



Texas State University
Religion Course Descriptions
Spring 2016

Philosophy Department
Texas State University
Comal 102
601 University Drive
San Marcos, TX 78666
Phone: 512-245-2285
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REL 1300.251 World Religions
TR 11:00 -12:20, ASBN 00408
#38453

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.

Required Texts: Prothero, Stephen R. *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World*. New York: HarperOne2011.

Format: Discussion, close reading, presentations, analysis.

Evaluation:

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|---|--------------------|
| -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

REL 1300.252
MW 12:30-1:50 PM, ASBN 00408
#34093

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

Evaluation:

Participation:	10%
Two Response Papers:	20% (10% each)
Mid-Term Exam (short essays):	25%
Paper (4 page):	20%
Final Exam (short essays):	25%

Office: CMAL 115B

Email: Bvm6@txstate.edu

REL 2321.251 Founders Prophets & Saints
MW2:00 -3:20 PM, CMAL 114
#36893

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:

- Armstrong, Karen. Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time. New York: Atlas Books/HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN: 0060598972 9780060598976
- Gtsan-smyon He-ru-ka, and Andrew Quintman. The Life of Milarepa. New York: Penguin Books, 2010. ISBN: 9780143106227 0143106228
- Pope Francis. The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church. Chicago, Loyola Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780829441680 0829441689 9780829441703 0829441700
- E. Allison Peers/ Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle. Dover Publications, 2007 ISBN: 978-0486461458

Office: CMAL 207C

Email: J_l36@txstate.edu

REL 3340.251 Religion Literature & Arts
TR 12:30 -1:50 PM, CMAL 114
#38455

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

REL 3366.251 American Religious Controversies
TR 2:00-3:20 PM, ASBN 00408
#38454

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

REL 3381.251 Indian Philosophy & Religion
MW 3:30-4:50 PM, CMAL 114
#34094

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

REL 4388.251 Problems in Religion
Special Topic: Buddhism
TR 3:30-4:50 PM, UAC 00406
#39112

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:

- Mitchell, Donald and Sarah Jacoby. *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, 3rd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Strong, John. *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2002.

Format: Discussion, close-reading, textual analysis, group presentations

Evaluation: Mid-semester presentations, final semester research papers, learning portfolios