



Texas State University
Religion Course Descriptions
Fall 2018

Texas State University
Philosophy Department
Comal 102
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World Religions

REL 1300 CRN #14923

MW 11 – 12:20

CMAL 114

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.

Description: Studying religious traditions—both your own and those of others—is some of the most important work you will do in your college career. Religious ideas and practices have had a profound impact on world history, global development, and their effect continues to be seen and felt today. To be an educated citizen, it is imperative that we both understand the basics of a variety of religious traditions and appreciate the vast diversity within a religious tradition. In this course, we'll cover a sampling of seven religious traditions that have had a profound impact on the world with two goals in mind: developing our own religious literacy and learning how to think about religions critically and with nuance. Beyond learning the basic practices and beliefs of these religions, we'll also ask what can we learned by comparing religions to each other? Are religions actually “all the same,” or do differences between them matter? Who even gets to define what is and is not a religion?

World Religions

REL 1300 CRN # 15478

TR 9:30 – 10:50

CMAL 114

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.

Description: Studying religious traditions—both your own and those of others—is some of the most important work you will do in your college career. Religious ideas and practices have had a profound impact on world history, global development, and their effect continues to be seen and felt today. To be an educated citizen, it is imperative that we both understand the basics of a variety of religious traditions and appreciate the vast diversity within a religious tradition. In this course, we'll cover a sampling of seven religious traditions that have had a profound impact on the world with two goals in mind: developing our own religious literacy and learning how to think about religions critically and with nuance. Beyond learning the basic practices and beliefs of these religions, we'll also ask what can we learned by comparing religions to each other? Are religions actually “all the same,” or do differences between them matter? Who even gets to define what is and is not a religion?

Hebrew Bible

REL 2310 CRN#17644

TR 9:30 – 10:50

UAC 306

Instructor: Rebecca Raphael, Ph.D.

Description: This course takes an historical and literary approach to the ancient writings that came to be collected in the Hebrew Bible -- known as Tanakh to Jews and as the Old Testament to Christians. We will examine a representative sample of this canon, including mythic, legendary, narrative, poetic, prophetic, and wisdom material. Often, we will look at a given text in relation to its historical context or to later interpretations of it. Thus, our readings will include material from neighboring Ancient Near Eastern cultures, classical commentaries or ritual renderings of texts, and selected connections to the contemporary world. Throughout, the instructor will emphasize the skills of close reading, historical inference, and analysis of the activity of interpreters.

Cults and New Religions

REL 3335 CRN# 15272

TR 11 -12:30 p.m.

DERR 241

Instructor: Joe Laycock, Ph.D

Description: This course is a survey of controversial, marginalized, and misunderstood religious traditions and communities. What does it mean to call a group a “cult?” Where is the line between religious belief and mental illness? Is brainwashing real? Does religious freedom give you the right to use illegal drugs or have multiple wives? What causes religious groups to become violent? We will explore these questions using a variety of methodological approaches.

Religion & Film

REL 3361A CRN # 15273

TR 2 – 3:20

Room TBA

Instructor: Joe Laycock, Ph.D

Description: Religious traditions and films are both in the business of “world creating.” Religious traditions shape the way believers understand their place in the world. Films create temporary worlds and invite us to enter. This course will examine how religious ideas are reflected in film and how films have taken on some of the functions traditionally served by religion. As our culture passes from literacy to visuality, discerning how the various dimensions of religious belief and practice are reflected and refracted through film is an important element in understanding the nature of religion in late modern society. In particular, this course will focus on the themes of rituals, myths, and values as they relate to both religion and film.

Mysticism

REL 3361B CRN #17646

TR 11-12:20

CMAL 114

Instructor: Binita Metha, Ph.D.

Description: This course explores the dimension of mysticism that pervades both the Western and Eastern religious traditions. A mystical state can be described as a state of direct experience of oneness with the divine and which involves a transformed self-understanding that radically differs from the ordinary understanding of one's being. We will analyze the nature of mystical experiences through a study of a number of key figures and texts drawn from the Neoplatonic, Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. We will analyze the relationship of mystical dimension to language, arts, and human subjectivity and examine the role of the mystics in society. Towards the end of the course we will situate mysticism in the context of contemporary sciences and address the question about the significance of mystical states for a broader understanding about human life and the world.

Buddhism

REL 3385 CRN #17647

MW 2 – 3:20

UAC 405

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.

Description: Who are you? What is the core of your “self”? What does “you” from ten years ago have to do with “you” now? What is the relationship between the beliefs and thoughts of one man 2,500 years ago and those of a 500 million-person religious community today? Originating in 5th-century BCE India and Nepal, Buddhism has wrestled with these questions and their implications. Together we’ll explore the world of Buddhist thought to consider what answers Buddhists have provided throughout historical time and geographical space. We’ll examine how this tradition of Buddhist thought has formed religious institutions and practices. Understanding the religious world Buddhists inhabit will also us 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 will ultimately allow us to understand the unique answers Buddhism provides to what are, ultimately, universal questions.