Exploring World Religions

**Catalogue Course Description:** This course is a 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.

**Further Details:** In this class we will approach the study of religion with three main goals in mind: 1) To learn the beliefs, rituals, and practices of the world’s religions, 2) to question how these traditions are similar and disparate, and 3) to become scholars of religion, developing literacy in how the scholarly community studies and speaks about religion, and asking the question - “what does religion mean?” This is no easy feat, but it can be fun and creative, as well as challenging. Leave your preconceptions at the door. You are not asked to abandon your own faith tradition, but rather to explore the questions that religious scholars have been asking for centuries; big and small. We will compare and contrast religious traditions, make grand statements about what they have in common, and then shoot them down to resurrect new ones the next day. In this endeavor we are always aware that neither the general nor the specific is confined to a single worldview or set of rules. No matter how easy it is to state categorically that religion X is monolithic, as scholars of religion we will resist that temptation and search for more complete and “interesting” answers.

**Class Structure:**

There is no set structure to class and so at times it will be lecture based and at times discussion based. However, whenever possible our stress will be on discussion and group work. To the extent that there is a lecture, it will focus on subject matter relevant to the reading, filling in gaps and adding sources as necessary. On occasion I will bring in audio or video to augment our discussion. If there are pressing questions, I encourage you to ask them, and I will do my best to address and clarify them during the course of class.
Goals of Class Discussions:

Class is an important opportunity to discuss the week’s themes and readings. It is a chance for us to think critically and question some of our own assumptions. We will aim at a thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion. As we go through the semester I want you to develop a sense of responsibility for class discussion, making sure it is robust, on-topic and well thought out. We will cover a lot of material each week and you should approach the readings with the goal of allowing certain sources to speak to you, challenge you, and inspire further reflection. Our discussions will be shaped, to a significant degree by the questions and ideas you bring to class. While we will generally stick to the course outline, I may change readings or subject matter to better address your concerns or interests.

Readings:

On average you will have 40 pages of reading per week. I have done my best to provide you with texts that tell a story, while at the same time building an understanding of how religions are studied and imagined by scholars and practitioners. The relaying of stories is an important part of religion, and I hope that we can replicate some of that experience through the texts I have chosen.

While reading an assignment, keep asking:

What does the author mean by that?  
Why should I believe that?  
So what?

These are the same questions that we will be asking in class, and that I will ask when reading your work. When you find something in the readings that seems vulnerable to criticism, try to formulate the criticism precisely, but then try to imagine how the author might want to respond to your question or objection.

* - Please be aware that the reading for any given week may change, and I will inform you of these changes in advance.
Class Requirements & Grading:

Participation 5%: Participation means actively and thoughtfully contributing to the conversation, as well as actively listening and respecting your classmates’ input. Articulating ideas through participation will also help you to formulate ideas, take exams, and write your essays; as well as reinforce the lectures and reading material. Your participation will also indicate your knowledge of the week’s readings. Active and thoughtful participation is one way to bring up your grade.

Bi-Weekly Reading Reflections 10%: Once every 2 weeks you will write a reflection on an assigned reading (approximately 250 words) to be uploaded to SacCT by 9PM the night before class. We will discuss the reading and your reflections in class. To receive an A on any given reflection you must demonstrate a clear engagement with the subject matter (including quoting and explaining the reading).

Midterm 15% (October 21): This is an in-class exam that will consist of a combination of multiple choice, true/false questions & short essays.

Primary Source papers 20%, 2 for 10% each (Oct. 25 & Nov. 22): These are 4-6 page papers, one for each half of the course. In these papers you will choose one of the three religions that we will cover in that portion of the course and write an analysis of a primary source reading. I will provide you with a guide to writing papers (Paper due dates: 1- October 25 @11:59PM & 2- November 22 @ 11:59PM to be uploaded to Blackboard). Late Essays: Essays turned in after the deadline will lose 1/3 grade (A to A-; A- to B+; B+ to B, etc.) for each 24-hour period late up until the end of the second day. Papers turned in any time after the second day will lose 1 full letter grade (A to B; A- to B-, etc.)

Final Project Paper & Outline 25% (Dec. 2 & 11): This is a 9-11 page paper on a primary source of your choosing. Outline is worth 3% of your total grade. Upload proposals to SacCT on December 1 by 9PM & bring 6 copies to class on December 2. The paper is due Friday December 11 @ 11:59PM by upload to Blackboard). I will provide you with a guide to writing papers Late Essays: Essays turned in after the deadline will lose 1/3 grade (A to A-; A- to B+; B+ to B, etc.) for each 24-hour period late up until the end of the second day. Papers turned in any time after the second day will lose 1 full letter grade (A to B; A- to B-, etc.)

Final 25% (December 16): The final exam will be cumulative and include multiple choice & true/false questions, short essays, a long essay, and a map quiz. The exam date is Tuesday, December 16 5:15-7:15PM.
Explanation of Grading: The following, partially taken from the CSUS website (http://catalog.csus.edu/12-14/first%20100%20pages/academicpolicies.html), helps to define what each letter means:

**A** - *Excellent* achievement of the course objectives. In addition to being clearly and significantly above the requirements, work exhibited is of an independent, creative, and contributory nature.

**B** – *Very Good* achievement of the course objectives. The performance is clearly and significantly above the satisfactory fulfillment of course requirements.

**C** - *Satisfactory* achievement of the course objectives. A C shows evidence of effort, but only modest success in meeting the course expectations.

**D** - *Unsatisfactory* achievement of course objectives, yet achievement of a sufficient proportion of the objectives so that it is not necessary to repeat the course unless required to do so by the academic department. A D is minimally acceptable in the sense that it barely counts as a completion

**F** - *Unsatisfactory* achievement of course objectives to an extent that the student must repeat the course to receive credit.

**Plus** - Shows effort and achievement that goes somewhat beyond the standards expressed above for each letter category.

**Minus** - Shows effort and achievement that is somewhat below the category’s standards.

**Grading Scale:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement on Academic Integrity
Plagiarism and academic dishonesty constitute serious offenses that undermine your education and violate Sacramento State’s policy on academic integrity and may result in penalties ranging from a lowered grade to course failure. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and must be completed specifically for this class. You may not turn in work previously written for another class. Any use of another’s work without proper attribution constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism ranges from copying someone else’s work word for word, to rewriting someone else’s work with only minor word changes (mosaic plagiarism), to summarizing work without acknowledging the source. For more information see the library’s page on plagiarism: (http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353)

Expectations:

Attendance: I will not be taking attendance, but excessive lateness and/or absence will negatively affect your performance on exams as well as the participation component of your grade.

Preparation: Being prepared means you have read and taken notes on all of the week’s required reading assignments, have arrived to class with all of the relevant texts, and have brought questions and ideas to class that are important to you, prepared to discuss a range of issues.

Laptops & Cell Phones: Laptops and cell phones are not allowed during class. We should be listening and commenting, keeping a good focus on the direction of the conversation. As we all know, laptops and cell phones can be a serious means of distraction for you and those around you.

Office Hours: Outside of our weekly meetings, I will be available to address any questions, concerns or suggestions you have by e-mail and during office hours. I will do my best to respond to your e-mails within 24 hours, and I encourage you to meet with me to discuss questions you might have about the course material or your broader interests.

Accommodations for Recognized Disabilities: I will make every effort to accommodate your needs as they apply to the above policies. Please come see me in the event that you will need special accommodation so that we can figure out an acceptable solution. I’m looking forward to a rich and exciting semester.
Course Books & Resources:


   This book will provide us with a fundamental understanding of the six religious traditions that we will explore this semester. We will begin each week by reading a chapter on that week’s religious tradition. *God is Not One* is a very approachable text and in it Prothero argues that all religions are not simply different paths to the same God. *Stephen Prothero* is a professor in the Department of Religion at Boston University.


   *Studying Religion* is a text that combines case studies and comparative examples to illuminate concepts in the study of religion and to extend our understanding beyond the six major traditions that this course centers around. *Gary E. Kessler* received his Ph.D. from Columbia University where he studied philosophy and comparative religions. For 30 years he taught at California State University, Bakersfield where he is now Professor Emeritus.

3) Accompanying texts and videos will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.
Course Outline

Part I: Introduction: What is religion and how is religious studies taught?
In this, our first week, we will start by asking what is religion? How has it been defined and what definition, if any, would you choose? What do scholars mean when they say “World” or “Great” religions? How do we understand the terms pagan, monotheistic, polytheistic? We will also ask questions about the field of religious studies. While reading, ask yourself: “What are the challenges to studying religion?”

Sept. 2:
Introductions

Part II: Judaism

Sept. 9 Reading:
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Ch. 2
*God is Not One*, Ch. 7

Sept. 16 Reading & Film:
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Ch. 4

See Blackboard for:
*The Quarrel*, 1hour 28 minutes & Companion Question Sheet

Part III: Christianity

Sept. 23 Reading:
*God is Not One*, Ch. 2

Sept. 30 Reading:
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Ch. 6

See Blackboard for:
- Reza Aslan, *Zealot*, xvii-xxx, 183-216
Part IV: Islam

Oct. 7 Reading:
*God is Not One, Ch. 1*

Oct. 14 Reading:
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases, Ch. 10*

See Blackboard for:
*Reading on the Hijab in Islam & Qur’anic Excerpts - TBA*
*Kecia Ali, Wedding Ceremony*

October 21:

1st half of class 1:15Min:

**In-class Midterm Exam (Green Books Required)**

2nd Half of Class:

Part V: Chinese Religions:
*God is Not One, Ch. 3*

**Sunday, October 25 @ 11:59PM: First Paper Due by Upload to Blackboard**

October 28 Reading: Daoism
- *God is Not One, Ch. 8*
- *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases, Ch. 5*

Part VI: Hinduism

Nov. 4 Reading:
- *God is Not One, Ch. 8*
- *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases, Ch. 8*

See Blackboard for:
- Readings from the *Bhagavad Gita* (pages TBA)

Nov. 11:

** No Class - Veterans Day**
Part VII: Buddhism

Nov. 18 Reading:
- *God is Not One*, Ch. 5

**Sunday, November 22 @ 11:59PM: Second Paper Due by Upload to Blackboard**

Nov. 25 Reading:
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Ch. 7

Dec. 2
Final Paper Proposals
*Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Ch. 11

Dec. 9
- *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple*, 1 hour 25 minutes & Companion Question Sheet & Companion Article

**Friday December 11 @ 11:59PM: Final Paper Due by Upload to Blackboard**

Final Exam Wednesday, Dec. 16 5:15-7:15PM (Green Books Required)