

Comparative Studies 270 Introduction to Comparative Religion

Rationale for GEC Literature Category and Assessment Plan for the Course

I. Goals and Objectives

- A. We believe that the current version of CS 270, Introduction to Comparative Religion, is more appropriately designated as fulfilling the **literature** requirement within the Arts and Humanities: Analysis of Texts and Works of Art. Although it is currently fulfills the Culture/Ideas category, the most recent versions of the course syllabus and readings reflect a much stronger emphasis on sacred literature and primary sources from the world's religions. The course emphasizes how the literatures of various religious traditions were created from oral traditions and placed into a canon. The course also examines how individuals use and interpret the literature of various religious traditions in practice and ritual. The course will maintain its designation as international because of its continued global perspective and concern with religious issues in a broad comparative perspective beyond the United States.

CS 270 will meet the **goals** of the GEC literature requirements as follows:

1. This course covers the sacred literature, historical development and lived practice of the world's major religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and contemporary new religions like Scientology. Secondary scholarship will be heavily supplemented with primary literature drawn from a wide range of sources, ranging from the Vedas, Bible and Qu'ran to contemporary sources like Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama. With Hinduism, the course analyzes the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Yoga Sutras, the Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as other writings. This literature includes sacred narratives about the relationships between Gods and humans among other themes. For instance, the course examines how the Ramayana is translated into various forms like television, childrens' stories, oral narratives, and plays, and how it functions as both a sacred text and national story.
2. The overall goal of the course is to teach students to look respectfully yet also critically at the role of religion in relation to larger social, historical and political forces, as a phenomenon intimately intertwined with literature, art, and other cultural systems.

B. Introduction to Comparative Religion fulfills the **learning objectives** of the GEC requirements for literature as follows:

1. Readings will include theory and methods for the interpretation of religious traditions and religious literature in their social, historical and

political contexts. Theoretical perspectives will include sociological psychological, materialist, feminist and comparative religions, among others.

2. Students will be introduced to the academic study of comparative religion as a critical engagement with religious texts, rituals and communities. This will involve close readings of primary and secondary sources and essay exams that require students to apply the theoretical tools discussed in class to specific religious texts.
3. Students will also write one field observation paper based on their visit to and critical analysis of a religious community or event. This will also include a thoughtful comparison of the way this tradition is represented in sacred literature and the way it is practiced as a living religious community.

Assessment plan for the course:

Assessment is embedded in the grading criteria for the assignments; that is, assignments will be evaluated based on the goals and objectives of the course. Specifically, the course will evaluate whether students' written and oral assignments indicate that they have learned to

- write and speak with clarity and precision so as to advance thoughts and arguments coherently and persuasively
- engage in critical analysis of visual arts genres in social, cultural, and political contexts
- understand research methods used in the fields of visual arts
- achieve an understanding of and develop an appreciation for ethnic, gender, racial, and class differences as these are expressed in visual artworks
- appreciate the role of visual artworks in shaping their own cultural values and beliefs

The instructor will assess the degree to which the main objectives of the course, as stated above, have been achieved in the various course assignments. In particular, the assessment will focus on students' ability to express a critical understanding of the aesthetic dimensions of visual artworks and on the social and cultural meanings of visual artworks.

In addition, students will be asked to fill out narrative evaluations at the end of the quarter. Narrative evaluation forms used in Comparative Studies ask detailed questions regarding the effectiveness of the course, including the teaching materials. Based on the comments of the students, but also including the instructor's assessment of the course (which includes an evaluation of the materials and pedagogy employed to reach the objectives of the course), appropriate changes will be made to the syllabus.

