

HR-8401 Global Religious Traditions

Spring 2014

Format: Online

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Faith brings us to truth; philosophy makes us grasp it; ethics makes us practice it; and ritual makes us one with it. ~Jagmanderlal Jaini

*"I know God won't give me anything I can't handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much."
~Mother Teresa*

"To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget." ~Arundhati Roy

*I tried to find Him on the Christian cross, but he wasn't there;
I went to the Hindu Temple and to the old pagodas,
but I could not find a trace of Him anywhere.
I searched on the mountain and in the valleys,
but neither in the heights nor in the depths was I able to find Him.
I went to the Ka'aba in Mecca, but He was not there either.
I questioned the scholars and philosophers,
But he was beyond their understanding.
Then I looked into my heart and it was there
where He dwelt that I saw Him;
He was nowhere else to be found.*

~Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the major global religions from a cross-cultural, multi-religious perspective. Taking into consideration that a course that explores many religions cannot be comprehensive, we will consider the religions from a thematic perspective by analyzing fundamental beliefs and practices in the various religious traditions. In addition, we will also examine assumptions underlying the discipline of religious studies. Students will engage through weekly readings and forum discussion, as well as other interactive learning activities, as part of the online learning community. Students of all faiths and backgrounds are invited and encouraged to

enroll. Priority given to off-campus SKSM students. [20 max enrollment; PIN code required; Auditors excluded]

The online education format brings with it both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, it provides greater flexibility and the opportunity for all of us to gather together in collaborative learning—no matter where we are in the world. On the other hand, certain limitations can sometimes render the format less interactive than a traditional in-person course. Taking all of this into consideration, and in the hopes of providing a lively learning experience, this course has been designed to provide as much quality interaction as possible—both with the material and with the class community. The course material will include images, video clips, and music relevant to the faith traditions we will be studying, along with the textual readings. In addition, collaborative dialogue with classmates (weekly forum postings as well as “live” discussion via Skype, phone, etc.) will hopefully create a dynamic and stimulating learning environment where we can all engage in thoughtful discussion and reflection.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the (often complex) historical contexts of the world’s global religious traditions.
2. Compare and contrast thematic topics across the various global religious traditions.
3. Engage in meaningful, reflective, respectful dialogue (both written and oral) regarding the global religious traditions.
4. Assess and articulate their own “location” in relation to each faith tradition.
5. Critically analyze the methodologies employed by religious studies scholars.
6. Identify and critically analyze religious themes in a film.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Fisher, Mary Pat. *Living Religions*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010). ISBN-10: 0205835856 | ISBN-13: 978-0205835850
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Global Religions: An Introduction*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003). ISBN-10: 0195158741 | ISBN-13: 978-0195158748
- Additional readings TBD (PDF copies will be posted on Moodle)

Note: Both texts are available on www.amazon.com or from other booksellers.

REQUIREMENTS: Successful completion of the course will be based upon four criteria:

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| 1. Introduction essay (2-3 pages) | (10%) |
| 2. Weekly Discussions and Forum Posts | (45%) |
| 3. Film Review (2-3 pages) | (10%) |
| 4. Final Research Paper and Site Visit (10-12 pages) | (35%) |

GRADING AND COURSE EVALUATION: As per Starr King School for the Ministry's educational methodology, SKSM students will receive narrative evaluations at the end of the term. Students from other schools at the GTU will receive letter grades. If, as an SKSM student, you need to receive a letter grade, please let the instructor know at your earliest convenience (preferably within the first 3 weeks of the semester).

INTRODUCTION ESSAY

For this assignment, students will write a personal essay in which they introduce themselves, discuss their own backgrounds, and reflect on the following question: *What is your definition of religion or the sacred?* In addition, students should briefly discuss why they have chosen to enroll in this course, and what they hope to take away from the experience. Students have the option to either email the essay directly to the instructor, or to post it in the forum (the latter is encouraged, as this will give other class members a chance to get to know you as well). This essay should be 2-3 pages (double spaced). Due **Wednesday, Feb. 5th**.

WEEKLY CHAVRUTA DISCUSSIONS AND FORUM POSTING

The participation component of the course will consist of **three** aspects:

1. **Chavruta pairs:** Since this is an online class, the majority of your participation will take place on Moodle. However, in an effort to create a more dynamic class community, we will seek to expand the boundaries of the traditional online learning format. In the Jewish tradition, there is a rabbinic approach known as *chavruta* (the literal meaning of this term is "friendship" or "companionship") where two people (or sometimes a small group) gather together to study, discuss, and analyze the Talmud. In the spirit of this practice, we will take a similar pedagogical approach in this class: at the beginning of the semester, each class member will be assigned a chavruta partner, and each week, the partners will discuss the assigned readings via Skype, Google Hangout, or over the phone. There is no specified length for these conversations, but each session should allow for a refining of both partners' thoughts on the readings (a minimum of 20 minutes is recommended for each session). It is hoped that this additional opportunity for a more "in-person" and collaborative style of communication will help deepen the overall experience and engagement with the religious traditions. (NOTE: if you haven't used Skype or Google Hangout before or have a slight technology phobia, don't worry! I will pass out detailed instructions and help in any way I can to facilitate this. You can also make free phone calls anywhere in the US via Gmail. This would be an option if platforms like Skype are not available to you because you don't have a webcam).
2. **Forum posting:** The second aspect of the participation grade will consist of weekly written reflections on that week's assigned readings. This reflection should be approximately 500 words and will consist of two parts:
 - a. Your own thoughts and analysis of the readings. What issues arise for you in the readings in relation to your own location (whether religious, social, gender, or other location)? It's also helpful to raise questions you had about the readings.

- b. A brief report of the main points (or, in your eyes, the most interesting issue(s)) you discussed with your chavruta partner. Where did you agree? Where did you disagree? Were you able to reach any sort of synthesis through your dialogue?

3. Weekly response: The third requirement is that each student respond to **at least one** classmate's post each week (it is preferable that you comment on a post by someone other than your chavruta partner, in order to dialogue with other class members as well). These responses can be brief (100-200 words) and should seek to respectfully engage the main points the poster raised by adding something further to the discussion, or by (gently) raising clarifying questions.

NOTE: *Forum reflections* must be posted by **11 PM Friday (PST)** of the week the readings are assigned. This means that you will have the week to complete the readings and coordinate a time to talk/video chat with your chavruta partner before completing the written reflections. The *weekly required responses to other students' posts* should ideally be posted by the following Monday.

NOTE: If you are experiencing problems with Moodle (logging in or otherwise) contact the instructor or the GTU's Moodle support IMMEDIATELY.

FILM REVIEW

In order to broaden our pedagogical approach, we will engage not only written texts, but also other media, such as films. For this assignment, students will choose one film from a list (the instructor will provide this at the start of the semester) and write a 2-3 page (double spaced) review that analyzes the religious symbolism and/or issues present in the film. Questions you might consider: Does the film adequately and respectfully represent the religious tradition? Does the film represent only a small facet of the faith, or a broader view? Does it deal primarily with ethical, social, ritual, or other dimensions of the religious tradition? Does it address social justice issues? **Film reviews are due May 5th.** There is a Film Review forum listed under the week of May 5-11 on Moodle where you should post your review.

FINAL PAPER AND SITE VISIT

For the final paper, students will write a research paper on a particular religious tradition and topic of their choice. Students may choose a topic that interests them, with one caveat: the paper should focus on a religious tradition *different from the student's own tradition or spiritual practice.*

As a component of the final paper, students are required to visit a place of worship outside their own faith tradition, for either 1.) a prayer/worship service or a religious or spiritual ritual, or 2.) to meet with the community leader(s) in order to learn about the faith practices of the community. Students should take detailed notes for their site visit and then incorporate these into the final paper. Final papers should be 10-12 pages in length. Final Papers are due by **Friday, May 23rd.**

Students should consult with the instructor about their final paper topic no later than **Fri., Apr. 11th.**

Students with disabilities, health concerns, etc. who so desire may make special arrangements with the professor at (or prior to) the beginning of the semester. This is a justice issue and will allow the student to be in the course in a way which is sustainable for them.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: FEB. 3-9 - INTRODUCTION AND APPROACHES TO RELIGION

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, ix-xvii & Ch. 1: “Religious Responses”

Assignment:

- Introduction Essay: Due by 11 PM, Wednesday February 5th.

WEEK 2: FEB. 10-16 - WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GLOBAL RELIGIONS?

Read:

- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch’s 1, 9, 11
- Additional reading TBD (PDF will be posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Select which film you will analyze (list of films posted on Moodle)
- Schedule Skype/phone discussion session with your chavruta partner
- **DUE:** Post 500 word reflection on the Moodle forum by Friday, Sept. 13th, 11 PM.
- **DUE:** Post 100-200 word response to at least one classmate on the forum by Monday, Sept. 16th.

WEEK 3: FEB. 17-23 - INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 2: “Indigenous Sacred Ways”
- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 7

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 4: FEB. 24 – MAR. 2 - SOUTH ASIAN TRADITIONS – HINDUISM

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 3: “Hinduism”

- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 5

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 5: MAR. 3-9 - SOUTH ASIAN TRADITIONS – JAINISM AND SIKHISM

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch's 4 & 11: Jainism and Sikhism
- Chapple, "The Living Cosmos of Jainism" (posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 6: MAR. 10-16 - BUDDHISM

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 5: Buddhism
- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 6

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 7: MAR. 17-23 - EAST ASIAN TRADITIONS: DAOISM & CONFUCIANISM

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 6: Confucianism & Daoism
- Weiming, "Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness" (posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 8: MAR. 24--30 - SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS!

WEEK 9: MAR. 31 – APR. 6 - EAST ASIAN TRADITIONS: SHINTO

Read:

- Fisher, Ch. 7, Shinto
- Boyd and Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective" (posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 10: APR. 7- 13 - RETHINKING THE MONOTHEISTIC “BIG 3” RELIGIONS

Read:

- Readings TBD (PDFs will be posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 11: APR. 14 – 20 - JUDAISM (& ZOROASTRIANISM)

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 8 on Judaism and also the brief section on Zoroastrianism
- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 4

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 12: APR. 21 – 27 - CHRISTIANITY

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 9: Christianity
- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 2

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 13: APR. 28 – MAY 4 - ISLAM

Read:

- Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 10
- Juergensmeyer, *Global Religions*, Ch. 3
- Safi, “I and Thou in a Fluid World: Beyond ‘Islam Versus the West’” (PDF posted on Moodle)

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 14: MAY 5 - 11 - WILD CARD SESSION

- The students and instructor will decide together a few weeks ahead what topic(s) we wish to cover this week.

Read: TBD

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

- **FILM REVIEW DUE THIS WEEK! (Post in film review forum on Moodle)**

WEEK 15: MAY 12 – 18 - WILD CARD SESSION

- The students and instructor will decide together a few weeks ahead what topic(s) we wish to cover this week.

Read: TBD

Assignment:

- Skype/phone discussion with chavruta partner
- **DUE:** 500 word reflection posted by Friday, 11 PM
- **DUE:** 100-200 word response by Monday

WEEK 16: MAY 19 – 25 – FINAL WEEK

- No readings or posts due this week.

Assignment:

- **FINAL PAPER DUE: MAY 23rd**

- Please provide feedback on the course on the Moodle forum:
 - What did you like?
 - What should be changed or improved?
 - All suggestions are welcome!