INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES
REL 300.001
Spring 2018

Class Time: MW 1:00 - 2:15 p.m.
Classroom: Paul L. Boynton Building 212 (BO 212)

Dr. Owen M. Smith
Professor of Philosophy and Classical Studies
OFFICE: Paul L. Boynton Building 208B (BO 208B)
OFFICE HOURS:
   MONDAY  2:30 – 5:00 p.m.
   TUESDAY  9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
   WEDNESDAY  9:00 – 10:30 a.m.
   THURSDAY  9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
   and by appointment
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Course Description:
Introduction to the study of religion and to a variety of the world's religious traditions

Required Texts:
ISBN 10: 0073386596
ISBN 13: 9780073386591
ISBN 10: 0062508113
ISBN 13: 9780061660184
Additional Readings will be provided by the instructor through the D2L site for the course.

Program Learning Outcome:
This course is a required course for the interdisciplinary Religious Studies minor; no specific learning outcomes for a major program are addressed in this course.

Student Learning Outcomes:
1. To gain an understanding of the methods, assumptions, challenges, and goals of the academic investigation of religion, especially comparative religious studies
2. To gain a more detailed understanding of the histories, beliefs, practices, and cultural products of the major western and eastern religions
3. To gain a deeper insight into the religious dimensions of contemporary cultural conflicts, both within the United States and internationally
Course Requirements:
• Midterm Examination: 20% of final grade
• Final Examination: 30% of final grade
• Paper Project: 40% of final grade
• Cultural Reflections: 10% of final grade

Course Policies:
1. Class Attendance and Conduct
   a. Since in-class exercises and discussions of course material are an essential part of the course work, each student is required to attend every class session. Students are required to be punctual in their attendance and to remain in class until the end of each class session, with the exception of breaks announced by the instructor. Behavior that is disrespectful to the instructor or to other students is not acceptable during class.
   b. Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (cf. Student Conduct Code, Policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the iCare Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.
   c. Attendance will be taken each class session either verbally or in the form of an attendance sheet to be signed by each student. Each student is responsible for making sure that his/her attendance has been recorded for each class session. Attendance at a class session may be recorded only during that session.
   d. Students are not permitted to use cell phones or other electronic devices such as laptop computers during class or to have cellphones on their desks or laps during class sessions; during all class sessions, including examinations, these devices must be turned off and placed out of sight. The instructor may also require students to remove their personal possessions, such as backpacks, from their desktops during class. A penalty of one (1) partial absence will be assessed for each violation of this policy.
   e. Excessive absences will result in a failing course grade. Students who arrive late to class or leave class early are assigned partial absences; for every two (2) partial absences, one (1) full absence will be assessed against a student’s attendance record. Any student who accumulates more than six (6) absences during the semester is subject to receiving a final course grade of “F.” Students are responsible for keeping track of their own attendance record and recognizing when their final course grade is endangered by excessive absences. Students who miss class sessions owing to late registration will not be charged with these absences provided that they meet with the instructor in the first two weeks of the semester to discuss the syllabus and review missed material.
   f. Students are responsible for all material addressed and all exercises performed in class regardless of their attendance record. Students who miss class are encouraged to obtain notes from a classmate and review these notes with the instructor.

2. Contact Information
   a. The instructor is available to meet with students in his office (BO 208B). Students who wish to meet with the instructor in his office during regularly scheduled office hours do not need to make an appointment; the instructor will meet with students on a first come, first served basis. Students who wish to meet with the instructor in his office outside of regularly scheduled office hours must make an appointment with the instructor ahead of time.
   b. Students can also contact the instructor by email either through the Brightspace (D2L) website for the course or by using the instructor’s university email address (omsmith@sfasu.edu).
   c. Students can also reach the instructor through his university telephone number (936-468-2367); if the instructor is not available, please leave a message and he will return your call.
d. Students can ask questions concerning course material or course requirements by making use of the Pager function of the Brightspace (D2L) website for the course or by making a post to the Open Question Forum discussion available on this site.

3. Examinations
   a. The instructor will provide fair notice of each examination and will clearly identify the material for which students will be responsible. The examinations will consist primarily of essay questions. It is the instructor's custom to schedule extra office hours prior to each examination and to hand out a study guide containing sample problems and exercises.
   b. Students are required to follow all directions provided on the examinations. Failure by a student to follow directions on an examination may result in penalties being assessed against that student's examination grade. Partial credit will be awarded on the examinations. Students should attempt to respond to every problem and essay topic on the examinations; even if a student does not finish a response, s/he will earn points for work shown.
   c. Any student who anticipates missing an examination is required to make every reasonable effort to notify the instructor prior to the examination. Following a missed examination, a student is required to contact the instructor in writing prior to the next class session, circumstances permitting, to request a make-up examination. The instructor may refuse to administer make-up examinations to students who, in his judgment, have not met these requirements. Under ordinary circumstances, the instructor does not administer make-up examinations once the original examination has been graded and returned to the class.
   d. A student who wishes to take a make-up examination must submit a written request to the instructor identifying the course in which the student is enrolled, the number and date of the missed examination, and the reason for missing the examination. This document must be submitted to the instructor at the time of the make-up examination; make-up examinations will not be administered to students who have not submitted a written request.
   e. The instructor will administer make-up examinations without penalty only to those students who could not take an examination at the designated time owing to serious illness or another similarly compelling reason. Any student who wishes to take a make-up examination without a grade penalty must attach to his/her written request some form of credible written documentation for the reason cited by the student for missing the original examination. The instructor may, at his discretion, administer a make-up examination with a substantial grade penalty to students who fail to take an examination at the designated time without an acceptable excuse.
   f. The format, time, and circumstances of make-up examinations are at the discretion of the instructor.
   g. The third examination will be administered during the final examination period. Students who have multiple examinations on the same day during the final examination period and wish to reschedule the final examination in this course are required to consult the instructor before the beginning of the final examination period. In no case will the instructor administer the third examination prior to the end of classes.

4. Paper Project
   a. Each student is required to complete a paper project centered around a topic in religious studies. This project consists of four inter-related components: an introductory essay, an essay regarding a western world religion, an essay regarding an eastern world religion, and an integrative reflection. A separate assignment sheet will be distributed by the instructor for each component of the paper project.
   b. Introductory Essay: The first essay will provide a basic introduction to the academic investigation of a topic in religious studies, including an examination of the basic concepts and terminology associated with the topic. This essay is due on Friday, February 21, 2020.
   c. Western Religion component: The second essay will investigate the chosen topic in the context of a western world religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). This essay is due on Friday, March 20, 2020.
   d. Eastern Religion component: The third essay will investigate the chosen topic in the context of an eastern world religion (Hinduism, Buddhism). This essay is due on Friday, April 17, 2020.
   e. Integrative Reflection: The final essay will integrate the material from the previous essays, perhaps through a comparison/contrast analysis, and will conclude with a personal reflection and evaluation on the topic chosen for the paper project. This essay is due on Friday, May 01, 2020.
f. Extensions: Requests for extensions on any of the due dates associated with the papers will be granted at the instructor’s discretion only for serious illness or other similarly compelling reason. Any student who wishes to obtain an extension must submit a written request to the instructor identifying the reason for the extension. Credible written documentation supporting the request must be attached to the request.

5. Cultural Reflections
   a. Every student is required to attend at least two (2) cultural events on campus and submit a cultural reflection form to the instructor providing information about each event and relating each event to topics addressed in class during the course of the semester. The instructor will make periodic announcements of eligible cultural events, which may include talks by guest speakers, dramatic productions, films, panel presentations, and symposia. Students are also encouraged to notify the instructor of eligible events so that he can inform the remainder of the class. For an event to be eligible for a cultural reflection, the instructor must approve the event prior to the submission of any cultural reflection forms.
   b. The cultural reflection form will be posted by the instructor on the Brightspace (D2L) site for the course and must be submitted to an online dropbox provided by the instructor for this purpose.
   c. The first cultural reflection form is due by Friday, March 06, 2020; the second cultural reflection form is due by Friday, April 24, 2020. Each cultural reflection is worth 5% of a student's final course grade.

6. Academic Integrity
   a. Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.
   b. Definition of Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one’s own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at <http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp>.
   c. Students are required to be familiar with all items they submit in fulfillment of course requirements. If in the instructor’s opinion, a student does not demonstrate sufficient familiarity with any such item, the instructor may reject the item and assign the student a score of zero (0.0) for that item.
   d. Students in this course are required to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity. If the instructor makes a finding that a student has committed an act of cheating or plagiarism in this course, that student is subject to receiving a final course grade of “F.” Moreover, a formal Report of Academic Dishonesty will be submitted to the student’s personal file with the Dean of the College of Liberal and Applied Arts.

7. Accommodations: To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to <http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/>.
8. Withheld Grades: Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Unit One: Foundations (January 15 – February 07)
• Introduction to the Concept of Religious Studies
• Exploration of the Definition of “Religion”
• Preliminary Distinctions
• PROSPECTUS FOR PAPER ONE DUE: FEBRUARY 07

Unit Two: Western Religion (February 10 – March 06)
• Judaism
• Christianity
• Islam
• PAPER ONE DUE: FEBRUARY 21
• PROSPECTUS FOR PAPER TWO DUE: FEBRUARY 28
• FIRST EXAMINATION: MARCH 04

Unit Three: Eastern Religion (March 16 – April 08)
• Hinduism
• Buddhism
• PAPER TWO DUE: MARCH 20
• PROSPECTUS FOR PAPER THREE DUE: MARCH 27

Unit Four: Integration and Rejection of Religion (April 13 – May 01)
• Pluralism
• Agnosticism and Spirituality
• Contemporary Atheism
• PAPER THREE DUE: APRIL 17
• PAPER FOUR DUE: MAY 01
• SECOND EXAMINATION: WEDNESDAY, MAY 06, 1:30 - 4:00 P.M.