

THE HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

RELIGION 100 - SECTION 001

Spring, 2008

Tues, Thurs 10:30-11:45 AM
Robinson A248
Office hours: Tuesday, 3:30 - 4:20 PM
Thursday, 12:00 - 1:00 PM

Whitney Shiner
Campus phone: 3-4327
Office: Robinson B446
E-mail: wshiner@gmu.edu

Purpose

This course is designed with two principle goals in mind:

(1) The world we live in has become increasingly diverse in terms of the numbers and types of religious beliefs and practices with which we come into contact or that otherwise affect our lives. This course is designed to give you a sympathetic understanding of some of the many religions practiced in this country and the world so you may better understand the people in your communities and the events in the world.

(2) Through their religions the people of various cultures have sought to answer many of the most basic questions about the nature of the world, what it means to be human, what the goal of our lives should be, how to attain happiness, and how to live our lives and order our societies.

This course is not designed to provide you with all the answers to the important questions raised by the religions of the world, but it will provide you with material to help you to pursue answers that are more satisfying to yourself and to understand the answers of others that may be different from your own.

Course Outline

This course will concentrate on three different models for approaching the unseen world.

(1) The first, which might be called nature oriented religion, sees a number of spiritual powers in the natural world as an expression of God and stresses the importance of aligning oneself correctly with those spiritual powers in one's own spiritual development. That approach will be examined through the Yoruba religion from the Nigerian region of West Africa and the religion of the Lakota nation of Native Americans.

(2) The second approach, which may be characterized as mystical, stresses the oneness of all being and the importance of developing an awareness of the unity between oneself and the sacred ground of being. We shall study Hinduism and Buddhism as examples of the mystical approach.

(3) The third model stresses a single God who alone is worthy of worship and the importance of aligning oneself with the will and purpose of that single God. The three monotheistic religions of the western world, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are representatives of that approach.

The Study of the Religion in a State University

Many students taking this course may consider some of the material covered in this course as normative for their own beliefs and practices. You should be aware that the study of religious texts in a state university such as George Mason is quite different from the religious use of the same texts in religious communities. For the purpose of this course, all religions are created equal. None of the religious texts or practices with which we deal will be given a privileged position as the revealed source of the truth about God and humanity or the standard of proper behavior. We will treat the texts as human creations written to address ancient audiences whose experiences and world views were considerably different from our own. These texts are primarily concerned with religious issues, but we will treat them as expressions of the religious beliefs of their ancient writers and audiences, not as expressions of religious truth directly applicable to the present day.

This approach makes no claim for or against any of the wide variety of religious understandings held by various groups. It makes no claim for or against the inspiration or value of any texts as a guide to belief or behavior today. It is left up to each student to make her or his evaluation of those issues.

Required texts

Mary Pat Fisher, Living Religions, 5th ed. (Earlier editions are acceptable)
Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks
Readings on e-reserve

Texts are available at the campus bookstore.

Course requirements

CLASS PARTICIPATION: Attendance at lectures and thoughtful participation in discussions
READINGS. All assigned readings should be done before class to aid you in understanding and participating in the discussion. In addition to readings listed in the syllabus, additional short readings may be assigned from time to time

MIDTERM EXAM, consisting of comprehensive essay question(s) and short answer questions or identifications.

PAPER.

FINAL EXAM, consisting of a combination of comprehensive essay question(s) and short answer questions or identifications.

Class etiquette

Come to class on time so class may start promptly.

Turn off cell phone in class.

Be respectful of the ideas and religious convictions of others.

Examination Make-up Policy

Students must take exams on assigned days at the scheduled times. If this is impossible due to serious illness or death in the family notify the instructor as far in advance as possible. Make-ups may be allowed for other unavoidable emergencies on a case to case basis.

Evaluation Of Student Work

Class participation: 5%

Paper: 30%

Midterm exam counts 30%

Final counts 35%.

Participation in discussion will be considered in borderline cases.

Grading scale on tests is 90 -100 = A, 80 - 89.9 = B, etc. 88 - 89.5 = B+, 80 - 82 = B-, etc.

Papers grades are assigned numbers as B+ = 88, B = 85, B- = 82, etc.

I do not give A+ or C- for final grades.

Grading criteria for the paper and oral presentation will be presented with those assignments. Tests will include short answer identifications and essay questions.

Short answer questions are graded in terms of accuracy, relevance, and completeness. For example, if I ask for an identification of circumcision, I am not interested in how to perform one. You need to explain its religious significance.

Essay questions are graded for the amount of information you include (that is **not** necessarily the same as length), how well you seem to understand the information, and how well you organize the information. Incorrect information will reduce your grade, but you are generally better off to include information which you think is correct, even if you are unsure. In general, I do not grade spelling and punctuation on tests, but correct spelling of religious terms will help your grade.

HONOR CODE

Thou shalt not cheat.

Thou shalt not try to cheat.

Thou shalt not plagiarize.

Thou shalt not lie about matters dealing with academic work.

Thou shalt not steal (if it relates to academic work).

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit. You must give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient. Notes referring to printed works must include page numbers or other common ways of directing the reader to the material. For example, references to the Bible should be made by chapter and verse, not page number. Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions for this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been termed common knowledge. Common knowledge in this class includes anything that you should have learned from class lectures or reading the textbook. To assist your readers, you should provide a citation for any piece of information you think your readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that you will never be guilty of plagiarism. (Statement adapted from one composed by the English Department at George Mason University)

HONOR CODE ENFORCEMENT

Eternal damnation to the fiery pits of hell where the demons of each religion will take turns in tormenting you. In addition, you will receive a zero for that assignment and will be sent to the honor committee. The professor checks suspicious looking papers and tests.

ADDING AND DROPPING CLASSES

The last day to add classes is Tuesday, February 6. Our department does not tolerate exceptions to this. The absolute last day to drop class is Friday, February 23.

CLASS SCHEDULE & READINGS

Subject to Change

January 22	Introduction
January 24	Religious World View Reading □ Fisher, Chapter 1
January 29	Religious World View
January 31	An African Religion: the Yoruba Reading: Fisher: Chapter 2 Electronic Reserve: □Religious World View of the Yoruba□ Electronic Reserve: □Communicating with the Divine: Prayer, Fellowship, and Sacrifice□
February 5	The Yoruba
February 7	The Yoruba
February 12	Native American: the Lakota Reading □ Fisher, Chapter 2 Reading: Black Elk Speaks, Chapters 1-3, 13-18, 20-24
February 14	The Lakota
February 19	The Lakota
February 21	The Lakota
February 26	Hinduism Fisher: Chapter 3 Hinduism
February 28	Midterm
March 4	Hinduism
March 6	Hinduism
March 11 - 13	Spring Break
March 18	Hinduism E-reserves: Krishna and the Gopis
March 20	Hinduism Film: Water
March 25	Buddhism Fisher, Chapter 5: Buddhism

March 27	Buddhism
April 1	Buddhism
April 3	Judaism Fisher, Chapter 9: Judaism
April 8	Judaism
April 10	E-reserves: Neusner: The Myth of a Common Tradition
April 15 Paper Due	Christianity Fisher, Chapter 10: Christianity
April 17	Christianity
April 22	Bible and Slavery E-reserve: Noll
April 24	Islam Fisher, Chapter 11: Islam
April 29	Islam
May 1	Jihad E-reserve
May 8 10:30 - 1:15	Final Exam