

HRS 140, Section 1: Exploring World Religions (Fall 2009)

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Office hour: MW 1:45-2:45 (and by appointment)

REQUIRED TEXTS: *World Religions Today*, Esposito et. al (3rd edition)
The Ways of Religion, Eastman (3rd edition)

RECOMMENDED: *A Pocket Style Manual*, Hacker (any edition)

Required texts are available for purchase in the campus bookstore, and are on reserve in the library.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: Comparative inquiry into the nature of global religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam will be studied. Material and social aspects of these religions will be considered along with primary beliefs and practices. The common yearning to experience the divine and the numinous will be emphasized. **Prerequisite:** GWAR Certification before Fall 09, OR WPJ score of 80+, OR C or higher grade in ENGL 109M/W, OR C- grade in ENGL 109 M/W OR WPJ score 70/71 and ENGL 109X co-requisite. **Units:** 3.0.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: As noted in the catalog, this course is devoted to examining the religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, the Chinese religions (Daoism and Confucianism), Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will also consider, more briefly, indigenous (primal) traditions and Sikhism. We will explore the historical roots of these traditions, along with their expression in ritual and sacred text or story, and we will attempt to address the ways these traditions affect and are affected by social, economic, ethical, and political issues. The material to be covered in the course will be presented primarily through lecture and reading from your required texts, with classroom discussions and an occasional video intended to enhance your grasp of the material.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Our goal is to arrive at an intellectual understanding of these various traditions, and to develop an appreciation for the nature and variety of religious experience in the global community. We will be asking what it means to be religious, and considering the responses to that question that have been formulated over the centuries by the major religious communities of the world. Toward that end, we will need to cultivate an attitude of empathy toward our material; that is, we will try, as best we can given the limits of our own religious and/or cultural presuppositions, to put ourselves in the place of those who practice the traditions we're studying. What this means is that we shouldn't be concerned with the question of whether unfamiliar religious beliefs are "true," or whether unfamiliar religious practices "make sense." Rather, we should ask about the significance of those beliefs and practices for the people who adhere to them, so that we can come to understand how those beliefs and practices function as ways of putting a given community in touch with what it takes to be supremely important (i.e., *sacred*). In other words, we don't need to ask whether there really is a God in order to explore the ways that various people worship God, or the gods. And since many of us in this class undoubtedly worship different gods, or no god at all, it's important that all of us are willing to bracket the question of *truth* in religion in favor of questions of *meaning*. This will allow us better to understand and appreciate the diversity of human religious experience.

In addition, because this is an Advanced Study course, an important objective of the class is to improve your ability to analyze and reflect on complex issues and to write clearly and logically using standard written English. Toward that end, you are required to complete formal, out-of-class writing assignments totaling at least 5000 words over the course of the semester.

At the end of this class you should be able to:

- demonstrate a working knowledge of the academic study of religions;
- identify and differentiate the key elements of Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices that tend to characterize primal or indigenous religions, and locate those beliefs and practices within their historical and cultural contexts;
- describe the place of religions within their historical and cultural contexts; and
- employ critical reasoning skills in the study of religious traditions through expository/analytical writing assignments based on required readings and material presented in class.

PREREQUISITES: This course is introductory in nature, and no previous study of religion is required. However, since this is designated as an Advanced Study course, you must have either passed the WPE (prior to July 2009) or received the appropriate GVAR placement (as specified in the “Catalog Description” section, above).

INSTRUCTOR’S EXPECTATIONS: I respect you as students, and in return I expect you to respect me, your fellow students, and the classroom environment. This means, among other things, refraining from the following while in class: eating, sleeping, reading outside materials, having private conversations, leaving and re-entering the classroom (except in the case of an emergency), and using cell phones for any purpose, including sending text messages. In addition, and more importantly, I expect an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for other students’ opinions, and an objective and empathetic response to the material we study together. Observing these guidelines will help ensure a better learning experience for all.

If you have any special needs (learning disability, etc.), please provide me with documentation as soon as possible, so I can make every reasonable effort to accommodate you.

PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is becoming a major problem on this campus, and I will not tolerate it. You are all responsible for familiarizing yourselves with the CSUS policies regarding academic honesty, as well as with guidelines for recognizing and avoiding plagiarism. A helpful source in this regard is found at: <http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353>. ***I will return all plagiarized (unoriginal) work ungraded, and you may not be allowed to resubmit the plagiarized assignment.***

REQUIREMENTS: All students will need to:

- attend class. I will not keep track of your attendance, but the material you’ll be reading for this class is difficult, and the material covered in lectures and class discussions will be extremely important.
- complete all assigned readings by the date for which they are listed on the syllabus. Classroom discussion of the readings is an important part of this course, and you won’t be able to participate in those discussions if you’re not prepared.
- write short informal responses to assigned questions drawn from the readings
- write a series of formal papers, of increasing length, in which you respond to an assigned topic. You will have the opportunity to revise these by the end of the semester. All papers must be turned in by the due date shown on the syllabus unless other arrangements have been made with me *in advance*. **These assignments are expected to conform to accepted standards of academic usage, and to be free of errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. I recommend Diana Hacker’s *Pocket Style Manual* (available in the book store) as a good reference,**
- take 1 in-class essay exam (open notes, open book, during final exam week).

GRADING:	Informal writing	20% (combined)
	Formal writing	60% (combined; point values for individual assignments based on length)
	In-class essay	20%

Your final letter grade will be determined according to a standard distribution (i.e., 90 – 100% = A, 80–89%= B, etc.). You may ask about your status in the class at any time.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

NOTE: All reading assignments are to be completed by the date for which they are listed. *Please pay careful attention to assigned page numbers.* *WRT = World Religions Today; WoR = Ways of Religion.*

Introduction:

Monday 8/31: Introduction to course
Basic concepts and categories in religious studies

MONDAY 9/7: NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

Primal/indigenous/tribal religions

9/14: *WRT*, Ch. 2

WoR, Ch. 11 (520-26)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Explain the significance of the shaman in indigenous or primal religious traditions

Hinduism

9/21: *WRT*, Ch. 6 (pp. 301-6, 309-34)

WoR, Ch. 1 (pp. 22-53)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss the concepts of karma and caste, and explain how they are interrelated.

FIRST FORMAL PAPER TOPIC ASSIGNED.

9/28: *WRT*, Ch. 6 (pp. 306-9, 335-85)

WoR, Ch. 1 (pp. 16-22, 65-74)

Informal writing topic, due TODAY: Discuss the importance of puja in modern Hinduism.

FIRST FORMAL PAPER DUE.

Buddhism

10/5: *WRT*, Ch. 7 (pp. 389-92, 396-430)

WoR, Ch. 2 (pp. 91-105)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Explain the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

SECOND FORMAL PAPER TOPIC ASSIGNED.

10/12: *WRT*, Ch. 7 (pp. 346-48, 380-412)

WoR, Ch. 2 (pp. 82-90, 110-29)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss the significance of the bodhisattva.

SECOND FORMAL PAPER DUE.

Chinese religions

10/19: *WRT*, Ch. 8 (pp. 471-93)

WoR, Ch. 4 (pp. 176-86, 201-06) **AND** Ch. 5 (pp. 226-33, 240-46)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss how the Dao (Tao) is understood in Daoism and Confucianism.

Judaism

10/26: *WRT*, Ch. 3 (pp. 75-8, 84-114)

WoR, Ch. 7 (pp. 301-18)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss the impact of the prophets on the formation of Judaism.

THIRD FORMAL PAPER TOPIC ASSIGNED.

11/2: *WRT*, Ch. 3 (pp. 78-84, 114-43)

WoR, Ch. 7 (pp. 293-300, 326-35)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss one way that the Holocaust has had a lasting effect on Jewish thought.

THIRD FORMAL PAPER DUE.

Christianity

11/9: *WRT*, Ch. 4 (pp. 147-52, 157-80)

WoR, Ch. 8 (pp. 339-64)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Explain the doctrine of the Trinity.

FOURTH FORMAL PAPER TOPIC ASSIGNED.

11/16: *WRT*, Ch. 4 (pp. 152-6, 181-209)

WoR, Ch. 8 (pp. 364-80)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss one key idea of the Protestant Reformation.

FOURTH FORMAL PAPER DUE.

Islam

11/23: *WRT*, Ch. 5 (pp. 213-19, 223-59)

WoR, Ch. 9 (pp. 406-21)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss the importance of the Five Pillars of Islam.

FIFTH FORMAL PAPER TOPIC ASSIGNED.

11/30: *WRT*, Ch. 5 (pp. 220-2, 259-96)

WoR, Ch. 9 (pp. 428-35)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Discuss the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism.

FIFTH FORMAL PAPER DUE.

Sikhism/ Conclusion

12/7: *WRT*, review Ch. 6 (331-4, 340-1); also *WRT*, Ch. 9 (all)

Informal writing topic due TODAY: Explain the concept of civil religion.

FINAL (IN-CLASS ESSAY)

12/14, 5:15-7:15 PM

Bring at least one large blue book.