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RS 150, **WORLD RELIGIONS Honors Section Fall 2014**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course satisfies the S5 general education requirements for inter-cultural study since it provides an introduction to and an overview of the major world religions in their historical and cultural developments. We will examine the various traditions in terms of their appropriations of Sacred Reality and the expressions of that Reality in symbol, ritual, and myth. We will focus in each tradition on questions of human identity and purpose (anthropology), the status of the world (cosmology), and access to Ultimate Reality (metaphysics).

### **Student Learning Objectives**

You will learn:

1. Think empathetically and critically about conflicting religious claims
2. Acquire knowledge of the history and culture of more than one major religious tradition
3. Become familiar with the broad outlines of several world religions that continue to shape major civilizations and which have important influences on the culture of Southern California
4. Grasp the phenomenological approach (as exemplified in the textbook) to the study of religion and culture through the study of clear descriptions and sympathetic insights into the religion of others.
5. Become a more proficient and critical reader through careful study and discussion of a masterfully written survey of selected world religions.

In other words:

- To think empathetically and critically about a vast variety of religious claims, paradigms, practices, and theoretical presuppositions

- How to acquire extensive knowledge and utilize state-of-the art research techniques pertaining to the histories and cultures of the major world religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as, less extensively, pre-historic and indigenous traditions, Shinto, Confucianism, Daoism, Zoroastrianism, and New Religions.
- To articulate sophisticated and nuanced understandings of the role religion plays in society, individual lifestyles, various vocational options, and the world community.
- To become a much more interesting human being, global citizen, and conversation partner whether as a participant at a party or an executive retreat, whether as a poet, priest, politician, pedagogue, patron of the arts, PTA president, or simply a lifelong learner.

### GE Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Describe and compare different cultures;
2. Explain how various cultures contribute to the development of our multicultural world;
3. Describe and explain how race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion , sexuality and other markers of social identity impact life experiences and social relations;
4. Analyze and explain the deleterious impact and the privileges sustained by racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance or stereotyping on all sectors of society;

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** weekly web assignments (i.e. BulletinBoard postings, online quizzes, etc.), reading assignments, class attendance, class participation via online forums, one quizzes and midterm, one research paper on a relevant topic of your choice, one final-examination, and, of course, good mental hygiene.

**THE RESEARCH PAPER:** The choice of paper topics has a wide range of flexibility in the hopes that the students will pursue subjects that command their interests and spark their imaginations. You will want to begin exploring possible topics from practically the beginning of the course and should not only feel free but consider it a necessary step in your preparation to consult the instructor concerning your topic. Various strategies for generating a viable topic will be discussed in class.

Texts: ***World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored & Explained*** by John Bowker, DK ADULT: Reprint 2006; 978-0756617721; ***God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World*** by Stephen Prothero, HarperOne 2011, 978-0061571282; ***The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*** by Philip Novak, HarperOne 1995, 978-0060663421

**Assignments and grading criteria:** All assignments will be posted. Preparation and class participation are factored into the grading. Students must participate in all posted class assignments. This cannot be emphasized enough. The mid-term accounts for approximately 20% of your grade, the final about 20%, and the research paper 20% with a 40% margin based on online class participation (quality of comments, thoroughness of thought, evidence of reading and viewing, timeliness, etc). In addition, 2% will be subtracted from your overall grade for untimely participation for each assignment or any missed scheduled class session. My scale includes plus and minuses. Make-ups are possible only by divine intervention.

## Assignments

There are basically three types of assignments: reading, viewing, and feedback. A general rule of thumb for assignment hours for outside homework for reading and projects has generally been something like 3 hours a week per unit. So, you owe time to this course and there should be no excuse for falling behind. (In Grad School it is not uncommon to have to read 2-5 books a week, so, no wonder you get no compassion from your professors, eh?) At any rate, I have tried to set up this course so you can work at your own pace, but generally that means that the industrious can loom ahead, it is not an opportunity for the slackard/laggard to fall behind. I know work and sleep can get in the way, but think of it this way: Better to be a sleep deprived and haggered bragard with your work all done, than a slacker-lagger wagging your tongue and crying in your beer because you thought you needed fun... There is a German proverb «Morgen, morgen, nur nicht heute, sagen alle faulen Leute.» ("Tomorrow, tomorrow, just not today, that's what all the lazy people say.") Hopefully, a word to the wise is sufficient.

**Reading:** Reading in a university course is of course a given. We will read material at a regular pace dealing with the various religions we are covering. There is a textbook for the course which we will read straight through, cover to cover in well-paced increments. However, you may want to read ahead so as to be prepared for the sophisticated concepts you may encounter. We will also be reading each other's BulletinBoard Discussion postings and various outside resources (internet articles and the like).

**Exercising/Assessing:** This involves utilization of the Moodle Course Site which is a supplemental site geared towards greater understanding of the material.

**Viewing:** Part of your responsibilities for this course will be to watch videos, easily obtainable at your local video store, from the library, or even online.

**Feedback:** You will be given several opportunities to reflect on, comment upon, and analyze the reading and viewing material in this course. Not the least of these forums will be provided by the use of a computer either at home or in a lab. Thus, part of your course preparation will be to take the time to become online-ready. I will try to help you get there. However, you are ultimately responsible to compose and send email, post messages via WebCt's bulletinboard, and perhaps even attend virtual class meetings online in realtime (more about this option later). The ultimate form of feedback will be a research paper you will write on some aspect of world religions.