

## Religious Studies 001U: World Religions Spring 2008

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Please note: I check my e-mail regularly (obsessively?) and this is an excellent way to get in touch with me if you have a quick question or if you want to make an appointment for a more substantial discussion.

### *The Course*

This course offers a historical and comparative survey of the principal beliefs and practices of the world's major religions, both Eastern and Western, ancient and contemporary. While studying each major tradition in its own right, emphasis will also be placed on those common themes and patterns that are found across the boundaries of time and space. These themes include: clergy and monastic orders, pilgrimage and holy places, sacrifice and sanctity, concepts of evil and the demonic, ideas of orthodoxy and heresy, and reactions to secularization. The course will compare and contrast the attitudes of different religions to issues involving the family and home, the status of women, and sexuality.

### *Texts*

All are in paperback, all are required

Nora Gallagher, *Things Seen and Unseen*  
New York: Vintage, 1999.  
ISBN: 0679775498

Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*  
McGraw Hill, 2006. 4th edition.  
ISBN: 0073535648

Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*  
Oxford University Press, USA, 2006. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition  
ISBN-10: 0195305035 ISBN-13: 978-0195305036

Course web page:

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/j/p/jpj1/001hmaterial.html>

### *Grading*

The grade for the course will be based on three components: two essay examinations, and a research paper (described below). Each exam is worth 25 percent, the paper 50. There will NOT be a comprehensive final exam. All the exams will be in a take-home format. There is no extra-credit work. Regular attendance and participation are of course expected as a fundamental requirement for the grade. In an Honors class of this nature, the participation element is especially important.

### *Class Policies*

Deadlines matter, and I intend to enforce them strictly. If you miss a deadline without getting an extension in advance, you get a non-negotiable grade of F on that particular exam, paper or project. Do not get in touch with me after the fact to explain why you missed an exam, unless you produce a proper medical note. Excuses must always be supported by documentation. Valid reasons include medical problems and the like.

The following are not valid reasons for an extension, so don't ask:

- \* "I have other exams that day" (so ask the other professors for the extension)
- \* "My hard drive died on me, so I couldn't print out the paper," alternatively, "The computer ate my homework" (so back up all your work regularly: options include zipdisks, CDs, or a jumpdrive).

This point about enforcing deadlines also applies fully to the various stages of the term paper project, which I view as a single process spread over most of the term. This project includes several stages, including letting me know the topic, handing in the synopsis, and completing the final draft, even though these elements do not individually carry specific grades. If you miss *any one* of these deadlines (without a legitimate excuse), then you receive an F on the entire term paper, which is 40 percent of the grade.

#### *Note about Participation*

Participation is essential to your grade. What this means in practice is that I expect you to do the readings for every class, and I will be calling on people individually through the term to comment or respond on particular texts, or issues arising from them. If you do the readings, and take a full and regular part in class discussions, then that will have a major positive impact on your grade. On the other hand, consistently not participating, not doing the readings - or repeatedly being absent from discussions - is equivalent to missing an exam or failing to do the term paper. I don't expect perfect, 100 percent, attendance, but consistent non-participation will have serious consequences. It does NOT just mean that you will receive a slightly lower grade: just like refusing to do a paper or an exam, it means that you would simply have not completed the class, and would therefore receive a grade of F for the entire course. I think it's important to spell out that expectation from the outset. If you are not prepared to do the readings and participate fully, then please drop the class now.

#### *General Note on Lectures and Materials*

Religion can be a sensitive issue in which it is easy to give offense. In this class, every effort will be made to ensure that all religious traditions are discussed with appropriate respect, and with due appreciation for the contributions which they have made to the human experience. Of necessity, though, the intellectual approach of this course is academic and critical in nature, emphasizing the insights of both history and social science. In such a context, it might well be that statements will be made - either by the instructor or particular authorities cited - that may cause offense to certain individuals. This may arise when discussing the credentials of religious leaders or the authority of scriptures. While such possible conflicts are regrettable, they are perhaps inevitable. Students are encouraged to engage freely in critical discussion about these and other issues arising from the course.

The order in which religions are discussed has no significance in terms of the importance attached to that particular creed. In other words, the course is not intended to suggest a pattern of evolution, from "primitive" to "most advanced". The order of presentation has been devised for purposes of convenience, in order to assist your understanding of cultural and intellectual patterns. And of course, the fact that the course

does not spend a great deal of time on a particular tradition is not intended to slight that religion, or to assert its lack of significance.

### **SYLLABUS OF CLASSES**

1. Jan 15

Introduction: the building blocks of religion.

2. Jan 17

Primal religions.

Discuss Molloy chapters one and two

3. Jan 22

India and Hinduism.

Discuss Molloy chapter three

4. Jan 24

Hinduism

5. Jan 29

Other Indian religions.

Discuss Molloy chapter five

6. Jan 31

Buddhism.

Discuss Molloy chapter four

7. Feb 5

Buddhism. Mahayana and Theravada.

8. Feb 7

Buddhism

9. Feb 12

Buddhism

10. Feb 14

The World of China; Confucianism.

Discuss Molloy chapter six

I NEED TO KNOW THE TOPICS OF YOUR TERM PAPERS TODAY

11. Feb 19

Taoism

12. Feb 21

Japan and Buddhism

13.Feb 26  
Zen.  
Discuss Molloy chapter seven

14.Feb 28  
EXAM ONE

15.March 4  
Monotheism The Bible and Jewish origins.  
Discuss Molloy chapter eight

16.March 6  
Judaism

MARCH 10-14: SPRING BREAK

17.March 18  
Christianity: the debate over Christian origins.  
Discuss Molloy chapter nine

18.March 20  
Development of Christianity. Orthodox and Catholic traditions

19.March 25  
The Protestant tradition

20.March 27  
Christianity past, present, future. Pentecostalism

PLEASE GIVE ME A TWO PAGE SYNOPSIS OF YOUR PROPOSED TERM PAPER,  
WITH THOUGHTS ON BIBLIOGRAPHY.

21.April 1  
Islam: Muhammad and the Quran.  
Discuss Molloy chapter ten

22.April 3  
Development of Islam.

23.April 8  
Faces of Islam: schools of thought and belief. Shi'ites.  
DISCUSS: Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*

24.April 10  
Mysticism.

25. April 15  
 Sects, cults and new religious movements. Mormons.  
 Discuss Molloy chapter 11

#### DRAFT OF TERM PAPERS DUE

26. April 17  
 Mormons

27. April 22  
 Fundamentalism and religious violence.  
 Discuss Molloy chapter 12

28. April 24  
 EXAM TWO

29. April 29  
 Discuss Gallagher, *Things Seen and Unseen*

30. May 1  
 Death and the Last Things.

*First day of final examination period:*

SUBMIT FINAL VERSIONS OF TERM PAPERS.

Please be sure to keep copies of your papers, because I will not be returning the originals. I will of course be happy to go over them with you if you wish, either later that week, or early in the following semester.

#### SELECTED UNIVERSITY POLICIES

##### *Academic Integrity Policy*

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized prior possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students (see Policies and Rules for Students, Section 49-20). Academically dishonest students may be punished with a minor penalty, typically a zero on a quiz or test, or with a major penalty such as a grade of "F" in a course. Please note that a student may not be forced to withdraw from a course for an academic integrity violation by the teacher alone. Students who are punished with major penalties may appeal the decision. Cases that are sufficiently serious to warrant disciplinary actions beyond academic sanctions may be referred by the faculty member to the Office of Judicial Affairs for further review.

##### Disability Access Statement

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in this programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.

### *The Research Paper*

I offer one OPTIONAL suggestion for the research paper in this class. I want you to go to the Palmer Museum of Art and choose either one or two art objects, which might be paintings, sculptures, coins, masks, and so on. The only restriction is that the object must be religious in nature, or have a religious theme (or what you can convince me is a religious theme). There is a huge range of potential choices here, including Hindu, African and Chinese items, as well as Jewish and Christian. Just to take one example, the rooms containing European art of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries have a lot that might be of interest. (One tip: choose something complex or detailed enough to give you enough to write on, ie don't choose just a coin portraying a Star of David, or a simple crucifix.)

I am placing no restrictions on the objects that can be used, but would strongly encourage you to explore the Asian and African items in addition to the more familiar Judaeo-Christian areas. You must tell me the object you have chosen before writing the paper, and I must approve your choice. There is no reason why two or more people should not choose the same item. Cooperate by all means, but remember that this is not meant to be a collaborative project, and people will be marked on their own individual work.

I then want you to write a paper on the object(s) based on the following questions. Some may be more or less appropriate in any given case, but your paper should at least touch on ALL the following:

1. Describe the object. Who made it, when and where, and how do we know?
2. What is its religious content? With what religious tradition is the object associated?  
Explain the object to someone who has no idea whatever of the religion in question.  
How far is it possible to understand the object without a knowledge of the religious context?
3. Did the object serve a religious function? If so, what? Was the object worshiped in its own right; was it meant to assist in meditation; did it have a ceremonial use; or what.  
Briefly, what was (is) its function? Do the ideas belong more to "high" or popular religious culture? Who paid for the object and why?
4. Does the object tell a story, and if so, what? Can we identify the source of the story in some text or sacred writing? How does the object treat the original source?
5. In this course, we will be discussing a lot of religious themes and ideas (eg sacrifice, pilgrimage, sanctity) as well as religious dimensions of issues like violence and sexuality. Which, if any, of these are relevant to understanding the object in question? How far are the ideas present here common to other religious traditions, or are they peculiar to the source in question?
6. How does the artist explore and/or build upon distinctly religious ideas? How does the artistic treatment support or detract from the religious content? Does the artistic

- treatment draw on secular traditions (that might be a tough question, but see if you can find out)?
7. What do you think about the ethical or religious dilemmas involved in keeping a holy object in a museum and displaying it like this? Is this a troubling situation? Would it trouble a person who belonged to the religious faith in question?
  8. IF you choose two objects, compare and contrast their religious meanings. If you pursue this course, the different objects must derive from two different religious traditions.

Please note. The staff at the Museum of Art are very busy, and have limited time in assisting with a project of this nature. They might be prepared to help you, but be polite and reasonable in requesting help, and give lots of notice when making requests. (Warning: the gallery attendants and guards are usually students like yourselves, and are virtually NEVER experts on the collections!)