

RELS 1010 – Introduction to Religious Studies

Utah State University

Fall 2015

Instructor: Dr. Ravi M. Gupta

Office Hours (Old Main 323J): Tuesdays, 1:00 – 2:00 PM; Thursdays, 12:00 – 1:00 PM

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Ms. Tolman will also hold a study session before each exam. Times and location TBD.

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Practitioners of every major living religion of the world are our neighbors right here in Utah. One can hardly read the newspaper, watch the evening news, or surf the Internet without encountering the influence of religion in our lives. Some of the most powerful forces for positive change and stability in the world are religiously motivated, as are masterpieces of architecture, music, and the arts. At the same time, religion plays a dominant role in some of the world's worst situations of tension and violence. Despite the tremendous reach of religions, they are often misunderstood. This course will introduce students to the history, doctrine, ethics, and ritual of the major living religions. We will try to see the world through the eyes of each tradition, question unexamined assumptions, and thus connect our learning to wider personal and social concerns.

With such a wide variety of traditions to cover, we will naturally be limited in how deeply we can explore each. Nevertheless, we will think critically about key issues in the study of religions. What are the important texts, doctrines and practices in each tradition, and who are the important thinkers? What ways of being religious do we find across different cultures? How do religious traditions develop over time and yet maintain continuity? How do practitioners express themselves through ritual, pilgrimage, and the arts? What role do social institutions play in the spread of these traditions? How do practitioners understand their own tradition and how are they perceived by others?

In order to encourage active learning, we will use a variety of media, including music, video, in-class discussions, and site visits.

Learning Objectives

Students who complete this course should be able to:

1. demonstrate literacy concerning the major religions of the world
2. understand the relationship between religion and culture, and think critically about the influence of religious value systems on individuals and societies
3. read and analyze the sacred texts of different religious traditions
4. possess the tools needed to pursue advanced study in religion or related fields

Requirements

There are a total of 1000 points possible in this course, allocated in the following way:

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is mandatory. You get 4 “free” absences for things like travel, sports, family events, common illnesses, etc. If you have more than 4 absences, 100 points will be deducted from your final grade. Chronic tardiness is not acceptable. It is your responsibility to make sure that your presence has been marked at each class. (If you attend a different section of RELS 1010 than your own, you will still be marked absent.) For medical emergencies or chronic conditions that require extended absences, please bring a doctor’s note and together we will make a plan for the semester. All queries regarding attendance should be addressed to Ms. Aja Tolman.

A very important part of learning is articulating your thoughts by asking relevant questions and making insightful comments in class. This will help your comprehension of the material and also help your classmates. Your regular and thoughtful engagement in class is highly encouraged.

Site Visit and Analysis (200 points)

Students should visit a place of worship and write an essay about your observations. You should choose a place of worship that belongs to a religious tradition that you or your family do not practice. (Another denomination of the same religion does not qualify.) On Canvas, you will find a list of sacred spaces in the region and their contact information. You should check their websites to identify appropriate times to visit. Before you go, you should “sign up” on Canvas by writing down the place and time you plan to visit. This is especially important if you are planning to visit the Logan Islamic Center, since they can only host 15 students on any given week. You do not have to choose a place of worship from my list, as long as you write down your plans on Canvas. (For example, if you are from out of state, you are welcome to visit a place of worship in your city when you go home over Fall Break.)

Your essay should not simply be a report of the visit: “first we took off our shoes, then . . .” Rather, you should organize your essay around one or two themes that struck you during your visit and provide an in-depth analysis. There are many things you might focus on—a particular ritual that you observed, the various functions served by the temple, the

philosophical viewpoint of the priests or congregation, and so on. You should connect your observations with what we have studied in class or your own life experiences. Please read the detailed guidelines on Canvas for tips about how to dress, what to look for, etc. The essay should be well-organized, with a clear flow of reasoning, and utilize perfect English. Put the date, time, and place of your visit at the top of the first page. Your essay should be at least 4 pages long and no more than 5 pages, double spaced, with 12 point font and 1 inch margins. You should submit your essay on Canvas, where it will be checked for plagiarism.

Response Papers (200 points total)

Approximately every other week, you will write a response to your primary source reading (the Fieser textbook). Every response paper should have two clearly labeled parts:

- 1) A one-page summary of that week's reading from Fieser. Your summary should highlight the major themes, ideas, or stories found in the Fieser reading for that week.
- 2) A one-page response to the reading. You do not have to respond to everything in that week's reading. Instead, choose one passage from the reading so that you can respond to it with some depth. Here are some questions you might think about while formulating your response:
 - How does this passage relate to my past learning or life experiences? How does it change your preconceived notions about this religion?
 - How does this passage compare with other readings from this chapter?
 - Why do you think this is an important topic for practitioners of this religious tradition?
 - How does this passage relate to what you have heard in class?

You are welcome to critically analyze or disagree with the readings, but you should not be disrespectful. Try to be specific in your thoughts, and avoid generalities.

Your response paper should be 2 double-spaced typed pages, with 12 point font and 1-inch margins. The quality of English (grammar, proofreading, organization, etc.) will play a major role in how I grade your response, so make sure you write well. A writing guide by Professor Mark Damen can be found at <http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/WritingGuide/00intro.htm>. You are welcome to use outside sources, but you do not have to. If you do, then make sure you give the full bibliographic reference(s). The bibliography does not count toward the 2 page limit. You should submit your response papers on Canvas, where they will be checked for plagiarism.

There are a total of 8 response papers, of which you only need to do 6. Because you get to skip 2 papers, there will be no makeup papers and no late submissions will be accepted. If you submit only 5 papers, you will automatically lose 100 points. If you submit only 4 papers, you will automatically lose all 200 points.

Grading will be done as follows: Every response paper you submit (which meets the basic guidelines described above) will earn you 10 points, for a total of 60 points during the semester, just for submitting the response papers.

I will grade 3 of the 6 papers you submit. I will definitely grade the first paper you submit. On your first paper, you can earn up to 40 additional points, depending on how well you do. You should carefully study the comments/corrections you receive on the first paper, since this will help you improve your performance on future papers. After this, I will choose 2 papers randomly at the *end of the semester* to grade. On each of these 2 papers, you can earn an additional 50 points each. Because I will choose the 2 papers randomly at the end of the semester, be sure to do your best on all of them.

Exams (200 points each)

There will be two midterm exams and a final exam, each worth 200 points. The exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer questions, and vocabulary definitions. You will be responsible for all the material covered in class lectures as well as your Molloy textbook. (You are not responsible for the Fieser textbook on exams.) The lecture material does not repeat information from the textbooks, so it is important to take good notes in class. A list of non-English words will be provided as a study aid before each exam. None of the exams will be cumulative. No make-up exams will be given, except in cases of documented hospitalization or documented serious illness in the immediate family.

Evaluation

Total points:

930 – 1000	A	730 – 769	C
900 – 929	A-	700 – 729	C-
870 – 899	B+	670 – 699	D+
830 – 869	B	630 – 669	D
800 – 829	B-	600 – 620	D-
770 – 799	C+	599 or less	F

Textbooks

Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 6th edition (McGraw-Hill).

Fieser, James and John Powers. *Scriptures of the World's Religions*. 5th edition (McGraw-Hill).

All chapter and page numbers are assigned from the editions listed above. If you use different editions, you are responsible for checking for differences in page numbers and content.

Tentative Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1 (Sep 1, 3)

The Nature of Religion

Reading: Molloy, chapter 1

Weeks 2 & 3 (Sept 8, 10, 15, 17)

Hinduism

Reading: Molloy, chapter 3 and Fieser, pp. 21 – 34

Response Paper #1 (Hinduism) due Sept 17 at 11:59pm

Weeks 4 & 5 (Sept 22, 24, 29, Oct 1)

Buddhism

Reading: Molloy, chapter 4 and Fieser, 88 - 119

Response Paper #2 (Buddhism) due Sept 29

First Exam: October 1

Week 6 (Sept 6, Oct 8)

Jainism

Reading: Molloy, chapter 5, and Fieser, 66 – 76

Response Paper #3 (Jainism) due Oct 8

Weeks 7 & 8 (Oct 13, 20, 22)

No class Oct 15 (Friday Class Schedule)

Sikhism

Reading: Molloy, chapter 5, and Fieser, 145 – 155

Response Paper #4 (Sikhism) due Oct 22

Week 9 (Oct 27, 29)

Chinese Traditions

Reading: Molloy, chapter 6 and Fieser, 193 – 211

Response Paper #5 (Daoism) due Oct 29

Week 10 (Nov 3, 5)

Second Exam: November 3

Judaism

Reading: Molloy, chapter 8 and Fieser 282 – 294 and 325 - 334

Response Paper #6 (Judaism) due Nov 6

Weeks 11 & 12 (Nov 10, 12, 17, 19)

Christianity

Reading: Molloy, chapter 9 and Fieser 355 – 381 and 394 – 418

Response Paper #7 (Christianity) due Nov 19

No class Nov 24 – Professor at conference

No class Nov 26 – Thanksgiving Break

Weeks 13 & 14 – (Dec 1, 3, 8, 10)

Islam

Reading: Molloy, chapter 10 and Fieser, 441 – 483

Site visit paper due December 3 at 11:59 PM

Response Paper #8 (Islam) due Dec 10

Final Exam:

Thursday, December 17 at 9:30 AM.