

HRS 140: Exploring World Religions (Spring 2007)

Instructor: Poxon

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Office hour: Tuesday 4:00-5:00 and Thursday 9:15-10:15 (and by appointment)

TEXTS: *World Religions Today*, Esposito et. al
The Ways of Religion, Eastman
A Pocket Style Manual, Hacker (recommended)

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: Passing score on the WPE. **This course counts toward GE Area C3, writing intensive.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION: As noted in the catalog, this course is devoted to examining the religious worldviews 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, their expression in ritual and sacred text or story, and we will attempt to address the ways these traditions, in their contemporary forms, 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, as well as occasional handouts taken from a variety of sources), 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, the attitude toward our material that we will need to cultivate is one of empathy. 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. That is, 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 around 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; 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 passed the Writing Proficiency Exam before enrolling.**

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 texting. 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.

Also, 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 work ungraded, and you will 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 explanations you'll receive in class, as well as the discussions you'll participate in, 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 2 take-home essays, each consisting of approximately 2500 words, on assigned topics. You will be allowed to revise these papers after they are graded. All papers must be turned in by the due date shown on the syllabus unless other arrangements have been made with me *in advance*. **Please note that since this is an Advanced Study course, I**

will evaluate these assignments for their form and mechanics as well as their content. I recommend Diana Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual* (available in the book store) as a good reference on points of grammar, punctuation, usage, and citation of sources.

- take a final exam, consisting of an in-class essay (open notes, open book, on a pre-assigned topic).

GRADING:	Take-home essays	800 points possible (400 points each, X2)
	In-class essay	<u>200 points possible</u>
	Total	1000 points possible for course

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS: All reading assignments should be completed by the date for which they are listed. *Please pay careful attention to assigned page numbers.*

Introduction:

- January 30: Introduction to course
- February 1: Basic concepts and categories in religious studies
WRT, Ch. 1

Primal religions

- February 6: *WRT*, Ch. 2
- February 8: *WoR*, Ch. 10 (475-84) and Ch. 11 (520-26)

Hinduism

- February 13: *WRT*, Ch. 6 (pp. 271-76, 279-97)
- February 15: *WoR*, Ch. 1 (pp. 13-53)
- February 20: *WRT*, Ch. 6 (pp. 276-79, 301-31, 334-37)
- February 22: *WoR*, Ch. 1 (pp. 53-8; 65-74)

Sikhism

- February 27: *WRT*, Ch. 6 (297-301, 331-33); videos
- March 1: Guest lecture

Buddhism

- March 6: *WRT*, Ch. 7 (pp. 341-44, 349-80)
- March 8: *WoR*, Ch. 2 (pp. 77-105)
- March 13: *WRT*, Ch. 7 (pp. 346-48, 380-412)
- March 15: *WoR*, Ch. 2 (pp. 110-29)

Chinese religions

- March 20: *WRT*, Ch. 8 (material on China only)
- March 22: *WoR*, Ch. 4 (pp. 163-75, 201-06) **AND** Ch. 5 (pp. 215-26, 240-46)

SPRING BREAK: March 26-30

Judaism

- April 3: *WRT*, Ch. 3 (pp. 65-8, 74-102)
- April 5: *WoR*, Ch. 7 (pp. 287-93, 301-13)
- April 10: *WRT*, Ch. 3 (pp. 68-74, 102-28)
- April 12: *WoR*, Ch. 7 (pp. 293-300, 313-18, 326-35)

Christianity

- April 17: *WRT*, Ch. 4 (pp. 131-36, 140-64)
- April 19: *WoR*, Ch. 8 (pp. 337-64)
- April 24: *WRT*, Ch. 4 (pp. 136-40, 164-92)
- April 26: *WoR*, Ch. 8 (pp. 364-86)

Islam

- May 1: *WRT*, Ch. 5 (pp. 195-201, 204-35)
- May 3: *WoR*, Ch. 9 (pp. 397-421, 428-35)
- May 8: *WRT*, Ch. 5 (pp. 201-04, 235-67)
- May 10: *WoR*, Ch. 9 (pp. 422-28, 435-44)

Conclusion

- May 15: *WRT*, Ch. 9 (all)
- May 17: Wrap up and review for final

FINAL (IN-CLASS ESSAY)

- May 24, 10:15-12:15