Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

The course is REL 202: Hindu Traditions, an introductory course on Hinduism.

This assignment sequence will be given over the course of the semester and will require students to demonstrate increasingly complex comprehension of the course material as well as the ability to draw complex (and sometimes disparate) course ideas into a sophisticated conversation.

My aim for the paper is to offer students the opportunity to engage with the central ideas from particular course readings and to synthesize the key concepts in the context of a written assignment.

Important features of the assignment are that as a short, focused writing assignment it offers students a relatively low-stakes way to both synthesize important material and to become acquainted with the writing expectations in this course. The peer review aspect has several benefits: a) the first round really enables students to learn from one another (by seeing how a colleague approached this assignment); b) it encourages them to take the rubric very seriously; c) and the second round offers them two opportunities to review my feedback and to see me model my expectations. Finally, the sequenced nature of the assignment helps me to foreground the way that the subsequent briefs build on the earlier ones and the ways in which I expect students to integrate what they have learned from the feedback from peers and from me on their prior essays.

This is a revised assignment.

The Assignment I Distribute to Students

REL 202 – Hindu Traditions
Analytic Briefs

According to our syllabus, four analytic briefs will be assigned over the course of the semester. These focused writing assignments (~2 single-spaced pages) require you to interpret and critically respond to course readings and to progressively draw
connections between and among course ideas. That is, each brief builds on the concepts that feature in prior one(s) as well as the feedback I supply about your writing, and requires you to demonstrate both a) an increasingly complex comprehension and analysis of course material and b) your advancing ability to draw course ideas into dialogue.

**Purpose**

Over the course of these four assignments you will develop your ability to identify central ideas in our readings, articulate these key concepts in the context of a structured and polished essay, and to draw specific aspects of Hindu traditions into an increasingly sophisticated conversation.

**Logistics & Instructions for Briefs**

- Read my Editing Marks & Grading handout, which includes helpful tips for writing in my class and understanding my grading and feedback process, and the rubric included below before you begin writing.

- Brief should be ~2 single-spaced pages and uploaded to Moodle before class begins.

- Terms drawn from Indian languages should be italicized (e.g., *yajna*, *sramana*), except if they have passed into common English usage (e.g., *yoga*, *karma*). Text names (e.g., *Veda*) should also be italicized, while proper names of deities (e.g., *Agni*) should not be.

- You should always provide evidence from the reading in support of your claims or points. This can be accomplished most effectively by employing a parenthetical citation – for example, (Rodrigues, 12) or (Class 9/8). Citations are necessary both when you: 1) paraphrase or reference ideas from the reading (my preference), and 2) use short quotations from course material (keep in mind that because of the "brief" nature of these assignments any quotations you use should be very short). For these short briefs you should limit yourself to course assignments and thus no Works Cited is necessary.

- Make sure to proofread before submitting your brief!

- Because they are intended to facilitate class discussion and I will count on you to contribute insights, questions, and critical reflections from your brief to our class conversation, late submissions will not be accepted.
BRIEF #1

Due Thursday, September 6

Purpose
This brief is intended to develop your ability to identify central ideas in our reading about Vedic religion, foundational material that continues to be relevant throughout our course. You will synthesize the information on texts, deities, and practices presented in the chapter in a structured and polished essay, and analyze what these features convey about the Vedic religious worldview.

Brief #1 aligns with several of the course objectives, including:

- Students will demonstrate familiarity with the historical trajectory of Hindu traditions, from the Indus Valley Civilization to modern movements;
- Students will discuss with accuracy and sophistication the principal features of Hindu religious traditions, including Hindu values, beliefs, worldviews and social practices;
- Students will build a working vocabulary of key Indian-language terms relevant to Hindu religious traditions;

Process
1. **Read Chapter 1 Vedic Religion** for main points and ideas. While I will help you to assess which terms are most important to know, please be attentive to them in context as you read. Consider implementing some of the reading strategies that I outlined in class, including summarizing material next to the list of “Main Topics Covered” at the beginning of the chapter and making a list of terms as you read. Let the “Key Points in this Chapter” help you to review what you have learned (some students have suggested reading this box first, before reading the chapter; I would suggest reading it before and after).

2. **Read two documents carefully before you begin drafting your brief:** the Editing Marks & Grading handout, which includes helpful tips for writing in my class and understanding my grading and feedback process; and the rubric included below.

3. **Develop an analytic brief that addresses the following questions:** What are the central features of Vedic religion? Speaking broadly, how would you characterize the texts associated with this early religion? How would you describe its deities? Now that you have read the section on Vedic ritual (including the case studies), what seem to be the main goals of these
Vedic rites? What concerns or desires animate their performance? Since you can assume that the colleague who reads your paper is also new to this material, please define key terms and contextualize ideas appropriately.

4. **Submit Brief #1 and engage in in-class peer review:** submit the brief on Moodle for me to grade and bring a hard copy to class, where you and a colleague will each read each other’s brief. Using the rubric provided, you will each evaluate one another’s papers.

5. **Share the feedback I provide with your peer review partner:** In the class session where I return your briefs along with the filled-out rubric, you will pair up with the same colleague to discuss my feedback. (Your actual grade will be posted to Moodle to protect your privacy; only my comments will be included on the rubric.) You will then be expected to incorporate my and your colleague’s feedback as you write Brief #2.

**Evaluation of Brief #1 (and subsequent briefs)**
Your briefs will be assessed – both during the peer review process and by me when I grade your work – using the rubric below.
### Rubric for Analytic Briefs

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<tr>
<th>HIGHER-ORDER CONCERNS</th>
<th>✓-</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>✓+</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This brief addresses all parts of the question posed.</td>
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<td>This brief moves beyond summarizing to analyze the material.</td>
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<td>This brief reflects substantive engagement with the material assigned.</td>
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<td>Specific and pertinent examples (i.e., evidence) are included to support ideas.</td>
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<td>Relevant Indian-language terms are included and employed with accuracy.</td>
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<td>Citations are included where appropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<th>LOWER-ORDER CONCERNS</th>
<th>✓-</th>
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<tr>
<td>This brief employs good writing skills, correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.</td>
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<td>Text names and foreign-language words are italicized.</td>
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<td>Citations are in the correct style.</td>
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<td>This brief is an appropriate length, as specified in the assignment.</td>
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✓- = does not meet this expectation; ✓ = meets this expectation; ✓+ = exceeds this expectation.