

Religion and Culture
REL 103 – Section 01 - Spring 2015

Meetings: 9:10-11:00 a.m., T/R; Ladd Hall 206

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

Office Hours: Wednesday, 10:00-11:30 a.m.; Friday, 10:00-11:30 a.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 major religious traditions through classic texts, short film clips, music, and secondary articles. For each tradition (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam), 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 Islam.
- an appreciation for the diversity of experience between and within Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.
- 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.

Final Class Grade:	Mid-Term Exam	22%
	Final Exam	23%
	Three Roundtable Papers	35%
	Two Quizzes	10%
	Attendance and Participation	10%

Mid-term and Final: 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: 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.

Roundtable Papers and Discussions: Throughout the semester, we will conduct four roundtable discussion sessions in class. The week before the roundtable, you will be given a question and then in a three- to five-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.

Attendance and Participation: 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 he or she earns.

Classroom Procedures and Policies:

Academic Dishonesty: Skidmore College's *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2012-2013* defines plagiarism and its consequences as follows:

PLAGIARISM: 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 Academic Integrity Board

and the Board of Review 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.¹

Further information on the college-wide policy on plagiarism and proper citation methods may be found on pages 14-26 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 Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability and need an approved accommodation for this course, please see me in private or e-mail me about the agreement that has been worked out with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities.

Work Expectations: Students should expect nine 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.

Required Texts (available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop)

- Eck, Diana L. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. 3rd 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
- Haley, Alex and Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: One World, 1992.
ISBN: 978-0345376718
- Taylor, Mark C. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
ISBN: 978-0226791579
- Other texts will be posted on Blackboard, drawn from several journals, books, and primary source document readers.

¹ *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2012-2013* (Saratoga Springs, New York: Office of Academic Advising--Skidmore College, 2012), 17.

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.

WEEK 1 What is Religion?

(1/20 -1/22)

Readings: 1) Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284.

WEEK 2 Hinduism: An Introduction

(1/27 – 1/29)

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

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

WEEK 3 Hinduism: Sacred Space

(2/3 – 2/5)

Readings: 1) Eck. *Darsan*, 32-75.

2) Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-11, 109-117. [Blackboard]

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

(2/10 – 2/12)

Quiz 1: Hinduism (2/10)

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]

WEEK 4, cont'd. 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]

WEEK 5 Hinduism: Sacrifice, cont'd.; Buddhism: Key Concepts **Roundtable 1 (2/17)**
(2/17 – 2/19)

Readings:

- 1) Primary Source Reading: selections from the *Bhagavad Gita* in *The Hindu Tradition*, 119-130. [Blackboard]
- 2) Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59-84.
- 3) "The Life of the Buddha," (selections from the *Buddhacarita*) in *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. by William Theodore de Bary (New York: Vintage, 1972), 57-72.

WEEK 6 Buddhism: Key Concepts; Relics
(2/24 – 2/26)

Readings:

- 1) Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 133-162.
- 2) *The Heart Sutra* (one page). [Blackboard]
- 3) Gregory Schopen, "Relic," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 256-268.

WEEK 7 Buddhism: Relics **Roundtable 2 (3/5)**
(3/3 - 3/5)

Readings:

- 1) "Relics" in *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, by John Kieschnick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 29-51. [Blackboard]

WEEK 8 Buddhism: Ritual and Performance
(3/10 – 3/12)

Readings:

- 1) Jacqueline I. Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitabha*, 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 *The Buddhist Tradition*, 204-207. [Blackboard]

SPRING BREAK (3/17-3/19)

WEEK 9 Christianity: Key Concepts
(3/24 – 3/26)

- Readings:
- 1) Woodhead, "Signs and Symbols of Christianity," *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24-45. [Blackboard]
 - 2) Craig Harline, *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1-67.
 - 3) Harline, *Conversions*, 68-134.

WEEK 10 Christianity: Conversion
(3/31– 4/2)

- Readings:
- 1) Harline, *Conversions*, 135-210.
 - 2) Harline, *Conversions*, 211-272.
 - 3) Mark 14-16:8. [Blackboard]

WEEK 11 Christianity: Body **Visit to the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery (4/9)**
(4/7 – 4/9)

- Readings:
- 1) William LaFleur, "Body," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 36-54.
 - 2) Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (summer 1985): 1-25. [Blackboard]

WEEK 12 Islam: Key Concepts **Roundtable 3 (4/14)**
(4/14– 4/16)

- Readings:
- 1) Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: One World, 1992), "Icarus" and "Out" (chs. 15 and 16). [Blackboard]

WEEK 13 Islam: Scripture; Pilgrimage **Quiz 2: Islam (4/23)**
(4/21– 4/23)

- Readings:
- 1) Lawrence Rosen, "Reading the Quran through Western Eyes," in *Varieties of Muslim Experience: Encounters with Arab Political and Religious Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 75-92. [Blackboard]
 - 2) Quran 1, 55.
 - 3) Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, "Mecca" and "El Hajj Malik El Shabazz," (chs. 17 and 18).
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WEEK 14 Islam: Pilgrimage. cont'd; Final Review
(4/28)

Readings: None; Study for your final exam

FINAL EXAM – 5/5, 6:00 p.m., Ladd 206
