

## REL 150 World Religions

Instructor: An Yountae, Ph.D.

Email: [yan@csun.edu](mailto:yan@csun.edu) Tel: 818-677-3940

Office Hours: T/TH: 10:30-12:00 pm Santa Susana 229

Cal State University, Northridge

T/TH: 2:00-3:15 pm

JR 301

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### Course Description

This course is designed as an Introduction to the major religious traditions of the world. The diverse religious traditions of the world show us how the belief system, worldview, and practices of each religion expose significant differences from each other despite numerous elements they might share in common. Learning about such differences will both enrich our understanding of world religions and make us rethink the very definition of the term. The main goal of the course is twofold. First, we will learn about the different elements that constitute each one of the major world religions such as philosophy, belief system, history, ethics, and practices. Second, we will study the different theories of religion and interrogate the problematic assumptions and definitions that categorize these traditions, including the very term “religion” and “world religions.” This course fulfills the Comparative Cultural Studies component of the General Education Requirement.

### Learning Outcome

By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To acquire knowledge about the cultural and historical development of the major world religions
- To acquire knowledge about the various religious claims, expressions, practices, and theoretical presuppositions
- To articulate sophisticated understanding of the place of religion in politics, culture, and Society
- To articulate critically the definitions of religion and analyze how such definitions do or do not successfully represent the various elements and practices of different world religions

### Course Assignments

**1. Reading:** Without a doubt, reading is extremely important for this course. Without reading all the assigned texts you won't be able to successfully complete the course.

**2. Attendance and Participation** (10% of the total grade): The course will rely significantly on open discussion. This means each student's participation is **KEY!**

**3. Quiz** (15%): There will be weekly quizzes to test your knowledge of the material. The quiz is short, timed, and will be posted on Canvas. You can complete the quiz anytime on Thursdays between 8:00 am and 11:00 pm.

**4. Examinations** (50%= 25% per each Exam):

- There will be a total of two (2) examinations to evaluate your knowledge. One midterm and one final term exam. The exam will be composed of essay questions. The exam tests your religious literacy but more importantly, your understanding of the theories of religion. You'll be asked to demonstrate how different essentializing notions, definitions, and assumptions can be problematic in each one of the contexts.

**5. Presentation** (10%):

Each student will do a 5 minute long presentation on their final exam. You must add some additional reflection on how you define religion and religions of the world.

**6. Reflection on Site Visit (15%):** Towards the end of the semester, we'll take two field trips to local religious sites. After the second trip, you will write an analysis/reflection paper (approx. 5 pages including the photo) in which you'll address the following elements:

- a) **Impression and reflection:** observation, new findings, other thoughts you had during your visit and interaction with the space & people
- b) **Material objects (Buddhist temple):** take a photo of an object that calls your attention. Write a short reflection on it: What makes the object special to other people? What is the history or significance of the object in the tradition (you must do some research)? What other meanings, symbols, histories do you think the object reveals?
- c) **Literacy & Theory:** Address all the following questions
  - In what ways does your experience correlate to the information you have learned about the tradition?
  - In what ways does the visit match the expectations and knowledge you have previously had?
  - In what ways does your visit make you rethink the essentializing assumptions/representations you have held about the tradition?
  - In what ways do you think these two visits could make you build up new essentializing assumptions and categories that define these traditions?

#### Course Policy/Instructions

**1) Attendance:** You are permitted to have up to 2 (two) unexcused absences during the semester. Starting from the third absence, you will lose 2 points (out of the final grade) each time you miss a class. If you have 6 unexcused absences, you automatically **FAIL** the course. In order for an absence to be excused, you need to **notify the instructor in advance** and present **proper documentation**. All other unverifiable absences should be covered by the two free passes. If you come to class three times late, it will count as an absence.

**2) Communication:** Make the best effort to be always prepared ahead of time so that you don't shoot me an email last minute. Please, follow the appropriate etiquette when you communicate with your instructor. For instance, beginning an email with "Hey, ...." is only appropriate when you communicate with your buddies. Or, beginning an email without any greeting is also inappropriate. I'm not asking for any strict formality in your email, but just the basic etiquette you need to keep in mind when you communicate with others in the adult world.

**3) Submission of Assignments:** All written assignments must be uploaded on Canvas by 11:59pm of the due date. No excuse will be accepted for late submission and it will result in a deduction of 3 points per day. No writing assignment will be accepted after the fifth day past the deadline. **YOU NEED TO CHECK AND MAKE SURE YOUR SUBMISSION IS UPLOADED ON CANVAS. NO EXCUSE IS ACCEPTED WHEN YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS NOT POSTED ON CANVAS.**

**4) Electronics:** The use of electronic devices (including laptop computers) in the classroom is **strictly prohibited**. If you are caught using the cell phone during the class, your attendance will be automatically annulled.

**5) Read the Syllabus before asking any question:** If you email me with a question without consulting the syllabus, you will receive a short answer that reads: "Dear student, you can find the answer on the syllabus. Read the syllabus first and then write to me again if you need any further clarification."

**6) Learning issues:** Individuals with disabilities are guaranteed certain protections and rights of equal access to programs and activities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Therefore, California State University, Northridge recognizes the responsibility of the college community to provide equal educational access for otherwise qualified students with disabilities.

Any student who needs classroom or testing accommodations is invited to present letters from the Office of Disability Resources and Educational Services. You can obtain more information about the procedure on their website: <https://www.csun.edu/dres/accommodation-procedures>

**7) Academic Honesty:** Any student who submits plagiarized work will be subject to the penalties described in CSUN's Academic Dishonesty Policy. **This code asks each student to do his/her own work in his/her own words.** <http://catalog.csun.edu/policies/academic-dishonesty/>

Students who take part in violations such as cheating or plagiarism are subject to grade penalty (F), and the case will be reported to the Office of Vice President for Student Affairs.

Note: Disciplinary records of any action of academic dishonesty are retained in the Office of Vice President for Student Affairs. **These records may be available to prospective employers and other educational institutions**, in accordance with federal and state regulations. In short, a student committing any act of academic dishonesty will run a serious risk of harming his or her future educational or employment opportunities.

#### Grading Scale

94-100=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B +, 83-86 =B, 80-82=B-, 76-79=C +, 73-75=C, 70-72=C-, 66-69=D +, 60-65=D, 0-59=F

#### Required Texts

- Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (10<sup>th</sup> edition)

- Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004)

\* All additional readings will be posted on course Canvas

#### Course Schedule

\* All contents and schedule are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor

#### Week 1. Beginning the journey: Contesting Religion

8/29: Review of the Syllabus. The Category and Definition of Religion I

8/31: The Category and Definition of Religion II: Orientalism and the Invention of World Religions

Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions* Ch 1; Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, X-33.

#### Week 2. Hinduism: History and Philosophy. The category of Hinduism

9/5: Vedas, History, Philosophy. Reading: Fisher, 72-78; James Laine, *Meta-Religion*, Ch 3.

9/7: The problems with the category of Hinduism: Lorentzen, *Who Invented Hinduism?* p, 630-638.

Week 3. Hinduism: Polytheism, Ritual, and the Mystical East

9/12: (Poly)theism, Caste system, Rituals Fisher, 78-89;96-115

9/14: Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*, Introduction & Ch 1

Week 4. Buddhism: Buddha, Origin, and Devotional practice

9/19: Buddha and the origin of Buddhism. Fisher, 136-141

9/21: Dharma, Theravada, and Core Teachings. Fisher 142-155

Week 5. Buddhism: Ritual and (Poly)theism

9/26: Mahayana: Matreya and Pureland traditions. Laine, *Meta-Religion*, TBA  
Fisher, 155-159; Overmeyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion* 1-6, 89-108

9/28: Zen Buddhism. Fisher, 160-164; Victoria, *Zen at War*, ch. 8

Week 6. Christianity: Myth, Socio-historical Formation, and Dogma

10/3: Primal Myths and Jesus. Belief System. Reading: Fisher, 250-261, 305-321

10/5: Historical Background: Religion under Empire. Laine, *Meta-Religion*, TBA

Week 7. Christianity: Diversity

10/10: Catholics, Protestants, and the Eastern Orthodox. Reading: Fisher, 327-345

10/12: Diversity: Pentecostalism, Mainline Protestantism, World Christianities  
Fisher, 354-368

Week 8. Judaism: Torah and the Law

10/17: Torah. Tapper, *Judaisms*, 30-38

10/19: The Law. Tapper, 34-35; 38-41

Week 9. Judaism: Israel

10/24: People and the Land. Tapper, 42-44

10/26: Diversity. Tapper, 3-7

Week 10. Islam: Muhammad, Five Pillars

10/31: Islam in the eyes of the West. *Following Muhammad*, Ch 1 & Ch 2

11/2: The Prophet, sacred sources, the Five Pillars, Fisher, 383-395; *Following Muhammad*, Ch 3

Week 11. Sacred Sites

11/7: Site Visit. Local Buddhist Temple (TBD)

11/10: FRIDAY: Site Visit. Local Mosque (TBD)

Week 12. Islam: Ethics, Politics, Practices

11/14: Ethics and Politics. Fisher, 395-398, 407-414, 417-424; *Following Muhammad*, Ch 4

11/16: Spirituality in Practice. *Following Muhammad*, Ch 5

11/21: No Class: Academic Conference

11/23: No Class: Thanksgiving Recess

Week 13. Material Culture, Globalization, and World Religions Paradigm

11/28: Globalization, Hybridity, and pluralism. Reading: Fisher, 494-496, 497-511

\*Site Visit Reflection Due

11/30: Material Culture

12/2: Final Exam Due

Week 14. Final Presentation

12/5: Final Presentation

12/7: Final Presentation