

**RSOC 9: WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING RELIGION:**

**M/W Kenna 212**

**3:30-5:15 PM**

**Spring 2015 (as of 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015 )**

**Kenna 214**

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**Office Hours: Thursdays 1-2 or by appointment**

**Course Description:**

With **specific examples** drawn from at least **2 Religious traditions** including but not limited to African Indigenous Religion (s), Asian Religions (eg Hinduism) and Christianity, this course will introduce students to ways of thinking about religion as a **fundamental dimension of human existence**. Through carefully selected course readings, discussions and class activities, students will explore **various approaches** to the study of religion as well as ways in which this dimension of human existence finds **diverse expression as a lived reality**, both **across cultures and across history**. The course will also introduce **selected key concepts, categories and ideas** that are used in the description and analysis of religion as **an academic discipline and as a lived phenomenon**. These ideas include but are not limited to concepts of **Deity, Cosmogony, myth and ritual**. The course will foster students' application *of the insights* from diverse approaches to the study of religion and its key themes in their own ***critical and comparative reflection of religion*** as a significant aspect of human experience, **theirs and that of others** in the diverse glo-cal contexts .

**Course Objectives: (Intended Learning Outcomes)**

Students who successfully complete this class will:

1. **Demonstrate** their basic appreciation of the **complexity of defining and studying religion** while at the same time show ability to **develop and apply** a **“working definition of religion”** and test how this definition is applicable in different traditions (*eg African/ Christian*) or different geographical locations (Africa, Asia) (see also **core goal one** below)
2. **Demonstrate** *basic understanding of key ideas , concepts and categories* used in the study of religion (eg Myth , Ritual , Theodicy)
3. Show basic **understanding and ability to compare** **how key themes** in the religious experience of humankind are manifested or expressed in **diverse religious contexts**; (eg compare and contrast Hindu notions of deity with African /or Christian ones ; or African notions of afterlife with those of Hinduism /and or Christianity)
4. Demonstrate their **critical understanding and engament with** the ideas about religion encountered in this class through analytically

- writing about them or *through other media* (eg digital photo-essay, or video documentary etc))
5. Demonstrate *ability to apply* what they have learnt about religion both as an academic subject and as a lived reality in **contexts other** than the ones discussed in class.
  6. Demonstrate ability analytically to reflect on the **differences, similarities** and overlaps between the academic approaches *to* religion and those of practitioners including f “**academic**” and “**faith based** “ **socially engaged** “ approaches to **religion as a lived reality** .
  7. Show ability **analytically to reflect on students’** own approaches to religion as these approaches relate both religion as *an academic discipline* and religion as a lived reality *locally and globally*:

### **Core Curriculum RTC 1 Goals:**

This course fulfils Core 2009 RTC1 requirements which is an important component of Santa Clara University education. The RTC 1 course is part of the foundations dimensions of the Core Curriculum and it designed to “lay a foundation” for further study of religion through (though not limited to) the upper levels: **RTC2 and RTC3**.

**The 2 core goals** for the class are that students who successfully complete this class will:

1. Be able to *describe and compare* the **central religious ideas** and practices from **several traditions** or within one and from at least 2 *globally distinct regions*.
2. Be able to use **critical approaches** to *reflect on their own beliefs* and religious dimensions of human experience

### **Mapping Core Goals to Course Activities**

- a) **Core goal 1** will be achieved through i) Analytical reading Of Materials drawn from *at least 2 Religious traditions or Geographical locations*: (**course activity 2**) and analytical responses to these readings and their discussion (course activities and responses to the readings (Course **activity 3 and 4**) Midterm (**course activity 5**))
- b) **Core Goal no 2** will be addressed through all the course activities but more specifically through: **Critical response papers**,(course activities 3 &4), Reports from site visits (course activity 6 ) as well as final paper (Course activity 7). **See below for details**

### **Course Requirements (AKA Means Of Achieving Course Objectives and Intended Learning out comes:**

1. **Attendance and Participation** : your presence and participation is essential to your success in the course and to the *success of the class as a whole*. Each of you brings “gifts” and expertise based on your unique and shared *prior and ongoing experience*. Consider your presence and participation as a *valued contribution to your own success* as well as *that of the class as a whole*. Your grade here will go beyond mere attendance roll- call to include an *evaluation of your participation*

and intellectual engagement with the materials individually and collectively. **10% of final grade.**

2. **Preparation for Class: (Through analytical annotated readings):** In order successfully to participate in class ( as required in number one above), it is important analytically to *read assigned texts*. The course is organized *around themes and for each theme*, there will be a *minimum of two readings* in order to enhance your ability to compare the materials across cultures and across time as well as nurture your appreciation of the *diversity of perspectives /expressions* that exist in regards to any and all of the themes. To facilitate this activity, questions to *guide the readings will be provided beforehand* ( in class or placed on Camino). To document your preparation in this manner , you will be requested at intervals to submit concise written responses to questions based on the readings .Such annotated written responses to readings will also provide you with a well thought out set of notes to which you can refer in your efforts to fulfill other course requirements including **response papers , midterm and site visit and reports. 10%**
3. **Reflective Self introductory Essay:** This will be an opportunity to reflect on the rationale behind your involvement in the class so that you begin to situate yourself as a **(budding)student of religion and to offer your own insights and prior ideas on the subject of religion** as a key basic dimension of human existence . Through the essay, you will introduce yourself as you would like to be known and describe your expectations (and/ or concerns) as you consider the 10 week journey into the study of religion that is RSOC 9. Include any information that you think will be helpful to the instructor in order to know you better in **your capacity as a(budding) scholar of religion**. Eg, what previous encounters with the study of religion on (whether formal or informal have you had? What motivates you to take the class besides (or including ) the fact that is a core requirement c) what intrigues you and what possible pertinent questions and topics would you hope to explore in and through this class etc) **5% ( Due Tuesday week 2) (Core goal 1&2)**
4. **2 critical engagement response papers:** These will reveal your critical engagement with an issue or issue arising from the readings **10% each total 20%(core goal 2)**
5. **Midterm: 20%:** This activity is designed to assess understanding of **class content** (by week 6) and gauge your **understanding of basic / key terms**, concepts and categories used to describe religion as these emerge from the readings and discussion thereof. (core Goal one)
6. **Critical engagement and reflection on religion as a lived reality through Religious Site visit and report thereof : 15%**
7. **Final Essay:** On The topic: Anatomy of The Sacred: A Comparative Case study of 2 Named religious traditions. This will not necessarily be the ones discussed in class but could be the ones visited in 6). Guidelines on content and format TBA: **(Core Goals 1&2) 20%**

**Bibliography:**

1. Livingston James **Anatomy of the Sacred** (6<sup>th</sup> Edition)
2. Ninian Smart: World Views: Cross Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs 1983 (third Edition) (excerpts to be placed on Camino)
3. Moshia: **Heart Beat of Indigenous Africa.**
4. Excerpts from other pertinent readings will be posted on Camino or distributed in Class:

**Video Resources: Episodes from the Long Search Series (on Reserve in Library):**

**Selected excerpts will be shown in class:**

**Grading:** Is cumulative and is based on a possible 100 points gained by how students perform in the **course requirements as follows:**

1. Attendance, Participation (including noting and sharing about religion in the news: 10%
2. Self Introductory Essay: 5%
3. Preparation and engaged annotated readings :10%
4. 2 critical response papers 20%
5. Site visits and Report: 15% (Power point) In Pairs
6. Midterm 20%
7. Final Essay : 20%

**Feedback :** For each written assignment (including annotated readings and writings related to presentations ,students will receive feedback intended both to evaluate critically that assignment but also to offer *constructive suggestions for improvement on future assignments* . In addition, students are encouraged to meet with the instructor **at least once before week 4 to ensure that they are on track.** Students may also meet the instructor during office hours or by appointment as needed. (Indicate before hand your intentions to come to regular office hours or by appointment)

**Note that final grades will be based on the following scale :** A (95-100) A- (90-94 ) B+(87-89) B (83-86) B-(80-82) C+ (77-79) C- (70-72 D (60-69 ) F (below 60

Grade values are based on the Undergraduate Bulletin which defines Grades as follows:  
**A (excellent) B (good) C (Adequate) D (Barely Passing) F (not passing)**

**Disability Accommodation Policy:**

To request **academic accommodation for a disability**, students must contact **Disabilities Resources** office located on the **Second Floor of Benson**. Phone Numbers are (408 554 -411; TY (408 554 5445). Students must register and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities 'Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations. Such documentation and requests should be in by **1<sup>st</sup> day of week 2** of classes.

**Attendance Policy:** Class attendance is **mandatory** except for **emergencies**, which should be explained to me preferably in writing and if possible **before hand**. Only those students with excused absences will be allowed to do make up assignments. Please note that **frequent absences** (more than 2 but less than 4 ) will invite a lowering of your grade by **at least one letter grade**. 4 or more absences will **invite an F for the class**. If you have circumstances *that irrevocably conflict with class schedule for a substantive amount* of time , (eg classes that overlap with this one or job scenarios that make it impossible for you physically to attend class, you may need to rethink enrolling in the class in light of the policy about **frequent absences** .

Attendance (**yellow pages**) will be monitored for the purposes of assigning the **attendance and participation grade**. See also **Disability accommodation policy** above

#### **Academic Integrity Policy**

Students are encouraged to collaborate, share ideas and ask questions of one another for mutual enrichment in the understanding of themes and ideas related to class. However, all work submitted for **grading must be your own and be clearly distinguishable from the work of others**. When you **present others work** as your own , or fail to cite the contribution of others whether these others are fellow students, something from the internet or books and other materials written or **even audio**) you have engaged in **plagiarism**. If you have any questions regarding the definition of plagiarism please do not hesitate to contact the instructor. Santa Clara University and the Religious Studies Department take Academic integrity seriously and violations in this regards could result in an **automatic F** and **referral to the office of Student life** as described in the Community handbook. Additional information and resources are available at: [www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity](http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity)

#### **Course Schedule:**

The class schedule is tentative and may supplemented by additional readings or may be modified to reflect matters arising in the course of the quarter such as *demographic changes , availability of resources or other contingencies.*

#### **Week 1: Introductory:**

March 30<sup>th</sup> Course overview and requirements

Video Excerpts: From Long Search series

April 1<sup>st</sup> Introduction to the Study of Religion: Defining Religion: Its essence and functions: Livingston Chapter 1

**Week 2: Defining Religion: World Views and Dimensions Of Religion**

April 6<sup>th</sup> (Self Introductory essay due )

- a) Religious Studies as World View analysis
- b) Inventory of World views:
- c) Towards a working definition of religion :Mapping Dimensions of Religion  
Ninian Smart : Introduction: (On Camino) , Mosha introduction and Chapter 1: pages 7-15

April 8<sup>th</sup> : Approaches to the Study of Religion:

**Livingston: Chapter 2**

**Smart chapter chapters 1&2**

**Self Introductory Essay due April**

**Week 3: Understanding Dimensions of Religion:**

April 13<sup>th</sup> : Narrative, Myth ,

Smart Chapter 4 , (On Camino)

Livingston Chapter 4:Pages 53-68

April 15<sup>th</sup> : Narrative & Scriptures

Livingston Chapter 6;

Mosha 47-67; Excerpts from Oduyoye (chapters 1-3

**Week 4: Dimensions of Religion Doctrine and Ritual**

April 20<sup>th</sup> Beliefs and Doctrine:

Smart: Chapter 5

Livingston pages Chapter 4 68-71

April 23<sup>rd</sup> Dimensions of religions : **Ritual**

Livingston chapter 5

Mosha : On African ritual Chapter 2 Pages 68-78

Video on Ritual

1<sup>st</sup> Response Paper due

**Week 5: Dimensions of Religion : Experience**

April 27<sup>th</sup> Smart Chapter 3, Livingstone chapter 3

(possible Guest Speaker :TBA)

April 29<sup>th</sup> :Dimensions Of Religion : Community and Society :

Livingston Chapter 7, Smart chapter 8

Video: Catholicism Rome, Leeds and the desert

**Week 6: Dimensions of Religion: Ethics : 2 Case studies**

May 4<sup>th</sup> : Livingston Chapter 12, Smart Chapter 6, Mosha chapters 3 &4

Excerpts

May 6<sup>th</sup> : Dimensions of Religions Concluded : Case study: Comparing Christian , Hindu and African Ethics; 2 Case studies

- a) Environmental ethics and religion :
- b) Religion and Social Justice

**Video : Taking Root**

Readings: Excerpts from Shiva, Maathai and or , Farmer

Possible speaker : On Religion , Ethics and social Justice: Christian Perspective (TBA)

**Midterm distributed**

**Week 7 Key themes in Religious Beliefs and Practices:**

May 11<sup>th</sup> Notions of Deity : Livingston Chapter 8;

Case study : Hinduism: 330 Million Gods

**Midterm Due back**

**May 13<sup>th</sup> : The Human Condition and Notions of Theodicy**

**Livingston Chapter 11**

**Video : TBA**

**Week 8: Notions the Human Condition and Religious quest for Salvation**

May 18<sup>th</sup> : **Soteriology** :Religious Paths in the Quest for salvation: :

Livingston: Chapter 13 : 287-311

Video: Excerpts from the Long Search Series:

May 20: Goal of Salvation: Diverse Interpretations

Livingstone Chapter 13:311- 333

**Second Response paper due**

**Week 9: Religion as Worldview Analysis: An on going journey**

May 25<sup>th</sup> : Understanding Religion: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities:

Readings: Livingston: Chapter 15, Mosha Chapter 5&6

May 27<sup>th</sup> : **Anatomy of The Sacred**: Students' analysis and reflections on

Contemporary : ) Students reports on Site Visits .

**Week 10: Conclusions and Course synthesis**

June 1<sup>st</sup> : i) Students *Anatomy of the Sacred Reports* concluded.

ii) Preparing the final paper: Guidelines and feedback on outlines

June 3<sup>rd</sup> : Last day of Class: **2: Last Day of class: Course synthesis and course wrap up :**

### **Addendum to Syllabus: RSOC: 9 Navigating the Readings:**

**Thematic, Analytical and Synthetic Readings:** The Readings are organized thematically. For each theme there will be at least two different texts to allow for access to different perspectives on the theme for you to consider in your analysis. When you approach the readings, remember to read **for the theme** and also to **read synthetically** (i.e. considering all the texts on the theme) in an **analytical** manner. Eg. On the first theme:

A supplementary reading from Keeley: **Asking the Right Questions** (PDF on Camino) has also been assigned to point you in the direction of **how to conduct an analytical reading** by asking the right kind of questions. E.g. what is the **central claim being made in the readings**? How do you **identify** an issue? What argument is being made about the issue in the reading? And how do you respond to the issue in a **panning for gold manner** rather than just “absorbing” it as a sponge would? How do you analytically engage or challenge **claims being made in a strong sense rather than just a weak-** sense kind of way? We shall be reading this supplementary text for the first few weeks to access insights that it offers us about **what analytical reading comprises of..** I will be posting questions to guide this reading on Camino as well...

### **Keeping Track of your Analytical Thoughts: Taking Note and Taking Notes.**

**Remember also to keep track of your analytical thoughts as you process the readings.** I will provide you with questions to Guide the readings and will be posting these on Camino at **least 2 days** before they are due. These questions are to **facilitate your understanding** of the theme embedded in the particular readings . Writing out your analytical responses to these questions on the readings provides you with a *well thought out set of notes for your reference during in class discussion* of the themes but also for reference as you navigate other aspects of the course requirements such including your group work, Midterm etc. I will **signal to you to submit these written responses** in order for me to check at intervals what progress you are making in unpacking/understanding the themes. **Keep copies of these notes for your records and further reference (ie keep a record of your notes)**

**Use of Note Cards: or Stenographers notepad** In order to keep track of your analytical thoughts as you read in preparation for class, I recommend that you use note cards to jot down at least 3 points that summarizes what is being said in the readings. On the flip side of the Card: Jot down your analytical thoughts as you consider these points. Eg to what **extent do you agree with the claims being made in the texts?** Why or why not? What more could be said about the points raised? What more are you curious about as you consider the claims being made in the texts . If you were to engage the writer on this topic, what analytical question would you ask him/her etc(written and visual .. **Videos are texts too** ) etc

**This regular note taking and taking note will help you keep track of your thoughts,** as the quarter progresses so that you can use these as a **spring board** for response papers , in -class discussion and d other aspects of your course requirements . At regular intervals , you will be called upon in class to share your analytical thoughts from the cards with the rest of the class for further discussion . I may also ask you to **submit the note cards** you have prepared to look at how you are **progressing in that regards.** So bring **both your written notes (responding to the questions to guide readings ) and note cards to class** for reference. All this particularly **boosts and documents your preparation and participation grades .**

**Ethno graphic Method: Participant observation:** Participating in events while wearing the RSOC 9 glasses: Taking note of what you see and what you hear and what you think : Take note of religion in the news ...

**Link to Potential Religious Sites for visits**



<http://scu.edu/cm/getinvolved/notcatholic/localplacesofworship.cfm>

