

**Comparative Studies 270 Introduction to Comparative Religion
FALL 2007**

Professor Erzen

428 Hagerty Hall

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Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-3:18 in HH451

Course Description:

What is religion? When and how did religious traditions emerge? What are the major literatures or texts of various religious traditions? How do people live and experience religion? How do people think about their religion in the face of the diversity of other religious traditions and diversity within their own traditions?

This course addresses these questions through an introduction to the *academic* study of religion. We begin by assessing what is and is not religion by using Scientology as a case study. We then proceed to look at different approaches and theories about religion.

Next, we will examine various religious traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and new religious movements. Each section begins by discussing:

Context and History: why a religious tradition emerges at particular times and places in history

Texts: how beliefs are codified into the canonical literature of each tradition

Communities: how religious communities form and become institutionalized

Practice: how people practice religion

How people practice their religious faith in the contemporary world is central to understanding religion. Therefore, there will be class trips to various religious organizations in the Columbus area. You are required to spend time at a religious organization significantly different from your own and complete one field report paper based on those visits.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO STUDY COMPARATIVE RELIGION
ACADEMICALLY?**

This class provides an opportunity to engage in the critical analysis of religious traditions. The class is not a place for either students or instructors to advance personal religious beliefs. The class examines religion as it would any other academic subject: historically, culturally, and critically. The class is not a space to prove that one religion is superior or true. Regardless of your personal religious beliefs, you should be prepared to study religion from this perspective.

GEC requirements. Comparative Studies 270 fulfills GEC Breadth requirements for Arts and Humanities, Literature and for Diversity, International Issues, Non-Western Global.

Arts and Humanities coursework develops students' capacities to evaluate significant writing and works of art, and for aesthetic response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience. Expected outcomes are:

- Students develop abilities to be enlightened observers or active participants in the visual, spatial, musical, theatrical, rhetorical, or written arts.
- Students describe and interpret achievement in the arts and literature.
- Students explain how works of art and literature express social and cultural issues.

International Issues coursework help students become educated, productive, and principled citizens of their nation and the world. Expected outcomes are:

- Students exhibit an understanding of political, economic, cultural, physical, and social differences among the nations of the world, including a specific examination of non-Western culture.

Readings:

Jacob Neusner, *World Religions in America*, third edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003)

[James Fieser](#), [John Powers](#), *Scriptures of the World's Religions* (McGraw Hill, 2007)

Course Packet of primary sources

Available at SBX Book Store 1806 North High St., Phone: (614) 291-9528

Assignments:

-One mandatory, 2-page, un-graded essay on “What I think about religion.”

1. 20%: Attendance, participation in discussion, mandatory essay.
2. 25%: Take-home Midterm
3. 25% One group presentation (20-30 minutes) on a religious tradition not covered in class. These will be done in the last two weeks of the quarter and guidelines will be distributed.
4. 10%: 10-minute presentation on a primary source from the class reader that explains its relevance to the religious tradition we are discussing.
5. 20%: One Field Report Paper (4-5 pages)

These papers are based on visits to and critical discussion of religious organizations. The traditions that you write about should be significantly different from the one in which you were raised. There are guidelines and examples posted on Carmen.

Attendance and Participation:

I expect students to be active participants in their education. This means that each student should come to class having carefully read the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them. Because knowing how to articulate your ideas is a crucial part of the learning process, I expect you, as a member of the class, to contribute your own unique perspective to our discussions.

The real action of the course takes place in the classroom. Therefore, it is important and expected that you will be at every class session. Inevitably, an occasion may arise when you are unable to attend. It is fine to miss class for major religious holidays. Out of fairness to your classmates who do attend every class, chronic lateness and/or more than

two unexcused absences will detract from your grade. Finally, if you have any special needs or concerns with this course, please feel free to talk with me in person.

My computer crashed, and my roommate ate my field report paper...

All written work should be in 12-point, double-spaced type, with standard margins, and pages numbered and stapled. I will not accept a paper that is not stapled. *All written work should be thoroughly proofread.* There are no extensions, and all assignments are marked down one-third of a letter grade for every late day. **After 3 days, if you have not turned in your paper, you will automatically receive a “0” for that paper. No exceptions.**

Student Conferences and E-mail Communication: Please stop by office hours or schedule an appointment if necessary. You are also welcome to email me with questions related to the course. However, do not send any information or requests in an email that you would not discuss with me in person. I will not answer any email I deem inappropriate.

Civility:

*Questions and discussions are welcome. The only requirement is that the questioner respects the opinions of others and does not monopolize class time.

*Early Departures: If there is a special circumstance that requires you to leave early, please notify me before class so I can make sure you get all the appropriate information concerning upcoming papers and assignments.

*And please: Turn off all cell phones and pagers.

Disability Services

Any student with a documented disability who may require special accommodations should identify him or herself to the instructor as early in the quarter as possible to receive effective and timely accommodations. You may also wish to contact the Office for Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall, 292-3307). Students are expected to know and understand the rules regarding academic misconduct, particularly the rules regarding plagiarism,

Plagiarism

Scholastic dishonesty in any form is a serious violation of academic integrity and university policy. Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own. As stated in the University's Code of Student Conduct, any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on exams, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Readings in *Scriptures of the World's Religions

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Thursday Sept. 20: Introduction to the course

Read in class: Larue, "What is 'Religion'? Well, it's Hard to 'Say Exactly'"

Tuesday Sept. 25: Scientology "Cult of Greed" or Valid Religion?

Church of Scientology: <http://www.scientology.org>

The University of Virginia Religious Movements webpage:

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu>

Time Magazine "The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power"

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~dst/Fishman/time-behar.html>

Rolling Stone Magazine "Inside Scientology"

http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/9363363/inside_scientology?rnd=1143220922_843&has-player=true&version=6.0.12.1040

Film Clips: *A&E Show on Scientology*, *South Park "Trapped in the Closet"*

Thursday Sept. 27: Theories of Religion: Making Sense of Scientology

*David Chidester, "The Church of Baseball"

*Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary forms of the Religious Life"

*Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion"

*Karl Marx, "Religion as the Opium of the People"

*Merlin Stone, "When God was a Woman"

Tuesday Oct. 2: The Context and Beliefs of Hinduism

Read Neusner, Chap. 8

* "You are That" and "What is the World but Spirit"

Thursday Oct. 4: Hinduism: Bhakti Gods and Goddesses, Gandhi

Film clip: *Puja*

*"Devotion to the Lord" from the *Bhagavad Gita*

"Yoga Sutras" by Patanjali

"Untouchability" by Mahatma Gandhi

Tuesday Oct. 9: Hindu Communities in the U.S. and the World

Film clip : *Hiders and Seekers*

Fieldtrip to Bharatiya Hindu Temple with Shiv Chatravedi

Fieldtrip to Krishna House Columbus

Thursday Oct. 11: NO CLASS

Start thinking about topic for group projects

Tuesday Oct. 16: Buddhism: Context and the Life of the Buddha

Read Neusner, Chap. 9

Thursday Oct. 18: Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana Buddhism

Film clip : *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

*“Zen and Koans” by Daisetz T. Suzuki, “The Heart Sutra” 2pp.

*“Love, Kindness and Universal Responsibility” by the Dalai Llama

Tuesday Oct. 23: Engaged Buddhism and Buddhism in America

Film clip: *Chasing Buddha*

*“Buddhism Comes Home” by Jean Latz Griffin,

* “Precepts for an Engaged Buddhism” by Thich Nhat Hanh

Thursday Oct. 25:

MIDTERM DUE and in-class portion

Watch *I Heart Huckabees*

Discuss Group Projects

Tuesday Oct. 30: Judaism: Context, Rabbinic Judaism, Judaism in history

Read Neusner, Chap. 7

*“Abraham’s Covenant” from Genesis, “The Mosaic Covenant” from Exodus, “Midrash”, “Talmud” and “Thirteen Principles of Faith”

Thursday Nov. 1: Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Hasidic Judaism in the U.S.

Film Clip: A Life Apart

Film Clip: Elie Wiesel Goes Home

Fieldtrip to OSU Hillel

Tuesday Nov. 6: Christianity: Context, the life of Jesus and Codification

Read Neusner, Chap. 4 and 2

*“The Beatitudes,” “The Good Samaritan,” “Paul on Faith and Works” “Paul on Faith, Hope, and Love,” “Formation of the Canon”

Thursday Nov. 8: Catholicism, Protestantism and Evangelicalism in America

Film Clip: Mine Eyes have seen the Glory

Fieldtrip to World Harvest Church or King Avenue United Methodist

Tuesday Nov. 13: Islam: Context, the life of Muhammed, Sunnis and Shi’ites

Read Neusner, Chap. 11

*“The Night Journey from Sahih Muslim”

Listen to Qur’anic recitation, read selections from the Qu’ran

Film Clip: The Hajj

Thursday Nov. 15: Sufism , Muslims in America, Global Forms of Islam

Film Clip: I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim

LAST DAY TO TURN IN FIELD REPORT PAPER

Tuesday Nov. 20: New Religious Movements: Branch Davidians and the Raelians
Group Presentations

Thursday Nov. 22: Thanksgiving

Tuesday Nov. 27: Group Presentations

Thursday Nov. 29: Group Presentations

TALKS OF INTEREST FALL QUARTER:

Thursday, September 27, 4:30 p.m.

Occulture, Popular Culture, and the Appeal of *The Da Vinci Code*.
Christopher Partridge, Lancaster University

Tuesday, November 6, 4:30 p.m.

UFOs, Conspiracy and the Occult: The Strange Journey of Sister Thedra
Michael Barkun, Syracuse University

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR GROUP PRESENTATIONS:

(I have numerous sources available for students)

Sikhism

Jainism

Confucianism

Taoism

Shinto

Parsees

Zoroastrianism

Bahai

Church of Latter-Day Saints

Nation of Islam

Atheism

Free-Thinkers

Christian Science

Theosophy

Native American Religions

Unification Church

Raelians

RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE COLUMBUS AREA

Bharatiya Hindu Temple
3671 Hyatts Rd.
Powell, OH
740-369-0717

Yellow Springs Dharma Center
502 Livermore St.
Yellow Springs, OH
937-767-9919

Krishna House
379 W. 8th Ave
Columbus, OH
421-1661

Jain Center of Central Ohio
PO Box 310
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068
863-5436

Karme Thegsum Choling
Llama Cathy
Tibetan Meditation Center
231 S. Grubb St.
228-6546

Gurdwara Sahib Sikh Temple
2580 W. Dublin Granville Rd.
Columbus, OH
761-0007

Zen Columbus Sangha
Meditation sessions at First Unitarian
Universalist Church
93 W. Weisheimer
Columbus, OH 43214
Web-site:
<http://worldwidehideout.com/zen/index2.html>

Islamic Center
Tarazi.2@osu.edu
1428 E. Broad St.
Columbus, OH 43201
253-3251

Baha'i Faith
1993 Sunbury Road
337-9990

Hillel Foundation
46 E. 16th Ave
294-4797

Chabad House
207 E. 15th Street
294-3296

Church of Scientology
30 N. High Street
Columbus, OH 43215
221-5024

Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery
Haysville, OH 44838 · (419) 368-5335
<http://sgpm.goarch.org/Monastery/index.php>