

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Elon University - Fall 2003

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Religious Studies 134 C & D
Alamance 302
T-TH - 8-9:40; 12:20-2:00

COURSE PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES:

Religious beliefs and practices form a core part of the identity and culture of many of the world's people. In order to understand how and why people behave in the ways that they do, it is often beneficial to take a look at how their religious beliefs impact their identity, their ethical practice, and their decision-making. What you will be learning in this class is a set of skills that will help you engage and interact in the world as an informed global citizen. Students will be challenged to take a critical look at the world in which we live with an eye toward examining how different belief systems impact the way that people understand, live in, and respond to the world around them.

The purpose of this course is to teach students a deeper appreciation of the role that religion plays in human behavior, social conflict, and community interaction. We will focus on developing a vocabulary for understanding religious ideas and belief systems and we will examine case studies with an eye toward analyzing how different religious communities understand, assess, and respond to social conflict. Throughout the semester we will focus on two tasks - examining how different religious traditions and communities help individuals in their decision-making process and evaluating how different religious communities respond to society's problems. Student engagement in service learning situations that deal with the social problems of poverty, homelessness, race, immigration, and violence will provide an opportunity for engaged learning in a practical setting.

By the end of this semester you should:

- *possess a set of intellectual tools that will assist you in understanding how religious belief systems operate (1, 2)*
- *be able to analyze ways in which different theological concepts work together to create a worldview (3, 4, 5)*
- *be able to identify different ways in which religious ideas/belief systems impact ethical decision-making (3, 4)*
- *be able to utilize your theological toolkit for assessing some of the root causes of social problems (6)*

COURSE MATERIALS:

available at bookstore:

Forward, Martin. *Religion: A Beginner's Guide*.
Green, William Scott and Jacob Neusner, eds. *The Religion Factor: An Introduction to How Religion Matters*.
Wolfe, Regina Wentzel and Christine E. Gudorf, eds. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies*.
Coursepack for REL 134 C & D

one of the following:

Buss, Fran Leeper. *Forged under the Sun/Forjada bajo el sol*
Kozol, Jonathan. *Amazing Grace*
Kozol, Jonathan. *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*
Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed*.

*refers to categories corresponding to Bloom's taxonomy which we will discuss during the third class period

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) participation/attendance (100 points)

This is a discussion based course. In order for this model to work effectively, everyone must come to class prepared to discuss the articles, chapters, or case-studies that are assigned for that day. Reading is not “optional” for this course, if you are not able to demonstrate that you have read and engaged the material, you will not pass this course. At the same time, I respect that students learn in different ways and participate in class in a variety of ways. Active listening, asking questions and contributing to the conversation are all important ways in which students participate in the academic classroom. I make every effort to create different kinds of spaces and formats for students to participate (small groups, drama, writing, simulations, etc.) At the same time, it is your responsibility to share your voice, perspectives, and questions with the rest of the class – this is what it means to be a learning community. I encourage you to find ways in which you are comfortable doing so or to talk with me about new ways we might structure our conversations to facilitate your participation.

Your attendance is an essential part of creating a productive learning environment. You are permitted three absences during the course of a semester. You will lose 10 points for each absence after three, if you miss 10 classes or more (that is five weeks of class) you will fail the course.

2) course material/critical reflection (250 points)

You will find the specific details about course assignments posted on Blackboard. Generally speaking you are expected to complete all assignments *before* you come to class on the day that they are assigned. That means that the readings/assignments found for August 28 are to be completed by the time class begins on August 28. These materials provide our discussion material for the day and it is essential that students come to class prepared to participate in class discussions and exercises. A combination of essays, research articles, non-fiction, and films make up the required materials for this course. There will be periodic writing assignments during the course of the term. These assignments offer you the opportunity for deeper reflection on the reading material and preparation for our class discussions. These will be posted on Blackboard at the conclusion of every class period.

3) service learning (350 points)

One way that student learning can be reinforced is through the practical application of ideas in a concrete setting. This course utilizes the model of service learning as a way to assist students in taking abstract, theoretical concepts and applying them in a practical, engaged way. Each student will be placed in a particular site placement for the duration of the semester. These placements will be made the second week of class and you are expected to start your service the following week. This placement will be your research laboratory for the semester. You will be expected to put the theological concepts we are learning and discussing in dialogue with the social problems that you encounter. These problems include poverty, racial discrimination, immigration, welfare, homelessness, illiteracy, and family violence among others. Every student will be placed in an organization where you will be expected to participate on a weekly basis. This placement is part of your “homework” for this class. You will be expected to log two hours of service each week at your placement for a total of 20 hours. Begin thinking immediately about which site interests you, as the placements will be made on Tuesday, September 2. Both the classroom and the site placement are meant to be complementary experiences that will aid in our learning together about religion and religious studies this semester.

A 2-3 page paper discussing your initial impressions/experiences of your site placement is due on September 30. (100 points)

A 3-4 page paper reflecting on your issue book and your placement is due on October 23. (100 points)

A 4-5 page paper analyzing the topics of oppression and justice as they relate to your placement is due Dec. 2. (150 points)

4) mid-term examination (100 points)

There will be an in class mid-term examination on October 2.

5) final examination (200 points)

There will be a cumulative final examination in this class, it will primarily be an essay format.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Learning is not a passive experience, but an interactive one that requires effort on your part as a student. This classroom will function as a cooperative learning environment.

To this end, each student should:

Attend class regularly - If you miss class, you are responsible for checking with classmates to find out what you missed. The professor will not update you on the content of the class period.

Complete your own work - Elon has an honor code which is taken very seriously by this professor. If you have even the slightest question about what is appropriate collaborative work, **ASK THE PROFESSOR!** Failure to do so could permanently affect your academic future.

Turn in assignments on time, at the beginning of the class period when it is due - There are no exceptions, lateness will be penalized - see grading policy.

Actively participate in class – As a course focused on participatory learning it is essential for all students to contribute to the variety of classroom discussions and activities that occur throughout the semester.

COURSE BUSINESS

Contact with Professor:

I enjoy meeting you during my office hours and even at other times. Feel free to talk about the course, questions you have, issues/points you do not quite understand, and anything else that is important to you. I am also very responsive to email and will make every effort to respond to your messages within 24 hours.

Blackboard:

It is your responsibility to check the Blackboard site on a regular basis. I will use it extensively as a way of communicating with you about assignments and other course material.

Writing papers:

Good writing skills are critical to receiving an outstanding grade in this class. While I will am not a writing professor, I will take off on grammatical and spelling mistakes that I notice. Clarity of thought, good organization and presentation of ideas, original thinking, and creativity will be required to receive an A on any formal writing assignment. I am also happy to read drafts of papers as long as I see them at least 24 hours before they are due, or to discuss your writing problems with you on an individual basis. You may also want to consider visiting the Writing Center to work on any of these areas. **All papers should be turned in with your social security number identifying you rather than your name.**

Writing Center Location - Belk Library, First Floor

Hours - Mondays-Thursdays, 3:30-5:30; 7:00-11:00 PM/Sunday, 7:00-11:00 PM

Grading policy:

Unless you have made a prior agreement with me, I will take off one grade level (A becomes a A-) for each day an assignment is late. Papers with an undue number of errors of punctuation, spelling, or grammar will be penalized one full letter grade (A becomes a B). **Written work will be evaluated in terms of your depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, clarity of writing, and ability to address issues raised in the class and in readings on the topic at hand.**

Grades given reflect the following criteria of judgment:

A	93-100	A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, and writing style; demonstrate creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	
B	83-86	B: Good to Very Good, thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	C: Satisfactory, meet minimum requirements of assignment but not much more
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	
D	63-66	D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements
D-	60-62	
F	below 60	F: Failure to meet minimum requirements

Elon Academic Honor Code:

Elon students are expected to:

- *refrain from cheating, including plagiarism.
- *refrain from lying.
- *express opinions with civility and with consideration for the opinions of others.
- *respect shared intellectual property and resources.
- *promote the importance of the honor code in all their interactions for the benefit of the learning community.

COURSE OUTLINE

What is religion/religious studies?

Aug. 26 – Intro to course

intro to course, syllabus, discussion of class norms and expectations

Aug. 28 – What is religion?

Beginner's Guide, p. 1-21

Sept. 2 – What is religion?

Beginner's Guide, p. 21-40

Sept. 4 – Religion as a way of ordering the world

The Religion Factor, ch. 5

What shapes who we are?

Sept. 9 – Living our lives in relation to others

“Service: Learning by Helping” – Anthony Weston (CP)

Sept. 11 - Exploring social location

The Religion Factor, ch. 1

Sept. 16 – Exploring social location

Mary Hobgood – “An Ethical Agenda for Elites” (CP)

Is anyone or something there?

Sept. 18 – Many gods

Beginner's Guide, p.41-74; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 4

Sept. 23 – One god

Beginner's Guide, p. 41-74; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 8

Sept. 25 – How do people relate to the divine?

“Shona Women and the Mutupo Principle” – Tumani Nyajeka (CP); Ethics and World Religions, ch. 11

What does it mean to be human?

Sept. 30 - Exploring the relationship between the self and the sacred

The Religion Factor, ch. 4

Oct. 2 - Exploring the relationship between the self and the sacred

The Religion Factor, ch. 6

Oct. 7 – Gender and religion

The Religion Factor, ch. 10

Oct. 9 – The challenges of religious pluralism

The Religion Factor, Conclusion; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 5

How do we express/experience our faith?

Oct. 14 – fall break/no class

Oct. 16 – People, places, and things

Beginner's Guide, p.75-102

Oct. 21 – Religion and sacred space

The Religion Factor, ch. 14

Oct. 23 - Ritual, worship, and spirituality

Beginner's Guide, p.102-120

Oct. 28 –Case study on religious expression

Salvation on Sand Mountain, p. 1-110

Oct. 30 – Case study on religious expression

Salvation on Sand Mountain, p. 110 – 240

Nov. 4 – Case study on religious expression

*Robert Orsi – “Snakes Alive: Resituating the Moral in the Study of Religion” (CP)
Ethics and World Religions, ch. 7*

How do we live in relation to others?

Nov. 6 – Living the good life

Beginner's Guide, p.121-152; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 12

Nov. 11 – What is the purpose of religion today?

Beginner's Guide, p.153-178

Nov. 13 – The challenge of a living faith

The Religion Factor, ch. 12; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 14

Nov. 18 – Religion and politics

The Religion Factor, ch. 9; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 9

Nov. 20– Religion and nationalism

The Religion Factor, ch. 2; Ethics and World Religions, ch. 10

Nov. 25 – AAR/SBL

Nov. 27 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Dec. 2 – The power of faith in action - Romero

Dec. 4 – The power of faith in action - Romero

Dec. 5 - Reading day

Dec. 9 - Final Exam - 3:00 – 6:00 pm