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Ways of Understanding Religion
Summer 2009
RSOC 9

Course Description:

This is an introductory course designed to introduce students to the many different NON-RELIGIOUS ways of understanding religion, formally known as METHODOLOGY OF RELIGION. This class will be a joint effort between the students and teacher with the understanding that every single person in the room is both a learner and a teacher. With that in mind, the class will consist of a mix of lectures and group discussion. Each person in the classroom will be on a journey of discovery in this course. We will all seek to understand the roots of our own personal definitions of religion while simultaneously learning about academic (non-religious) understandings of religion which will include anthropological, sociological, psychological, and philosophical viewpoints. **Respect for all spiritual traditions will be the dominant theme.** At the end of the course, the students will be expected to be able to analyze their own personal understandings with any of these viewpoints, as well as be able to use their own personal understanding of religion to analyze academic viewpoints.

Course Goals:

1. Identification of the different academic ways of understanding religion.
2. Demonstration of knowledge of theories of religion and explorations of religion by thinkers important to the field.
3. Ability to apply these academic ways of understanding to the case studies of world religions in the textbook and in the Hicks reader.
4. Critical evaluation of definitions of religion and the root/s of religion presented by fellow classmates, important thinkers, and the textbook.
5. Critical evaluation of themes and readings of the class through writing both on exams and in the writing assignments
6. Development of individual and collaborative critical thinking skills.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion: Introduction through Cases 3rd EDITION*
David Hicks, *Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion*, Second Edition

If students have the first or second editions of the Kessler text, they are responsible for coordinating with a classmate who has the second edition in order to make sure that they are reading the correct material. There are significant differences between the first and second edition, including a brand new chapter and different page numbers, etc. ***It will be difficult to use other editions, but if you wish to do so, you are responsible for figuring out the changes and finding ways to read material that is not in previous editions.***

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Every student has to take 2 exams, participate in group discussions, hand in notecards on the readings, POSSIBLY take randomly administered pop quizzes, and write one five to seven page paper. **Grading for each exam, writing assignment, pop quiz, and group discussion** will reflect the quality of a student's work as follows: A+ (100-98 = outstanding), A (97-94 = exceptional), A- (93-90 = excellent), B+ (87-89 = very good), B (86-84 = solid performance), B- (80-83 = more than adequate), C (adequate), D (barely passing), F (not passing). The grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by (+) or (-) suffixes, except that the grade of A may not be modified by a (+) suffix when it comes to the over-all class grade. **Grading for ALL WRITING, BOTH ON THE EXAMS AND ON THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT** will be based on both content and writing ability.

GRADING POLICY: In addition to the grading policy listed above, the schema for the (+) and (-) system for **over-all, final** class grades will be as follows:

1. NO A + (FOR OVER-ALL GRADE—THIS IS UNIVERSITY POLICY)
2. A is equivalent to 94 and above to 100.
3. A- is equivalent to 90-93.
4. B+ is equivalent to 87,88,89.
5. B is equivalent to 84, 85, 86
6. B- is equivalent to 80-83
7. C+ is equivalent to 77,78,79
8. C is equivalent to 74,75,76
9. C- is equivalent to 70-73.
10. D+ is equivalent to 67,68,69
11. D is equivalent to 65,66
12. F is equivalent to 64 and below.

I DO NOT DISCUSS GRADES OVER EMAIL OR BY PHONE. I WILL ONLY DISCUSS GRADES IN PERSON DURING OFFICE HOURS.

Exams

STUDENTS MUST BRING IN BLUE BOOKS ONE CLASS AHEAD OF THE EXAM. YOU MAY NOT TAKE AN EXAM WITHOUT A BLUE BOOK HANDED IN BEFORE THE DAY OF THE EXAM.

Exams will consist of short answers and two essay questions. Short answer is worth 1/3 of the exam grade and the essays are worth 2/3 of the grade. The second exam is not comprehensive. Make-ups are at my discretion.

First exam -- -- -- -- Wed., July 8th 3:20-5:20 in our classroom.

Second exam-- -- -- -- Fri., July 24th 3:20-5:20 in our classroom. (NOT COMPREHENSIVE)

Make-ups are at my discretion AND WILL ONLY BE GIVEN IF YOU HAVE A DOCTOR'S NOTE OR DOCUMENTATION OF AN EMERGENCY. I DO NOT GIVE MAKE-UPS BASED ON TRAVEL PLANS. IF YOU HAVE TRAVEL PLANS THAT CONFLICT WITH ANY OF THE EXAMS, YOU SHOULD DROP THE CLASS.

Pop Quizzes

If it appears that students are not reading, pop quizzes might be administered. If administered, they will be factored into the exam grade.

Writing Assignment: Each student will be required to do a five to seven page paper which will use Freud, Turner, Douglas, Durkheim, or Weber (depending on what the class eventually covers) to analyze case studies in the textbook and/or the reader. This paper is designed to help the students learn how to apply different methods of academic analysis to religion and to get a taste of what it is like to be a scholar of religion.

ACCEPTANCE OF LATE PAPERS IS AT MY DISCRETION. POINTS WILL BE DEDUCTED FOR LATE PAPERS (10 POINTS OFF PER DAY). EMAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. POINTS ARE TAKEN OFF IF YOU DO NOT FOLLOW THE FORMATTING DIRECTIONS AS FOLLOWS: 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING CITATIONS; 10 POINTS OFF FOR PAPERS THAT ARE TOO SHORT; 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING WORKS CITED OR BIBLIOGRAPHY PAGES, AND ADDITIONAL POINTS TAKEN OFF FOR NOT FOLLOWING OTHER FORMATTING STIPULATIONS.

Turn in the papers outside the Religious Studies office in the mailbox on the wall labeled “for student papers”. IF YOU HAND IN A PAPER AFTER THE DUE DATE AND TIME WITHOUT MY EXPRESS PERMISSION, THE DATE I FIND IT IN MY BOX IS THE DATE IT WAS HANDED IN, REGARDLESS OF WHEN YOU ACTUALLY HANDED IT IN. THEREFORE, IF A PAPER IS LATE, YOU SHOULD GET THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO INITIAL AND DATE IT BEFORE YOU PUT IT IN MY BOX.

Paper due - - - - - Friday, July 17th by 5pm in mailbox inside the Religious Studies Office, Kenna 323.

Participation and Preparation for class:

NO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR CELL PHONES AND PDA’S:

IF YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS CLASS, YOU MUST TURN OFF AND PUT AWAY ALL CELL PHONES AND PDA’S. ANY USE OF CELL PHONES OR PDA’S IN THIS CLASS (IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, ETC.) WILL LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN CLASS. IF YOUR CELL PHONE/PDA IS OUT AND ON, EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT USING IT, YOU RISK LOSING CREDIT FOR CLASS PARTICIPATION THAT DAY, IN ADDITION TO LOWERING YOUR OVER-ALL PARTICIPATION GRADE. THEY CANNOT BE IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, OR OUT IN ANY WAY. THEY MUST BE PHYSICALLY TURNED OFF AND IN A BAG. THE SAFEST MEASURE IF YOU WISH TO EARN A GOOD PARTICIPATION GRADE IS NOT TO BRING THEM TO CLASS.

Students will be graded on participation and effort in the groups and in regular class lectures. At the beginning of every class for which there is scheduled reading, students must bring in an index card with the following on it:

1. What was easiest to understand about each self-contained part of the reading. One to three sentences per each part.
2. What was hardest to understand about each self-contained part of the reading. One to three sentences for each part.

THESE ARE NOT QUIZZES. THEY ARE SIMPLY TO SHOW EVIDENCE THAT YOU HAVE READ AND TO HELP FOCUS LECTURE. THEY WILL BE FACTORED INTO YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.

YOU WILL HAND THESE CARDS IN AT THE END OF CLASS.

Students receive one grace absence. Persistent tardiness and early departure from class will hurt your grade. Sleeping in class, not paying attention, chattering or whispering to fellow students during lecture or when others are answering or asking questions of the professor and other behavior that demonstrates the student is not participating will hurt your grade. Consistent disruption of class by talking to fellow students outside of group discussion periods will hurt your grade.

IF YOU PERSIST IN WHISPERING TO SEAT-MATES OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSION, I WILL ASK YOU TO MOVE DURING CLASS. WHEN ASKED, PLEASE RISE AND MOVE TO ANOTHER SEAT. IF YOU ARE TEMPTED TO WHISPER TO YOUR SEAT-MATE, SIT NEXT TO SOMEONE YOU DO NOT KNOW.

Please note that it will be difficult for you to do well on exams if you are not present during class discussion. If you do not make the effort to make up the material, even one absence can radically affect your ability to do well on the corresponding exam.

USING YOUR CELL-PHONE OR ANY PDA DURING CLASS IN ANY WAY WILL ALSO LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Attendance in this classroom will be closely monitored. This not only helps me learn your name, but alerts me in time to pre-empt avoidable problems with absenteeism. Numerous unexplained absences are not acceptable. Stuff happens, but I want to know about it. **If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes and hand-outs from a fellow student who is part of your “buddy” group. Only if you have contacted all team members and no one has responded to you should you ask me for the material.**

Participation will be graded in the following manner:

PHONES AND ALL PDA'S MUST BE OFF AND PHYSICALLY PUT AWAY DURING CLASS. STUDENTS WHO TEXT OR CHECK THEIR MESSAGES DURING CLASS (IN YOUR LAPS, ON THE DESK, ETC.) OR USE THEIR PHONES OR PDA'S IN ANY WAY DURING CLASS WILL NOT GET AN A IN PARTICIPATION. NO QUESTIONS ASKED. IF YOU PREFER TO TEXT DURING CLASS, THIS IS NOT THE CLASS FOR YOU.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WHISPERING OR CHATTERING TO FELLOW STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND USING ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES (CELL-PHONES, ETC.) WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE LEVEL EVEN IF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IS AT THE A, B, C, ETC. LEVEL.

A: Regular attendance and regular contributions and regular notecards.

The A student *displays that he or she has done the reading, references the reading in contributions*, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR, **DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS** and answers questions and asks questions regularly in class.

GRADING OF PARTICIPATION CONTINUED.

B: Regular attendance and regular notecards and occasional contributions.

The B student answers questions when asked point-blank, attends class regularly and hands in all participation assignments, **DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR.**

C: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. The C student cannot answer questions when asked, or when asked reflects that he/she has not done the reading. The C student does not take the participation assignments seriously. The C student disrupts class by chattering to fellow students outside of group discussion and does not pay attention **AND/OR USES ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS.**

D: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. Doesn't pay attention and chatters to fellow students outside of group discussion and ignores class-room protocol. Texts, uses PDA's during class, has cell-phone, PDA, out and on.

F: Serious problems

BUDDY GROUPS:

If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes and hand-outs from a fellow student who is part of your class team/discussion group. Only if you have contacted all team members and no one has responded to you should you ask me for the material.

In order to calculate your **final grade for the quarter**, each component of the course requirements will be weighted as follows:

EXAMS AND POSSIBLE POP QUIZZES:	55 percent of your final grade.
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:	25 percent of your final grade.
PARTICIPATION:	20 percent of your final grade.
TOTAL:	100 percent.

Academic Honesty:

Cheating in any way will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating on an exam or quiz, you will fail the assignment and possibly the entire course. Recently, I failed a student who was caught cheating, so I advise you not to cheat. If you are caught plagiarizing material, you will receive no credit for the assignment and might fail the entire course.

Disability Policies: Students with disabilities or special needs concerning test-taking or note-taking must provide me with the appropriate forms from the Drahmman Center. You must contact me so that we can arrange testing facilities for you with plenty of time.

Respect in the Classroom:

The atmosphere in the classroom will be one of respect, both for me and for each other. Open discussion is taken for granted, but disruption will not be tolerated. If you are disrupting the class, I will give you a first warning. A second warning might include a request for you to leave the classroom. A third warning will entail your departure from the classroom.

Cell Phones and all other electronic devices (PDAS, ETC.)

Cell phones and all electronic devices are to be turned off during class. If you use your cell phone/electronic device during class in any way (answering it, text-messaging, playing games, etc.) it will be confiscated and kept by me until the end of class. Use of any cell phone/PDA during class will hurt your participation grade.

Computers

Computers are not allowed in the classroom unless you have a written and signed form from the Drahmman center explaining that you have a special need. You must take notes by hand.

Course Outline:

This is a flexible outline. At any time we might refer back to another previous reading if it informs our discussion.

FOCUS OF FIRST HALF OF CLASS:

**THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION:
HOW DO YOU DEFINE RELIGION? WHAT IS IT?**

FIRST WEEK

June 22	Introduction and syllabus	What is the study of religion? What is methodology of religion? Can a person be religious and study religion objectively? Excerpts from the movie <i>Agnes of God</i>
	What is religious experience? How is it possible? Can it be proven or disproven by science?	

BRING A NEWSPAPER TO CLASS.

June 24	Who is a student of religion? What is the field of Religious Studies? Definitions of Religion What makes a religion a religion and not something else?	Kessler, Chapter 1 Kessler, Chapter 2
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SECOND WEEK

June 29	What is the role of a higher power in religion? How do you explain the existence of religion and/or higher power/s? Should the scholar of religion participate in the religion? Should the scholar of religion interfere in moral conflicts in the religion?	Kessler, Chapter 3 Hicks, Reading 1-2 by Freud, pp. 8-11. Kessler, pp.148-149 on Freud. Hicks, Chapter 6, Reading 6-1 by Chagnon pp. 204-210.
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SECOND WEEK CONTINUED

July 1	What is a sacred story? Are myths lies? Why are they important? What is a symbol? How does symbol function in myth? What is ritual? How are myth and ritual related? How can the symbols used in ritual reveal the structure of a society/ culture?	Kessler, Chapter 4 Read pp. 60-71. Stop at Section 4.4. Skip to section 4.5 and read pp. 74-80. Kessler, Chapter 5 pp. 82-96. Hicks, Chapter 4, Reading 4-2 by Turner, pp. 122-129.
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THIRD WEEK

BRING A BLUE BOOK TO CLASS.

July 6	How might religion be used to control people and society? How might society be God? What is the relationship between religion and society? Finalize definition of religion and review.	Hicks, Reading 1-3 by Durkheim, pp. 11-15
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July 8 **FIRST EXAM**
Two hours.

**FOCUS OF SECOND HALF OF CLASS:
THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE ROOT OF RELIGION: BELIEF IN RELIGION:
WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE? WHY DO THEY BELONG TO A RELIGION?**

FOURTH WEEK

July 13	What is wrong with human existence? How can religious experience cure it? How might meditation transform suffering?	DOING TIME, DOING VIPASSANA (A Documentary to be viewed in class). Kessler, Chapter 7, pp. 127-142. Then skip to the bottom of page 149 and read about Jung and Teresa of Avila, pp. 149-156. Kessler, pp. 296-298 ON ZEN.
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FOURTH WEEK CONTINUED.

July 15	What is the relationship between religion and politics? Why do religions harm others for religious reasons?	Kessler, Chapter 10
	Why must religions explain evil in order to survive? Why do innocent people suffer? Why might people commit atrocities in the name of religion?	Kessler, Chapter 8 Pp. 159-181.
	Why are some religions flexible and others rigid? Are religious systems arbitrary? Is it possible for religions to change? How does the human mind relate to the way religions develop?	Hicks, Chapter 2, Reading 2-4 by Douglas, pp. 49-55.

PAPER DUE FRIDAY, JULY 17th BY 5 P.M. IN MY MAILBOX INSIDE THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES OFFICE: KENNA 323.

FIFTH WEEK

July 20	How does a religion keep itself alive? What is needed in order for a religion to persist?	Kessler, Chapter 11 pp. 240-260. Stop at Section 11.5.
	How does religion change the world? How does it influence culture?	Hicks, Chapter 11, Reading 11-1 by Weber, pp. 446-455.
	Is religious tolerance possible? What is the role of Religious Studies in religious tolerance?	Kessler, Chapter 13 Don't forget the case study at the end.

BRING A BLUE BOOK TO CLASS.

July 22 nd	Why is religious tolerance important to the academic study of religion? How can we apply critical tolerance to case studies and the Hicks' readings? What is the root of religion?	Hicks, Reading 9-3 by Nanda pp. 359-369. Re-read Douglas and Kessler Chapter 13. REVIEW
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SECOND EXAM: FRIDAY, JULY 24TH FROM 3:20-5:20 P.M. IN OUR CLASSROOM.

