experiences. The presentations *should NOT provide a general overview of the assigned religious tradition/s itself/themselves (except in the case of the alternative faiths presentation) as this will have already been done by the professor.*

The presentations will be judged on their organization, on their scholarly content, creativity, scope, and on the participation of all members of the group. Students will be divided into four groups focusing on the following traditions:

- 1) Hinduism/Sikhism (Presentation on 9/30—VERY EARLY!)
- 2) Buddhism (Presentation on 10/21)
- 3) Islam (Presentation on 12/4)
- 4) Alternative Faiths (Presentation on 12/11)

Students should arrange their visits ahead of time, and should avoid making their visits alone. Finally, entering an unfamiliar environment is often initially uncomfortable and confusing (and dealing with this discomfort and confusion is part of the assignment's challenge). Nevertheless, students are expected to be respectful, sensitive, and careful observers of these events.

5. Religious Encounter Journal (15%)

Helps the student achieve course objectives #1, #3, and #4

By the last day of class (12/11—no extensions), students will submit a journal or some other kind of chronicle/record/proof of their interactions and discussions with a person of a faith other than theirs. Ideally, students would choose to interact with a person associated with the religion they are exploring as part of the group project, but if there is good reason to do so, the professor will make exceptions. The point of the assignment, beyond the value in the engagement alone, is to find out what makes that other person tick, to see the world as they see it, to consider what it would be like to order the world as they do, and then to describe, in the journal, those aspects of the interaction which you find most interesting. What you turn in by the last day of class (or earlier, if you've completed it) should contain information not only about the person with whom you interacted, but also about the you yourself, about what questions the interaction/encounter raised in your mind, about what it made you think about your own beliefs, etc. There is no hard and fast length requirement for this paper, as its length will depend on the format. But you should have multiple interactions/conversations with the person you choose (whether those interactions happen in person, by phone, in a chat room, or over e-mail), and the interactions should be spread out over the *entire semester*. Journals will be graded on the degree to which they demonstrate and reflect repeated, sustained, informed, thoughtful, and meaningful engagement with the other person. Nevertheless, as I said, creative formats are encouraged, and obviously those who encounter their interlocutors in person will submit a different "journal" than those who do so, for example, in a chat room.

6. Final Examination (20%)

Helps the student achieve course objectives #1 and #2

Students will take a final examination composed largely or entirely of essay questions on the last day of class.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Paper Submission:

All papers should be submitted as a Microsoft Word (.doc) or, for Mac users, a Rich Text Format (.rtf) document attached to an e-mail to the instructor. *Please do not turn in hard copies.*

Lateness Policy

Extensions will generally be granted without question to those who request them *before the assignment is due*. (No extensions will be given, however, beyond the last day of class.) Extensions will not be granted, however, if requested after the due date. Late assignments will be assessed a penalty of two points per day.

E-mail Policy

All students are expected to check their Butler e-mail account daily (when school is in session) for class updates and reminders.

Rough Drafts:

The professor will read and comment on complete rough drafts of student papers, provided they are submitted at least one week in advance of their due date.

Student Disability Accommodation

It is the policy and practice of Butler University to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Written notification from Student Disability Services is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with me and allow one week advance notice. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that the accommodation can be received on a timely basis. If you have questions about Student Disability Services, you may wish to contact Michele Atterson, JH 136, ext. 9308

Academic Integrity:

Students will be expected to adhere to the standards of academic integrity as outlined in the Butler University Student Handbook, as well as to the highest standards of honesty, good faith and fair dealing. Students discovered violating those standards will **fail the course**, and may face additional sanctions which could include expulsion from the University. Violations include (but are not limited to) cheating, collaborating improperly on assignments assigned individually, and plagiarizing (turning in another person's work as one's own, copying text from any source, *including the internet*, books, articles, or magazines, without acknowledgement, etc.). Students should consult Butler's statement on academic integrity, posted on the course's Blackboard site under "Course Documents," for more detailed information on the University's expectations and policies. The library provides a tutorial on plagiarism for those needing more instruction: www.butler.edu/library/instruction/tutorial/index.html.

Statement on Disruptive Classroom Behavior:

The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. Differences of viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in terms which students and faculty may learn to reason with clarity and compassion, to share of themselves without losing their identities, and to develop an understanding of the community in which they live. Student conduct which disrupts the learning process shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action (Butler University Rules of Conduct #2) and/or removal from class. Some specific examples include talking during lecture or the use of cellular phones, pagers, etc.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Willard Oxtoby and Alan Segal, *A Concise Introduction to the World Religions* (Toronto: OUP, 2007)
- Barbara Stoler Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)
- M. M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1994).
- Individual articles and electronic packet available (*ECP*) on course blackboard site under "Course Documents."

**Note: Required texts are referred to on the reading schedule by the name of their author.

SCHEDULE

R 8/28 – No class (professor in India)

T 9/2 - Introduction to course/central questions in the study of religion

- Oxtoby & Segal, 2-9
- The Syllabus (I'm not kidding—read it carefully and come to class with questions)
- **In Class: Sign up for Religions in Indianapolis project group**

R 9/4 – What is religion?

- Grossman, "Americans Get an 'F' in Religion," *USA Today* (on Blackboard). Read the article closely and come to class prepared to discuss questions like the following: "What assumptions does the article make?" "What assumptions about religion does the article make?" "What kind of information about religion does the article deem important?" "What kind of 'experts' are chosen to give comment in the article?" "What do we know about them?" "What are the solutions offered by these experts?"

T 9/9 – Scholars and Adherents/Oral Religions, 1

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 1, 11-59 (read half now, half for next class)

R 9/11 – Yoruba Religion

- "Yoruba Creation Story" (*ECP*)—Print out electronic course packet (under "Course Documents" on Blackboard) and bring to class *every day* from now on.
- In-class Video: Yoruba Dance (C&T N28)

T 9/16 – Oral Religions: Impact on Global Christianity

- Walls, "African Christianity in the History of Religions," pgs. 116-135 (*On Blackboard under Course Documents*)
- In-class videos of African Christianity
- Begin reading *Bhagavad Gita* (paper due in one week)

R 9/18 – Basic Hindu Worldview/Scriptures/Varnashramadharma

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 5, pgs. 259-270
- Excerpts from Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (*ECP*)
- Look at Varnashramadharma System Chart (*ECP*)
- Keep reading *Bhagavad Gita*

T 9/23 – In-class Discussion of Bhagavad-Gita/Puranas

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 5, pgs. 270-285
- Puranas: "Kali Age," and Krishna stories (*On Blackboard Under Course Documents*)
- ***Bhagavad Gita* paper due**

R 9/25 – Discussion of Bhakti/Puja

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 5, pgs. 286-325
- Bhakti Poetry (*ECP*)

T 9/30 – Sikhism lecture, Hinduism/Sikhism Group Presentation

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 6, pgs. 327-351

R 10/2 – Buddhism: Introduction

- Oxtoby & Segal, 377-392
- In-class film: *In the Footprints of the Buddha*

T 10/7 – Buddhism: Theravada Buddhism/The *Dhammapada*

- Oxtoby & Segal, 392-412
- Selections from the *Dhammapada* (*ECP*)

R 10/9 – Buddhism: Mahayana Buddhism (Pure Land/Zen)/Tibetan Buddhism

- Oxtoby & Segal, 412-439
- Fieser & Powers, *Scriptures of the East*, Buddhism “Mahayana Scriptures,” pgs. 98-111 (*ECP*)

T 10/14 – **Test I**

R 10/16 – **Reading Break**

T 10/21 – Buddhism Group Presentation

R 10/23 – Chinese Religions, II

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 9, pgs. 468-498
- Excerpts from *Tao Te Ching* (*ECP*)

T 10/28 – No regular class: Attend (optional) evening lecture by Jean Langford on Indian Ayurvedic medicine, 6:00 pm in the Krannert Room (Clowes Hall basement)

R 10/30 – Christianity, Scriptures

- Oxtoby & Segal, 131-158
- Creation Accounts from *Genesis* (*ECP*)
- Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures: Western Traditions*, Judaism “History,” and “Ethics,” pgs. 46-50; 57-66 (*ECP*)
- “Commandment” List Comparisons (*ECP*)

T 11/4 – **No Class (to make up for visits)**

R 11/6 – Christianity, History/Beliefs

- Oxtoby & Segal, pgs. 159-197
- Van Voort, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 6th ed., Christianity “History” and “Ethics,” pgs. 257-265; 271-279 (*ECP*)

T 11/11 – **Test II**

R 11/13 – Early Islam / The Qur’an

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 4, pgs. 199-211
- **Bring your Qur’ans to class and be prepared to discuss passages below**
- Pickthall
 - Surah 1 – The Opening
 - Surah 96 – The Clot

- Surah 2:28-54 (God, Adam, and Eve)
- Surah 23:21-49 (Noah)
- Surah 2:122-132 (Abraham/Ka'ba)
- Surah 26:1-78 (Moses and Pharaoh)
- Surah 5:19-29 (Moses/Promised Land)
- Surah 12 (Joseph)
- Surah 3:40-65 (Jesus' Birth and Prophethood)
- Surah 4:153-159 (Jesus' Crucifixion and Ascension)
- Surah 112 (Unity)
- Noah and the Flood, from Genesis 6:9-7:5 (*ECP*)

T 11/18 – Islam: The Five Pillars/Haj

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 4, pgs. 233-38
- Look over Haj Outline/Outline of Salat Service (*ECP*)
- In-class film, *The Hajj*

R 11/20 – Islam: Hadith and Fiqh

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 4, pgs. 211-219
- Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Manual of Hadith*, pgs. 267-281 (*Available on Blackboard under Course Documents*)

T 11/25-R 11/27 **Thanksgiving**

T 12/2 – Islam: Sufism

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 4, pgs. 219-233
- In-class film, *I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim*

R 12/4 – Islam Group Presentation, evaluations

- Oxtoby & Segal, Chapter 4, pgs. 238-257

T 12/9 – West African Traditions in the New World/Rasta Movement

- Molloy, first part of Chapter 11 (Alternative Paths), pgs. 501-521 (Blackboard)

R 12/11 – Scientology, Alternative Faiths Group Presentation

- Molloy, second part of Chapter 11 (Alternative Paths), pgs. 521-535 (Blackboard)

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 17th, 10:15-12:15.