

*Religion and Culture*  
REL 103 – Section 02 - Spring 2017

**Meetings:** 12:20 p.m.-2:10 p.m.; W, F; Ladd 206

**Instructor:** Dr. David J. Howlett, Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion, dhowlett@skidmore.edu

**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 2:30-4:00 p.m.; Thursday, 2:30-4:00 p.m., or by appointment  
205B Ladd Hall, (518) 580-8404 (office)

**Course Description:** “Religion is the smile on a dog” poetically quipped Edie Brickell in a 2002 pop song, “What I Am.” Perhaps not intended as such, this quote advances a terse theory about “what religion is.” In this course, we will encounter several theories of religion and assess their utility as we study four religious traditions through classic texts, short film clips, music, and secondary articles. For each tradition (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Lakota religion), we will highlight two major analytic terms in the study of religion, such as sacred space, scripture, body, or ritual. Finally, we will consider how these categories, studied in class against a specific religious tradition, can illuminate or obscure understanding another religious community. And we will look for smiling dogs.

**Course Goals:** Students will leave this class with

- an understanding of several basic themes and approaches utilized by scholars in the academic study of religion.
- an awareness of some of the ethical issues and tensions confronted by religious studies scholars and the communities they study.
- an understanding of several major themes, practices, and beliefs in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Lakota religion.
- an appreciation for the diversity of experience between and within Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Lakota religion.
- an awareness how religions interact with other cultural constructions such as race, gender, age, and class.
- an ability to critically and empathetically analyze religions as cultural systems that orient people in time and space toward mundane and ultimate horizons, causes, and concerns.
- a practical ability to write thesis-driven essays that synthesize secondary sources and make original arguments.

<b><u>Final Class Grade:</u></b>	Mid-Term Exam	20%
	Final Exam	20%
	Two Roundtable Papers	25%
	Observation Essay	15%
	Two Quizzes and Reading Guide	10%
	Attendance and Participation	10%

**Mid-term and Final Exam:** These examinations will consist of short identification terms and two essay questions, respectively. You will be given a review sheet one week before each examination, and we will conduct a brief review session in class.

**Quizzes and Reading Guide:** Students will take two short-answer question quizzes (each quiz on a different religious tradition). The quizzes will be drawn primarily from the course readings. In addition, you will complete a reading guide on Harline's book *Conversions*.

**Roundtable Papers and Discussions:** Throughout the semester, we will conduct three roundtable discussion sessions in class. The week before the roundtable, you will be given a question and then in a two- to four-page paper you will lay out your argument. To be admitted to the discussion of the topic the following week, you turn in your paper. Together, your paper and your participation in the roundtable constitute your grade on each roundtable session.

**Field Visit Analytical Essay:** In the unit on Christianity, you will be asked to visit a local church (one that you have never attended and a denomination with which you have never had any affiliation) during a worship service. As a religious studies scholar, you will take field notes on the service, and then you will write a report about your visit using one of the themes we have already studied in class. As such, your essay will be both descriptive (what you observed) and analytic. For instance, you might use theories of sacrifice to analyze a Catholic mass or theories of ritual to analyze a Mormon sacrament meeting. You will turn in both your notes and your report, and we will hold a round table discussion to report on the class's observations. A more detailed explanation of this assignment will be given to you in class.

**Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions. Students are expected to arrive on time. If a student is ten or more minutes late, he or she will be counted as absent, even if he or she attends the rest of class. If a student misses four classes, he or she will have his or her final grade dropped by one full letter grade. If a student misses eight classes, he or she will be expelled from the course. Each class will have a daily question or exercise that students are expected to complete in the first few minutes of class. Daily questions will be collected at the time of the midterm and at the last class of the semester.

**Assessment of Student Work:** Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A+	97-100
A	94-96
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	60-66
D-	56-59
F	55 and below

There is no curve for this class. A student will receive the grade they earn.

### **Classroom Procedures and Policies:**

**Academic Dishonesty:** Skidmore College's *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* defines plagiarism and its consequences as follows:

Presenting as one's own, the work of another person (for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else). Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgment, submission of another student's work as one's own, the purchase of prepared research or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging his or her academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness, and the consequences for violating the Skidmore Honor Code. THE JUDICIAL BOARDS OF THE COLLEGE WILL NOT REGARD CLAIMS OF IGNORANCE, OF UNINTENTIONAL ERROR, AND OF ACADEMIC OR PERSONAL PRESSURES AS AN ADEQUATE DEFENSE FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE HONOR CODE.<sup>1</sup>

Further information on the college-wide policy on plagiarism and proper citation methods may be found on pages 16-27 of *The Academic Integrity Handbook*.

**Late Assignment Policy:** Any paper not given to the instructor in person by the student on the due date is late and will have its grade automatically dropped by one full letter grade. A student will have forty-eight hours to e-mail the instructor a copy of the late paper. (The student must still submit a hard copy.) Any paper that is not given to the instructor within forty-eight hours of the due date will not be accepted, and the offending student will receive a zero for that assignment.

**Accommodations for Students:** If you are a student with an approved accommodation for your courses, please see me in private or e-mail me about the agreement that has been worked out with the Coordinator of Student Accessibility Services.

**Work Expectations:** Students should expect eight to ten hours of outside preparation work for class each week. On written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week rather than cram their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

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<sup>1</sup> *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* (Saratoga Springs, New York: Office of Academic Advising--Skidmore College, 2016), 8.

**Required Texts** (available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop)

- Eck, Diana L. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.  
ISBN: 978-0231112659
- Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.  
ISBN: 978-0192892232
- Harline, Craig. *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.  
ISBN: 978-0300167016
- Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Bison Books, 2014.  
ISBN: 978-0803283916
- Other texts will be posted on Blackboard, drawn from several journals, books, and primary source document readers.

## **SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY TOPICS & STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENTS**

### *Religion and Culture*

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The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the reading schedule. Should changes be made, students will be informed in advance.

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#### **WEEK 1**      What is Religion?

(1/25 -1/27)

Readings:      1) James S. Bielo, "What is Religion?" in *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-20, 27-28. [Blackboard]

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#### **WEEK 2**      Hinduism: An Introduction

(2/1 – 2/3)

Readings:      1) Vasudha Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.4 (2000): 761-779. [Blackboard]

2) Eliza F. Kent, "Representing Caste in the Classroom: Perils, Pitfalls, and Potential Insights," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 17.3 (2005): 231-241. [Blackboard]

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#### **WEEK 3**      Hinduism: Divine Beings; Sacred Space

(2/8 – 2/10)

Readings:      1) Diana L. Eck. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1-31.

2) Eck. *Darsan*, 32-75.

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#### **WEEK 4**      Hinduism: Sacred Space, cont'd.; Sacrifice

(2/15 – 2/17)

**Quiz 1: Hinduism (2/15)**

Readings:      1) Diana L. Eck, "City of All India," in *Banaras, City of Light* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 283-303. [Blackboard]

2) "Atman: The Real Self," "The Identity of Brahman and Atman," "Karma and Transmigration," "Emancipation from Karma," in *The Hindu Tradition*, ed. by Ainslie T. Embree (New York: Vintage, 1972), 55-65. [Blackboard]

3) Suchitra Samanta, "The 'Self-Animal' and Divine Digestion: Goat Sacrifice to the Goddess Kali in Bengal," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 3 (1994): 779-830. [Blackboard]

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<b>WEEK 5</b> (2/22 – 2/24)	<u>Hinduism: Sacrifice, cont'd.; Buddhism: Key Concepts</u>	<b>Roundtable 1 (2/22)</b>
<u>Readings:</u>	1) Primary Source Reading: selections from the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> in <i>The Hindu Tradition</i> , 119-130. [Blackboard]  2) Rupert Gethin, <i>The Foundations of Buddhism</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59-84, 133-162.  3) "The Life of the Buddha," (selections from the <i>Buddhacarita</i> ) in <i>The Buddhist Tradition</i> , ed. by William Theodore de Bary (New York: Vintage, 1972), 57-72.	
<b>WEEK 6</b> (3/1 – 3/3)	<u>Buddhism: Key Concepts, cont'd; Relics</u>	
<u>Readings:</u>	1) Rupert Gethin, <i>The Foundations of Buddhism</i> , 133-162.  2) <i>The Heart Sutra</i> (one page). [Blackboard]  3) Gregory Schopen, "Relic," in <i>Critical Terms for Religious Studies</i> , 256-268.	
<b>WEEK 7</b> (3/8 – 3/10)	<u>Buddhism: Relics</u>	<b>Round Table 2 (3/10)</b>
<u>Readings:</u>	1) "Relics" in <i>The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture</i> , by John Kieschnick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 29-51. [Blackboard]	
<b>WEEK 8</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK (3/15-3/17)</b>	
<b>WEEK 9</b> (3/22 – 3/24)	<u>Buddhism: Ritual and Performance</u>	<b>Midterm Exam (3/24)</b>
<u>Readings:</u>	1) Jacqueline I. Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in <i>Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitabha</i> , ed. by Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 77-119. [Blackboard]  2) "The Parable of the White Path" in <i>The Buddhist Tradition</i> , 204-207. [Blackboard]	

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**WEEK 10**      Christianity: Key Concepts  
(3/29– 3/31)

Readings:      1) Stephen Prothero, “Christianity: The Way of Salvation,” in *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 65-99.

2) Craig Harline, *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1-67.

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**WEEK 11**      Christianity: Conversion  
(4/5– 4/7)

Readings:      1) Harline, *Conversions*, 68-134.

2) Harline, *Conversions*, 135-210

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**WEEK 12**      Christianity: Body      **Visit to the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery (4/14)**  
(4/12 – 4/14)

Readings:      1) Harline, *Conversions*, 211-272.

2) Mark 14-16:8

3) Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Fast, Feast, Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,” *Representations* 11 (summer 1985): 1-25. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 13**      Lakota Religion: Key Concepts; Shamans/Mystics  
(4/19– 4/21)      **Field Visit Analytical Essay and Round Table Discussion (4/19)**

Readings:      1) Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition* (Bison Books, 2014), 1-38.

2) Alice Beck Kehoe, “Shamans Everywhere?” in *Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2000), 57-70.

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**WEEK 14**      Lakota Religion: Revisiting/Revising Key Terms  
(4/26– 4/28)      **Quiz 2: Lakota Religion (4/26)**

Readings:      1) Black Elk Speaks, 97-132.

2) Clyde Holler, “Black Elk and Dual Participation,” in *Black Elk’s Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 204-223.

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**FINAL EXAM – May 8, 6:00 p.m., Ladd 206**