**RS 150 World Religions—*online*Fall 2015**

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**Instructor: Xochitl Alvizo**

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Regular Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00pm

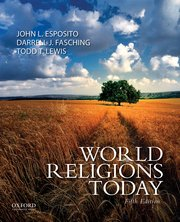
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**Course Readings**

1. REQUIRED: *World Religions Today*, **2014** **5th Edition**; John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, Todd T. Lewis, ISBN-13: 978-0199999590.
2. SUPPLEMENTARY: Articles and excerpts of sacred texts will be available on course Moodle.
3. HELPFUL but *not* required: *The Religion Toolkit: A Complete Guide to Religious Studies,* John Morreall & Tamara Sonn, ISBN-13: 978-1405182461.

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to significant forms of religion around the world, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as religions of East Asian, indigenous religions, and new religions. There will be an emphasis on the historical and cultural developments of religious traditions, on methodological considerations in the study of religion, and on the significance of religion in contemporary life. This class introduces the critical study of religion and religious phenomena as dynamic ongoing forces in the lives of individuals and in the collective experience of modern societies. It will explore the practice of religion and seek to understand religious experience in terms of its formative elements: religious stories, sacred text, ritual, individual and communal morality and ethics, and its social and political context.

**Learning Outcomes**

**Student Learning Objectives** for World Religions RS 150**.** Students will:

1. Be able to think logically and analytically about various religious traditions;
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the basic content and formative elements of various religious traditions of the world;
3. Grasp the historical and lived-religions approach (as exemplified in the textbook) to the study of religion;
4. Be able to articulate on the meaning and value of the term 'religion' for understanding and describing a diversity of cultural and ideological phenomena in the United States and abroad.
5. Be able to connect today’s religions to their classical beliefs and practices and understand how these religious traditions have both radically changed the modern world and been changed by it;
6. Become a more proficient and critical reader through careful study and discussion of primary texts and a written survey of selected religions.

This course is available for **General Education, Comparative Cultural Studies**/Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity Studies and Foreign Languages.

**Goal**: Students will understand the diversity and multiplicity of cultural forces that shape the world through the study of cultures, gender, sexuality, race, religion, class, ethnicities and languages with special focus on the contributions, differences, and global perspectives of diverse cultures and societies.

**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;
5. Demonstrate linguistic and cultural proficiency in a language other than English.

**Assignments**

**Assignments**: Further details and instructions for each assignment can be found on the course Moodle.

**All Assignments DUE at end of the week on Sundays by 11:55pm.**

* *Online Forum Response*—to be completed in two parts.
  + Part I: Why Study Religion? and What is Religion? Due **August 30**.
  + Part II: Misconceptions and Pressing Issues. Due **September 6**.
* *Reading Response Posts* — Weekly short-answer posts on the textbook readings and the formative elements of the religions: religious stories, sacred text, ritual, individual and communal morality and ethics, and its social and political context. **Due dates specified on schedule** – 3 *lowest grades will be dropped.*
* *Seminar Handout*—a pamphlet/reference sheet on 2 different religions (of your choice) demonstrating its historical and lived-religion aspects, including a bibliography of sources consulted. Due by **November 22**.
* *Site Visit—****Extra Credit—****Critical reflection and analysis on a visit to a religious site of a tradition other than one you belong to or have practiced.* *Due by* ***December 6.***
* *Posted Annotated Bibliography*—on 10 news articles that relate to world religions. Due by **December 6**.
* *Final Exam*—covers the material from the entire class and includes objective and short-answer/essay questions. **To be scheduled**.

**Evaluation**

**Grades**: Each assignment will be calculated on a 100 point scale with the corresponding letter grade as indicated below. Together, all the assignment will make up 100% of the final course grade – with an extra credit option.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Highest** | **Lowest** | **Letter** |  | **Assignments** | **Percentage** |
| 100.00 % | 94.00 % | A |  | Online Forum Responses (2 at 5% each) | 10% |
| 93.99 % | 90.00 % | A- |  | Weekly Quizzes/Posts ( *lowest 3 dropped* – 2.5% each) | 50% |
| 89.99 % | 87.00 % | B+ |  | Seminar Handout (5% for each religion) | 10% |
| 86.99 % | 84.00 % | B |  | Posted Annotated Bibliography (10 entries, 1% each entry) | 10% |
| 83.99 % | 80.00 % | B- |  | Final Exam | 20% |
| 79.99 % | 77.00 % | C+ |  | [Site Visit—Extra Credit] | [10%] |
| 76.99 % | 73.00 % | C |  | **Total** | **100 [110]** |
| 72.99 % | 70.00 % | C- |  |  |  |
| 69.99 % | 67.00 % | D+ |  |  |  |
| 66.99 % | 60.00 % | D |  |  |  |
| 59.99 % | 0.00 % | F |  |  |  |

**An online course** affords you the opportunity to take ownership over your learning. In many ways it is up to you, the student, to leverage the fact that there is no classroom (in the conventional sense) and that you will be engaging the course material from your specific context and location. It is an opportunity for you to think contextually about the subject matter and to bring your insights, questions, and concerns to bear upon it. The assignments are designed for you to think creatively and dialectically about the religions of the world.

**Participation**: Appropriate class participation is a key to meeting the course objectives; participation will be determined through thoughtful and critical online postings and timely assignment completion via online forums.

Participation is an *especially* important part of an online class. If the student is not actively participating, or is not participating in accordance with the assignment instructions, this can affect the student’s final grade —sometimes seriously. Appropriate class participation is a key to meeting the course objectives, and it speaks for itself —it is not merely one grade alongside the others with a pre-defined percentage value.

***Remember—****any evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing   
 grade, certainly for the item plagiarized, but also for the course.*



**Weekly Course Schedule and Submission Tracker**

**NOTE - All Assignments DUE at end of the week on Sundays by 11:55pm.**

**Class materials:** (e.g., e-lectures, PowerPoints, discussion posts, articles) will be available on Moodle by 9am on Monday morning at the start of each scheduled weekly topic. Assignments are due by Sunday of that week no later than 11:55pm. **You have from Monday 9am until Sunday 11:55pm to complete and submit the week’s required assignments – don’t wait until the last minute. Set a regularly scheduled period of time each week to work on this course as you would with all others.**

**Abbreviations:**WRT5 = *World Religions Today*, 5th Edition, editors, John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, Todd T. Lewis

O = Other readings as specified

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WK** | **Week begins MONDAY** | **Topic** | **Read** | **Week ends SUNDAY  Submit assignments by 11:55pm, Sundays** | **DONE?** |
|  |  | **UNIT ONE: FOUNDATIONS** | |  |  |
| **1** | Aug 24 | Course Introduction; Why Study Religion? and What is Religion? | O: Syllabus – read *carefully*  O: “Study Religion” website Part I (see Moodle) | DUE by Aug 30 1) Practice QUIZ  2) **Forum Response**: “Why and What” (I) |  |
| **2** | Aug 31 | Introducing Religious Studies; Approaches to the study of religion. | O: *Religion Toolkit,* 1-14 O: “Study Religion” website Part II (see Moodle) | DUE by Sep 6 1) Quiz 1 2) **Forum Response**: “Misconceptions” & “Pressing Issues" (II) |  |
| **3** | Sep7 | Formative elements; history and context; Modernity, postmodernity, colonialism. | WRT5: Chapter 1, 1-37 O: “Timeline,” in *Religion* *Toolkit,* xvi – xxi | DUE by Sep 13 1) Quiz 2 2) Post 1 - Timeline |  |
|  |  | **UNIT TWO: EARLY RELIGIONS AND WESTERN MONOTHEISMS** | | |  |
| **4** | Sep 14 | Indigenous Religions | WRT5: Chapter 2, 39-73 O: Religion and the Media | DUE by Sep 20  1) Quiz 3 2) Post 2 - Discussion |  |
| **5** | Sep 21 | A Bridge to Monotheism—Guadalupe of the Mexica | O: Watch “Mesoamerican Cosmovision,” D. Carrasco  O: Read *Nican Mopohua* | DUE by Sep 27 1) Post 3 - Response |  |
| **6** | Sep 28 | Judaism | WRT5: Chapter 3, 76-145  O: Leaving or Remaining? | DUE by Oct 4 1) Quiz 4 2) Post 4 - Response |  |
| **7** | Oct 5 | Christianity | WRT5: Chapter 4, 146-215 O: Gina Messina-Dysert | DUE by Oct 11 1) Quiz 5 2) Post 5 - Response |  |
| **8** | Oct 12 | Islam | WRT5: Chapter 5, 218-303 O: Laury Silvers | DUE by Oct 18 1) Quiz 6 2) Post 6 – Response |  |
| **9** | Oct 19 | Western Modern Theism; Biblical Studies, Theology, Contemporary Issues | O: *Religion Toolkit,* 44-77 and 183-205.  O: Feminism and Faith | DUE by Oct 25 1) Post 7 - Response |  |
|  |  | **UNIT THREE: 330 MILLION GODS – or NONE; BALANCING AND BLENDING** | | |  |
| **10** | Oct 26 | South Asian Religions: Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism | WRT5: Chapter 6, 307-394 O: Manushi Swachhnarayani | DUE by Nov 1 1) Quiz 7 2) Post 8 - Response |  |
| **11** | Nov 2 | Buddhism | WRT5: Chapter 7, 399-482 O: Sheppard video | DUE by Nov 8 1) Quiz 8 2) Post 9 - Response |  |
| **12** | Nov 9 | East Asian Religions: Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Buddhism in China | WRT5: Chapter 8, 487-572 O: video O: visiting a site protocol | DUE by Nov 15 1) Quiz 9 2) Post 10 – Discuss |  |
| **13** | Nov 16 | What makes a “World Religion”? Globalization—from New to New Age | WRT5: Chapter 9, 577-616 O: Carol Christ, Starhawk O: Zoroastrian wedding | DUE by Nov 22 1) Quiz 10 2) **Seminar Handout** |  |
|  |  | **UNIT FOUR: PRESENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS** | | |  |
| **14** | Nov 23 | Closing Questions: Can we define religion? And other surprises. | O: *Religion Toolkit,* 308-336 O: Peter Berger, “Taking it back” | DUE by Nov 29 1) Quiz 11 2) Post 11 - Response |  |
| **15** | Nov 30 | Last week of classes Review | O: Feminism and Religion O: tbd | DUE by Dec 6 1) Post 12 - Discuss 2) **Annotated Bibliography** 3) **Extra Credit** |  |
|  | **Dec 7** | **Final exam** is due at the beginning of our scheduled exam period, TBD. | | |  |

**Course Policies**

**Late Work—**Since deadlines are stated clearly at the outset, I expect you to meet them. All papers/assignments must be turned in or posted on Moodle by the date and time listed. Extensions or make-up exams will be available only in extreme cases and must be arranged in advance. Otherwise, late work will not be accepted.

**Email Policy—**Before you reach me by email, review the syllabus and Moodle to see if the information you need isn’t already there. **The Syllabus is Your Friend!** In the subject line please indicate your name, course number (RS 150), and the content of the email. Messages sent over the weekend will be read on Mondays; on weekdays, I will do my best to respond within 48 hours—please plan accordingly.

**Accommodations 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 (NCOD). 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. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.

**Plagiarism**—Do not plagiarize. The CSUN Religious Studies Department is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence, honesty, and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating or helping someone else cheat will receive an F on the assignment and will be subject to disciplinary action such as suspension or expulsion. Find and read CSUN’s Academic Dishonesty policy (just type “academic honesty” in the Search CSUN box and then select the PDF titled “ACADEMIC DISHONESTY.”

**Remember, too, that much of the information posted on the Internet is protected by U.S. copyright laws**. Passing off this information as your own is plagiarism and carries the penalties outlined above.

**Writing Standards**—All papers must be written according to basic scholarly standards appropriate for university level work. Not only does this include proper citation as well as grammar, punctuation, and syntax, but also serious reflection on the topic. There are many sources available to you—the most important is the Writing Program at CSUN’s Learning Resource Center, 3rd floor/East Wing of the Oviatt Library: <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resourcecenter/writing-center-and-freshman-writing-lab>.

**Inclusive Language**—The instructor will conscientiously attempt and all students are encouraged to use inclusive language, images, and metaphors in both their speaking and writing.

In order to cultivate an environment of inclusion and non-discrimination and to ensure clarity in written communication, students should use non-gendered pronouns and nouns when referring to mixed-gender groups (e.g., “humanity” rather than “man” or “mankind”) or when the gender of a subject is unknown.

Scholars agree that in regard to “God” or diety language is insufficient to capture the manifold understandings people hold. Moreover, sacred texts typically use masculine, feminine, and an expanse of metaphors to explain or speak of God. Students are encouraged to avoid using gender-specific pronouns for God or to use a variety of pronouns interchangeably. If the use of gender-specific pronouns is necessary to make an argument about a particular sacred text, that usage should be acknowledged in a footnote.

**Site Visit Guide (for optional extra credit)**

**Observe and participate** during a service at one of the following sites of a religion not your own. *This is not an exhaustive list – you may submit a different site to the professor for approval*.

**Write a 2-page paper; 1-page description and summary of event and 1-page critical response and analysis.** Further instructions on Moodle, but be sure to use the tools you have gained in class to make observations regarding myth, sacred text/sacred stories, sacred space, ritual, images of the sacred/divine, and cultural context.

**Please note:** For all visits, please wear typical ‘church’ clothing (Hindu temple: clothes comfortable to sit on the floor, if need be). For Islamic centers or mosque, women need to wear loose pants or full skirt and bring a large scarf for head covering. Please bring at least one dollar to all sites as an offering.

Hinduism: - Venkateswara Temple, 1600 Las Virgines Canyon Road, Calabasas, Ca.  
 - Hindu Temple Society, 18700 Roscoe Blvd., Northridge, CA  
 - Hindu Temple and Indian Cultural Center, 21213 Devonshire Blvd. Chatsworth, CA

Buddhism: - Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple, 3456 Glenmark Drive, Hacienda Heights, Ca  
 - West Los Angeles Buddhist Church, 2003 Corinth Avenue, West L.A., CA  
 - Wat Thai Temple, Corner of Coldwater Canyon and Roscoe Blvd.

Judaism: - Stephen S. Wise Reform Temple, 15500 Stephen Wise Dr. (Mulholland and 405), Los Angeles  
 - Valley Beth Shalom Temple, 15739 Ventura Blvd, Encino, CA  
 - Sinai Temple, 10400 Wilshire Blvd, West L.A.

Christianity: - Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 18405 Superior Street, Northridge, CA  
 - St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, 1324 South Normandie, Los Angeles, CA  
 - Mosaic Church, 7107 Hollywood Blvd, Los Angeles, CA, or another Protestant church, your choice

Islam: - The Islamic Center of Granada Hills, 11439 Encino Ave., corner of Encino and Rinaldi, Granada Hills  
 - The Islamic Center of Southern California, 434 South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles

Other: - You can propose something to professor for approval – have fun!

***SEE NEXT PAGE: Students are advised to keep the following details in mind when completing writing assignments –not everything listed applies to all the assignments for this class, but take note, these are important.***

**Guidelines for Writing Assignments**

It is expected that students weave together insights gleaned from scholarly sources and their own critical and constructive thoughts in the development of any writing assignment. Furthermore, students should aim to make use of a variety of bibliographic sources.

While there are subjective components in any grading process, most professors are concerned that you become well educated in eight basic qualities of solid academic work – these guidelines reflect this professor’s expectations of your written work:

1. ***The presentation of a clear point of view or central argument – i.e. the thesis you will advance.*** In most of the writing you will do, you are expected to formulate a thesis statement or central point of view and to articulate it early on. Often this is conveyed through an explicit or recognizable thesis statement that provides a sense of your purpose and point of view or argument in the opening material. Think of the thesis as the plot of your written piece – that which keeps your writing moving forward step-by-logical-step toward a predetermined end.

2. ***Demonstration of unity and coherence.*** In well-written text, one thought is connected to another. The words, sentences, and paragraphs are arranged logically and coherently. As a result, the reader moves easily from one point to the next and understands how the individual points relate to the whole.

3. ***The offering of support for assertions and conclusions.*** In any type of writing, but especially in academic writing, it is important to support one’s assertions and conclusions. This can be done through the use of facts, statistics, experiential anecdotes, and direct quotes from credible sources.

4. ***Demonstration of an understanding of the content of texts and resources used—(Reading Comprehension).*** Your essay should provide a fair description and a clear understanding of the texts and resources it makes use of. In other words, grasp the ideas of or the points being made by the authors you use to support your assertions. This will be apparent in your ability to discuss precisely or accurately what an author has written or a speaker has said.

5. ***Appropriate documentation of sources.*** In academic writing, it is important that you cite the sources of any quotations, paraphrases, and facts or ideas that are not common knowledge. The three most commonly used styles are those of the Modern Language Association (MLA); the American Psychological Association (APA); and the Chicago Manual of Style. The MLS and APA styles are similar, in the sense that they use parenthetical references for in-text citations. The Chicago Manual Style uses footnotes at the bottom of the text or endnotes following the text. Because it is used extensively in the field of religious studies, I encourage students to familiarize themselves with the Chicago Manual Style. Find a “quick guide” reference sheet here: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>

6. ***Evidence of clear critical thinking that weighs the merits of viewpoints and conclusions.*** This involves and is conveyed through a) the ability to recognize the assumptions that underlie the ideas of authors; b) the ability to assess the strengths and potential limitations of other people’s ideas as well as of your own ideas and conclusions; and c) the willingness to imagine or to remain open to alternative perspectives.

7. ***Creativity that moves beyond reporting someone else’s ideas.*** This suggests that you should work to find your own voice and perspective in your writing. Your creative addition to academic discourse might include questioning, evaluating, or criticizing the ideas of others in a way that is objective and fair. But it can also include the development of your own viewpoint or the viewing of an issue from a unique perspective. The minimal requirement of academic work is correctly reporting what is read or discussed. Excellent work moves beyond repetition of another’s idea to the offering of unique questions, insights, perspectives, or correlations of ideas.

8. ***Sound grammar, spelling, and form.*** Good writing is a product of proofreading and clear communication. A brilliant idea can be lost in a paper that obscures its ideas with careless writing. Keep this in mind: Your readers and listeners should not have to guess what you mean. Help them by writing and speaking well. You can work towards this by making sure a) that generally accepted rules of grammar and syntax are followed; b) that correct words are used to convey the intended meaning; c) that spelling is correct; d) that punctuation (e.g. the placement of commas, apostrophes, and quotation marks), reflects standard usage, and; d) that you define any important terms you are using for your reader – don’t assume your understanding of the term coincides with theirs.

P.S. **Final note on Formatting*.*** Except for creative assignments, such as the *Seminar Handout*, papers should be typed in Microsoft Word format, **double-spaced**, using a standard 12-pt. font (Times New Roman) with 1” margins all around. Use footnotes in [Chicago Manual of Style](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html), and always include a Works Cited/Bibliography page at the end of the paper [<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>].

***Be advised that ‘A’s are not easy to earn—at least not without effort.   
Do your best and strive always to do better.***

As a general rule of thumb, I note that an earned grade of “A” reflects work of exceptional, faultless quality; an earned grade of “A-” reflects work of superior, almost perfect quality; an earned grade of “B+” reflects work of notable or noteworthy quality; an earned grade of “B” reflects work of solid, sound quality; an earned grade of “B-” reflects work of above average quality; an earned grade of “C+” reflects work of satisfactory quality; an earned grade of “C” reflects work f average quality; and an earned grade of “C-“ reflects work of passable quality.



