

RE 103: RELIGION AND CULTURE
The Experience of Self & Community, Power & Empowerment
Spring 2013

Instructor: Dr. Mary Zeiss Stange
Ladd 213

Office Hours: Tues 11:00-12:00, Wed 2:00-4:00, Thurs 1:00-3:00,
and by appt.

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The basic goals of this course are two:

To foster appreciation of the many ways in which people are religious, and how the religious self-understanding affects people's self-perceptions, and their experience of and activity in the world. Special attention is devoted to the precise ways in which issues of class, race/ethnicity and gender impact individuals' self-understanding in different social and cultural settings.

To develop objective critical skills for studying religious phenomena in various philosophical, historical and cultural contexts. This applies to one's own tradition(s) as well as to others. Particular emphasis is placed on the idea of learning to appreciate how different ideas about self and world may be real and valid for someone else, and can be respected as such, without threatening or challenging one's personal religious perspective (or lack thereof).

In addition, this course works toward students' achievement of the following specific objectives of the Skidmore College Curriculum:

I. Knowledge

- Acquire knowledge of human cultures and the physical world through study in the arts, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences
- Understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts

II. Intellectual Skills and Practice

- Think critically, creatively, and independently
- Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of information; understand and use evidence
- Communicate effectively
- Interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities

III. Personal and Social Values

- Examine one's own values and their use as ethical criteria in thought and action
- Interrogate one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences
- Apply learning to find solutions for social, civic, and scientific problems

Texts:

John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*

Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Mohandas Gandhi, *Autobiography*

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*

Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*

David Chidester, several chapters from *Patterns of Power* (to be handed out in class)

Additional materials provided in class

Audio-visual presentations in class (days noted on syllabus; absolutely no “reruns”)

A good dictionary

Any standard edition (translation, not paraphrase) of the Bible

Format:

Classes are a mixture of lecture and discussion; regular attendance and active participation are vital to success in this course.

Attendance Policy:

Because regular attendance and active participation are vital to success in this course, no more than three unexcused absences will be tolerated. Exceeding this limit will result in an automatic lowering of your semester grade, 3 percentage points for each additional class missed.

Etiquette:

Plan to arrive in class on time.

Feel free to bring a beverage and/or light snack, but not a meal.

Be sure your cell phone is turned off, and stowed out of sight, before class begins.

Use of a laptop during class is prohibited, unless you can document a medical reason.¹

Use of any and all other electronic devices during class is strictly prohibited.

We will take a five-minute break approximately halfway through class each day. This is the *only* time you should leave the room during the class period.

¹If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

Evaluation:

Grading is based upon the following criteria:

2 short response papers.....	20%
3 examinations.....	45%
Religious visitation assignment.....	25%
Participation.....	<u>10%</u>
	100%

The *response papers* are approximately 3-page responses to selected films; each counts for 10% of the semester grade, and you will have your choice among four options to write. (You may opt to write a third paper, and drop the lowest of the three grades.) Regardless of which videos you choose to write your essays on, for the purposes of exams you are responsible for the content of all of the films.

The *exams* combine objective (multiple choice, matching, etc.) and essay questions. They are not cumulative tests, and each accounts for 15% of the semester grade.

The *religious visitation* is an independent project undertaken outside of class time, involving attendance at a local religious institution and writing a report of your experience, structured according to specific guidelines.

Participation means not only coming to class consistently, and being consistently prepared, it also means active, engaged listening, asking thoughtful, constructive questions about the course materials, and contributing to and advancing class discussion.

Syllabus:

All reading must be completed prior to the class period for which it is assigned; comprehension of lectures and media presentations, and effective participation in discussions, will depend upon thorough preparation. Handouts for use in class will be available ahead of time, to afford ample time for preparation.

Note that the dates for exams and when written assignments are due are starred.

- Jan 22: Introduction: What is Religion?
 24: *Black Elk Speaks*, Foreword, Prefaces, Chapters 1-7; Film: "Spirit of Crazy Horse;" **Writing assignment #1.**
- 29: *BES*, Chapters 8-19
 31: N. Scott Momaday, "The Native Way of Seeing" [Handout].
- Feb *05: *BES*, Chapters 20-26 & Appendices; **Writing assignment #1 due**
 07: *Patterns of Power*, Chapters 4 ("Native Americans") & 5 ("Black Americans") [Handouts].
- 12: *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 1-3. Film: "Eyes on the Prize"

- 14: Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter From the Birmingham Jail" [Handout];
Autobiography of Malcolm X, Chapters 4-12.
- 19: *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 13-19.
- *21: **Exam**
- 26: Indian religions: Gandhi, *Autobiography*, Part I; Film: "330 Million Gods"
Writing Assignment #2.
- 28: Gandhi's *Autobiography*, Parts II & III; the story of Gautama Buddha
- Mar 05: Gandhi's *Autobiography*, Parts IV & V; Joseph Campbell, "Prologue: The Monomyth"
- *07: Film: "Footprint of the Buddha" **Writing Assignment #3**
Writing Assignment #2 due.
- 12-14: *Spring Break*
- 19: *Woman Warrior*, "No Name Woman;" *Womanspirit Rising*, 228-245 (Christ);
Film: "Small Happiness"
- *21: *Woman Warrior*, "White Tigers" and "Shaman"; Film: "Taoism: A Question
of Balance" **Writing Assignment #3 due.**
- 28: *Woman Warrior*, "At the Western Palace" and "A Song for a Barbarian Reed
Pipe;" *Patterns of Power*, Chapter 6 ("Immigrant Americans") [Handout].
28: *Patterns of Power*, Chapter 3 ("Civil Religion") [Handout].
- Apr 02: Film: "Protestant Spirit U.S.A." Religious Visitation assignment and
discussion.
- *04: **Exam.**
- Apr 09: *WR* 107-119 (Pagels); 198-209 (Plaskow); 273-287 (Christ). Film: "Goddess
Remembered." The truth about the Easter Bunny. **Writing Assignment #4.**
11: *WR* 74-83 (Trible); 84-92 (Schussler Fiorenza); 93-106 (McLaughlin), 210-
216 (Daly).
- 16: Film: "The Burning Times." *Womanspirit Rising*, 259-272 (Starhawk), 273-
286 (Christ), 120-139 (Stone)
- 18: *WR* 167-173 (Gross); 174-178 (Janowicz and Wenig); 179-184 (Plaskow).
Writing Assignment #4 due.
- 23: Review Session.
- *25: **Exam.** (Not a Final: Final Exams are against the Professor's religion.)
- *30: Religious Visitation discussion. **Religious Visitation due in PH & RE Office
by 4:30 p.m.. [absolute deadline: no extensions, no excuses].**

