Instructor: Joe Laycock
Description: This course is an introduction to the beliefs and practices of the world’s most influential religions. We will explore how these religions respond to “big questions” such as why we are here, how we ought to live our lives, and what happens when we die. We will also learn to be scholars of religious studies and how to analyze religious problems. Finally, we will wrestle with the problem of defining what religion is, and explore why this problem matters for a society where religious freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution.
Format: Discussion, close reading, presentations, analysis.
Evaluation:
- Weekly reading responses 25% of final grade
- Definition of “religion” and revisions 25% of final grade
- Midterm examinations 25% of final grade
- Final examination 25% of final grade
Office: CMAL 207C
Email: J_l36@txstate.edu

Instructor: Binita Mehta
Description: This course offers an introduction to the major religions of the world. On the basis of primary foundational texts and secondary scholarly literature, the course will provide an overview of the historical development of these religious traditions and will examine the core ideas and concepts, myths, symbols and practices within a tradition. The lectures will also include a discussion of religious expression in arts, music and culture. Images and video clips on various aspects of religion will be shown as an integral part of the course material.

The course will enhance the ability of students to read the texts critically and refine their skills in analytical writing. Engagement with different religious traditions will serve to facilitate a multi-dimensional perspective on religious phenomena and on various facets of human existence in the world. The course will also provide tools to students to reflect comparatively on the similarities and differences between different traditions.
Required Texts: No textbook required; readings consisting of excerpts from the primary foundational texts and the secondary critical sources will be posted on TRACS.
Format: Lecture, Discussion, Close Reading, Analysis
Instructor: Joe Laycock
Description: Throughout history, extraordinary men and women have arisen to reveal sacred truths, model values to others, and deliver warnings about the future. Some of these people are dismissed as lunatics and frauds. Others go on to become prophets, founders, and saints and their ideas alter the course of history. In this course, we will explore the lives of extraordinary men and women from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. We will also employ the disciplines of psychology and sociology to examine their experiences and the influence they have on society.

Format: Discussion, close reading, presentations, analysis

Evaluation:
Found your own religion project 30%
Quotations quiz: 10%
Book review paper 15%
Biographical research paper 25%
Biographical research paper prospectus 5%
Comparative paper 15%

Required Texts:

Office: CMAL 207C
Email: J_l36@txstate.edu
Instructor: Rebecca Raphael  
Description: Religion, Literature, and the Arts will examine selected figures whose literary, artistic, or political work included a substantial engagement with religious thought. The following figures are likely to be included: Michelangelo, Beethoven, Hildegard of Bingen, Emily Dickinson, Frida Kahlo. Course themes include representation of the soul or self, heroism, the fictive and the real, and the interplay between autobiography, works, and spirituality.  
Office Hours: Comal 107F, MW 9:00-10:30 & TR 11:00-12:00  
Email: rr23@txstate.edu

Instructor: Joe Laycock  
Description: Religion matters. Whether we like it or not, religion is intimately tied with other spheres of culture such as science, law, and politics. In this class, we will analyze religious controversies and crises in America from the colonies to the present in order to explore the way religion both unites and divides American society. Potential topics include the Salem Witch Trials, The Scopes Trial, the Branch Davidians, and placing religious monuments on government property.  
Required Texts: No textbooks required.  
Format: Discussion, close reading, presentations, analysis.  
Evaluation: This is a writing intensive class. Students will write two short papers on our case studies as well as a research paper on a topic of their choice. Students will also be assigned to collect and analyze contemporary news items involving religious controversies.  
Office Hours: CMAL 207C  
Email: J_l36@txstate.edu
Instructor: Binita Mehta
Description: The Indian religious and philosophical traditions have a long, rich history. Indian thinkers predominantly present a spiritual, multi-dimensional outlook on the nature of human life and the world; they combine reason, experience, yoga and meditation as methods of inquiry. On the basis of primary foundational texts and secondary scholarly literature, the course will explore various facets of Indian thought from the time of the Vedas (around 1st millennium BCE) to the contribution of modern figures. Our focus would be on the Hindu and Buddhist schools. Notion of transformation, both spiritual and bodily, is inherent in almost all Hindu and Buddhist philosophical inquiries. We shall pay special attention to this “transformative” feature. Over and above receiving exposure to Indian philosophy, this course will acquaint students to the distinctive manner in which human self is understood and enacted in the Indian culture. Images and video clips on various aspects of Indian thought, religious and cultural practices will be shown as an integral part of the course material.

This course will deepen your understanding of the religious and philosophical perspectives of the Indian culture. The course will also enable students to reflect critically about various issues concerning religion and philosophy in a broader cross-cultural context and enhance their ability to think in a pluralistic fashion.

Required Texts: No textbooks required; readings consisting of excerpts from the primary foundational texts and the secondary critical sources will be posted on TRACS.

Format: Lecture, Discussion, Close Reading, Analysis
Evaluation:
Participation & Comments (based on the readings of the week): 20%
Paper (4-5 pages): 30%
Mid-Term Exam (short essays): 25%
Final Exam (short essays): 25%
Office: CMAL 115B
Email: Bvm6@txstate.edu
Instructor: Natasha L. Mikles
Description: This course provides an introduction to the religious tradition of Buddhism throughout historical time and geographical space by examining how the tradition of Buddhist thought was enacted through the formation of both religious institution and practice. Understanding the religious world Buddhists inhabit also allows students to explore the controversies Buddhism encountered as it spread out of India and throughout Asia—eventually appearing in America. Framing the specific historical, social, and philosophical situations Buddhism inhabits allows students to understand the unique answers Buddhism provides to what are, ultimately, universal questions. Beyond these content-specific learning goals, this course also actively targets students’ writing skills through weekly reflection papers and a guided process of producing a research paper with close input from the professor on research, outlining, and paper composition.

Required Texts:

Format: Discussion, close-reading, textual analysis, group presentations
Evaluation: Mid-semester presentations, final semester research papers, learning portfolios