

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
RS 100 – Fall 2017**

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Office Hours: T – R: 8-9 A.M.; 11-12 Noon

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:  
(GE-C: 3 or GE-R: S2)**

This course covers the objectives for “RS 100” as stated in the CSUN Catalog ([www.csun.edu/catalog/religiousstudies.html](http://www.csun.edu/catalog/religiousstudies.html)). It also fulfills a General Education requirement in the Humanities. Courses in this category help students understand the history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literature, religions and philosophy. Religious Studies courses provide students with the tools to critically examine and reflect upon the search for religious meanings, values, expressions, and experiences. These important course objectives and “Student Learning Outcomes” (see below) are divided into three five weeks segments with a midterm at the end of each. PART 1). *Methodological Problems and Solutions in the Study of Religion(s)*. PART 2). *The Elements of Religion and Contemporary Religious Issues*. PART 3). *Examples of a Historical-Contextual Study of Religions—Five Religious Traditions*.

**PART I: Problems in the Study of Religion/s.** A survey of modern scholarship’s (18<sup>th</sup> century until the present) attempt to understand and explain religious phenomena. We will consider these major problems in the academic study of religion: What is/are religion/religions? Why is it crucial to understand history, politics, economics, societies, cultures, and our modern world? What is the best *scientific-objective* method to study religion? What are the crucial differences between a *descriptive-academic* approach to religion and a *normative-faith* approach? What questionable or false presuppositions should we avoid when studying religion? How can we find a working definition of religion and religions?

**PART II: Elements of Religions and Contemporary Religious Issues.** We will examine several different elements found in religious traditions with discussions on myth, ritual, symbols, sacred places, “Ultimate Reality,” and other symbolic expressions embedded in all human cultures. During this segment we will also analyze contemporary religious movements and phenomena with topics such as religion and science, secularization theory, religion and violence, religion and gender, religion and politics, Pop Culture, new religious movements and religious hybridity; including the *new Atheisms*.

**PART III. Examples of How to Study Religions.** We will study the basic historical developments, diverse social-cultural environments, and *contents* of five major religious traditions in *context*—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam—practicing our descriptive, academic, historical/social-scientific methods.

The course will explore questions such as: Are all religions the same? Is religion simply based on ignorance and hallucination; or evolution (Computational theory and Evolutionary

Psychology)? What is the nature of religious experience? Is it different from other types of “special” human experiences? What is the relationship between religion and modern world views? Is religion fading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Secularization Theories)?

By examining the central role that religion has played in human cultures around the world, comparing their different views of life and critically reflecting upon our “western” notions about the meaning of existence, students also have an opportunity to examine their personal questions about spirituality and authenticity. This course does not promote religion or spirituality—but it does offer a structured, academic context to widen and enrich students’ university learning experience by reflecting on one’s own quest for understanding, authenticity and meaning.

#### **RS 100 Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students will be able to recognize and to articulate (orally and in writing) the difference between an academic approach to religion and a personal, devotional approach.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate a *basic level of proficiency* in recognizing the major contributors to the modern study of religion and their models/theories for the study of religion.
3. Students will be able to understand the following terms in their conventional, popular usage, and then discuss the variety of ways that religious studies scholars have critiqued, expanded, or problematized these: religion, religions, myth, ritual, symbol, philosophy, subjectivity contrasted with objectivity, secular/secularization, cult, sect, mysticism, theism, atheism, polytheism, monotheism, spirituality, magic, paganism, canon, religious violence, post-colonialism, process thought, syncretism and hybridity, and individualistic compared to community-based religions.
4. Students will be able to explain and give basic examples of the social function of religion with regard to gender.
5. Students will be able to recognize religiosity in an aspect of modern culture such as different forms of media, art, music, films, politics, sports, and the public discourse on science.
6. Students will be able to demonstrate a *basic level of proficiency* in describing two specific religious traditions (perhaps one from North America, one outside of it), including their historical development, major beliefs and practices, and demonstrate a *basic level of proficiency* in interpreting religious texts and rituals from each religious tradition.
7. Students will be able to discuss how themes such as community, suffering, love, doubt, joy, birth and death are seen and heard through the many prisms of religious experience.

## G. E. SLOs

### **Arts and Humanities:**

Goal: Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literatures, religions, and philosophy.

### Student Learning Outcomes

#### **Students will:**

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;
2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;
3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

*Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition. Robert Ellwood, Barbara Mcgraw.

*The Sacred Quest: An invitation to the Study of Religion*, 6th Edition. Lawrence Cunningham, John Kelsay.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Students take **three** scheduled exams on the assigned days, **2 midterms and a final** each worth 30%. The final 10% comes from a **3-5 page, double-spaced paper** based on visiting a religious ritual of your choice. The plus and minus grading format will be used. (Note: GE classes as well as classes in one's major and/or minor must be taken on a graded basis.)

Approximately **five extra credit** assignments will be given at random in class that will help in preparation for exams and significantly improve one's grade. Extra credit cannot be made up, students must attend class to receive credit.

Attendance is taken and **unexcused absences result in a 2% drop from one's overall grade**. Hence, 5 unexcused absences will lower one's grade a full letter, A to B, etc.

Reading assignments are to be completed before class meetings to enhance discussion and student progress. Lectures will elaborate on some of the readings and supplement the texts with additional information.

**Note:** Disrupting class in any way and inconsiderate behavior to other students will not be tolerated. **Turn off cell phones.** Students must get permission to use lap tops in class. Students

arriving late for exams may **NOT** take the exam after another student turns in his/her exam. Any form of plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and will have a corresponding negative impact on one's overall grade in the course. Students are responsible to know the University's code of conduct found in the University Catalogue.

Accommodation for Disabilities:

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (DCOD). The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at (818) 677-2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2611.

**READING SCHEDULE:**

**Note: Students Check Moodle for Additional Materials including some lecture content, study guides, power points.**

**PART I: Methodological Problems and Solutions in the Study of Religion.** European Enlightenment: The “Old and New Paradigms” in the Study of Religion(s). Religious Symbolization: Myth, Ritual, Sacred Places and Artifacts. Descriptive—Normative Approaches.

WEEK 1 Lakoff and Johnson, “Objectivism and Subjectivism.” *Sacred Quest (SQ) Intro*

WEEK 2. Chap 1. *Many Peoples, Many Faiths* (MPMF). SQ, chap 1.

WEEKS 3 - 4 MPMF Chap. 2. (SQ) chap 2.

WEEK 5 MPMF Chap. 3 and **Genesis** chapters 1-11.

**FIRST EXAM.**

**PART II: The Elements of Religion and Contemporary Religious Issues.** Social Scientific Approaches, Phenomenology, Functionalism, Social Conflict Theory (“Power”), Polyphasic—Monophasic.

WEEKS 6 - 7 MPMF Chap. 4 AND 5, SQ chaps. 3-4.

WEEKS 8 - 9 MPMF Chap. 6 AND 7, SQ 5-6

WEEK 10 MPMF Chap 8, SQ 7

**SECOND EXAM.**

**PART III: Examples of a Historical Study of Religion—Five Religious Traditions.**

WEEK 11 - 12 MPMF Chap.8 AND 9. SQ 8-9

WEEK 13 – 14 MPMF Chap. 10 AND 11,

**WEEK 15 REVIEW FOR FINAL**

**Finals Week: Final and Ritual paper**

## ***Why Consider a Religious Studies Major, Double Major, or Minor?***

Most students enjoy Religious Studies courses but wonder what they can do with a degree in Religious Studies. Here are some answers.

1. Go to graduate school, including Law School and Medical School.
2. Learn important skills sought after by employers.
3. Teach a variety of topics in the humanities and social sciences.
4. Human Resources, Social Service, Law Enforcement, Ministry.
5. Gain personal insight and knowledge to last a life time.

Come to my office hour and learn more about Religious Studies or contact the Department Chair, Dr. Rick Talbott at ex. 2741.