

RE 103: Religion and Culture

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Ladd 307
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I. RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THE LIBERAL ARTS. The liberal arts tradition, as I understand it, is founded on the assumption that a true education requires more than the accumulation of trade-specific information, but also the cultivation of a variety of valuable cognitive, practical and social capacities. A liberal arts education seeks to foster the ability to seek, classify and organize knowledge effectively and to critically assess one's own presuppositions and biases, as well as those of others (including teachers and the authors of course texts), in order to refine that knowledge continuously. Such an education should nurture the ability to recognize broad patterns in nature, society and culture, should stimulate curiosity about their basis and equip one with methods for testing one's intuitions about the causes and effects of those patterns. Training in the liberal arts also fosters excellent communication skills, which have enormous practical value. Teachers in this tradition endeavor to cultivate the ability to structure and communicate arguments clearly and persuasively, especially orally and in writing, but increasingly in other media as well. Finally, and importantly, training in the liberal arts entails the development of certain social qualities, foremost among them being respect for difference, an empathetic imagination, and counter-conventional thinking (that is, the ability to imagine established practices and institutions otherwise). Challenging students to wrestle with the religious viewpoints, values and worldviews of other people is one of the most efficient and effective ways to achieve these goals of a liberal education.

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION: RE 103 exposes students to two such religious worldviews in a sustained fashion, examining the historical roots and present-day manifestations of Lakota Sioux Religion and Buddhism in order to appreciate religion as a fundamental component of human experience. In this course, we will examine both the intriguing patterns of similarity evident in religions across space and time, and the ways particular varieties of religion are embedded in social and historical contexts. A central theme of the first part of the course will be how religious beliefs and practices legitimate - or challenge - prevailing social arrangements. The second part of the course focuses on how adherents adapt and transform a religious tradition as it moves across space and through time. Throughout the course, we will be reading texts that describe the experiences of individual believers, to get a sense for how individuals draw on their religious traditions to create meaningful lives amidst great personal and political challenges.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- to try to understand a religion as a committed practitioner might, not simply as a detached observer
- to develop a richly nuanced conception of religion that recognizes both the social and the personal dimensions of religious belief and practice
- to examine, challenge and clarify one's own self-understanding, worldview and fundamental values
- to acquire a working vocabulary that will enable you to speak in an informed and accurate way about the different religious traditions we will examine
- to develop an awareness of the approaches that can be taken in the scholarly study of religion

III. COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS

- A. Attendance and Participation
- B. Reading
- C. Writing

The format of this course will combine lecture and discussion with audio-visual presentations, guest lectures and (hopefully) a class field trip.

A. Attendance and Participation: This is not a “distance-learning” course. Regular attendance is a must! A sign-in sheet will be passed around each class session. Attendance will be taken at each class session, either through a sign-in sheet, or by me. **A pattern of unexcused absences will affect your participation grade adversely; more than six will lead to earning a zero for the participation component of the course. In accordance with Skidmore policy, if you miss more than 1/3 of the course classes you will not be able to take the final exam, which will lead to failure in the course.**

Etiquette: Please plan to arrive in class on time. Feel free to bring a beverage and/or a light snack, but not a meal. We will take a five- to ten-minute break approximately half-way through class each day. This is the *only* time you should leave the room during the class period.

Laptops, Tablets, etc.: In general, laptops, tablets, and other such devices will not be permitted in the classroom. You must bring assigned readings in paper form, whether we are using books or readings downloaded from Blackboard. **If you do not bring the day’s reading to class that will count for ½ an unexcused absence.** Please silence all cell phones and other personal electronic devices.

Participation in the classroom process is vital to your learning experience. You are expected to come to class having read the assignments so that you are prepared to offer your thoughtful questions, comments, comparisons and suggestions for further areas of exploration. This kind of participation benefits the class enormously, as does your attentive listening to the comments and questions of others. Your class participation grade will depend not only on the consistency of attendance, but also on how well you contribute positively to the overall class dynamic through your comments, questions, attentive listening, prompt arrival, leadership and cooperation in small group work, etc. Generally speaking, when an imbalance occurs in terms of who is speaking and how frequently, those who are shy need to exercise the virtue of courage and those who are loquacious need to exercise the virtue of restraint. I reserve the prerogative to call on students in order to even out the class dynamic. **Class participation will count for 10% of your grade.**

B. Reading: Nothing is more central to a course in the liberal arts than the careful, thorough, critical reading of texts, and that will certainly be the case here. I encourage you to take notes in the margins of your books or in a notebook designated for that purpose. Such active engagement with the reading will enhance your retention of the material and help you to think through the issues and questions raised by the texts.

Texts are available for purchase at the Skidmore Bookstore, Case Student Center. If you choose to purchase your texts elsewhere, please note the ISBN numbers below, and strive to get the exact edition we will all be using so we can be on the same page, literally, when we consult the text in class together.

- John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Univ of Nebraska Press 2000) 978-0803261709

- Rupert Gettin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford Paperbacks 1998) 978-0192892232
- Pema Chodron, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* (Shambhala Classics, 2000) 978-1570623448

Additional required readings will be made available through Blackboard Electronic Reserve (ER) or in class. As mentioned above, please print these out, unless otherwise indicated, and bring to class on the day assigned.

C. Writing:

- Formal essays
- Informal response papers
- Short answer-based quizzes

1. Formal essays: These are called “formal” because they will be evaluated for style--grammar, spelling, punctuation--as well as content. Since this is a writing intensive class, I urge you to visit the Writing Center for a one-on-one appointment early in the semester, to get the maximum benefit from their excellent services. They are happy to meet with students at any point in the writing process – from brainstorming ideas to refining the final argument (although they do not line-edit papers for spelling, grammatical or stylistic errors). Please do have the writing tutor send me a report of your session.

<http://www.skidmore.edu/writingcenter/>

Formal essays must be typed using a normal font (Times, Times New Roman, Helvetica, Palatino, etc.) of 12 pt. and double-spaced with margins of 1 inch. You are welcome to print your papers on recycled paper, so long as your essay is legible.

Note well: Because of the size of the class, **late formal papers will not be accepted** unless you have explained ahead of time the reason for its being late, or are able to provide a documented reason after the fact. If you and I agree that you may turn a paper in late, we will negotiate how many points will be taken off for tardiness.

2. Response Papers: At regular intervals throughout the quarter you will be responsible for a 1-1/2 to 2 page written paper in response to the required class readings. These papers will form a basis for classroom discussion of the material, and so are due in class on the day assigned.

You will be given general directions for each response paper in advance. At the same time, the response papers are an opportunity for you to engage the course material in a way that enables you to achieve greater clarity concerning your own thoughts, and so there is no “right” or “wrong” response.

These assignments will not be graded for either content or style, but I will make comments on them. If you hand in a paper of sufficient length in class, you will receive a grade of 4. If the paper is late for any reason, except a documented reason such as a doctor’s appointment, away-game, illness (with a note from Health Services or your Academic Administrator/Dean), etc., you will be given a 1. Late response papers will be accepted for one week after the due date. If you do not hand in a paper, you will receive a grade of 0. If it is obvious that you have not read the assignment with much or any care, and are handing in a paper based on nothing but your own imagination and ingenuity, in all likelihood you will receive a 0.

3. Short-answer questions: Learning the words that people use to describe their beliefs and practices is a crucial component of learning about other people’s religions. Periodically we will conduct in-class quizzes to test your comprehension of the reading, particularly your understanding of key-terms introduced throughout the semester. Your knowledge of key terms may be tested using multiple-choice rather than short-answer questions. **Quizzes will not be rescheduled unless you are able to provide a documented reason in advance why you cannot be present for the quiz.**

IV. Evaluation

A. Grading Summary

Assignment	Percentage
First formal essay	15%
Response papers	8%
Midterm essay	25%
Quizzes	15%
Take home final exam essay	25%
Attendance and Participation	12%

B. Grading Standards: The following is designed to help you think about the level of participation you’re prepared to give to this course, and the final grade you would like to shoot for. (Obviously, there are finer gradations for each of the grades discussed below, e.g. A-, B+, C+)

1. “A” signifies outstanding. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) keep up with your regular response papers, demonstrate consistent care and thoughtfulness in your reflections on the issues and questions raised by the class; (c) demonstrate in the in-class quizzes a thorough understanding of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religious traditions we are examining; (d) do a thorough, analytically acute job on the essays and exams and get them in on time.

In addition, to merit an “A” your writing in the formal essays and exams must reflect the following: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; depth and complexity in your engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an exceptionally creative original contribution--a new idea, a different way of thinking about the issue(s) you’re discussing--that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else’s ideas.

2. “B” signifies good; it is a solid, good grade. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) keep up with your response papers and your note taking both in and outside of class; (c) demonstrate in the quizzes a firm grasp of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religions we are examining; (d) do a thorough job on the essays and exams and get them in on time.

In addition, a “B” grade essay typically contains: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; solid engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an original contribution that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else’s ideas.

3. “C” stands for satisfactory. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) keep up with your response papers and your note taking both in and outside of class; (c) demonstrate in the quizzes an adequate grasp of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religions we are examining; (d) do a satisfactory job on the essays that meets the requirements of the assignment, and get them in on time.

In addition, “C” level essays contain no statement of intent, or a confused one at best; occasionally lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no clear development leading to a supportable conclusion.

4. To fall below satisfactory (i.e. C-, D), you could fall behind in your note taking and response papers, skip one of the in-class quizzes, turn in one of the formal papers several days past the deadline, and/or be more irregular in attendance and discussion.

In addition, below “C” level essays do not adequately meet the requirements of the assignment. They typically also contain no statement of intent, or a confused one at best; frequently lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no development leading to a supportable conclusion at all.

C. Guide to Instructor’s Abbreviations in Marking Papers

Vertical line with check-mark = useful point, important idea

Double vertical line = good, strong idea or sentence

Exclamation point = yes! excellent point

Double-lined P = start a new paragraph

WW = wrong word

Wavy underline = something is wrong here - awkward expression or factual error

E = grammatical, spelling, or punctuation error

If your paper contains a great many grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors, and/or instances of awkward expression or wrong word choice, I will ask you to locate and correct each “E,” “WW” or underlined phrase that I have marked in the margin of your paper. You must make these revisions in order to get full credit for your paper.

D. Students with documented disabilities: I strive to create an inclusive classroom that respects the fact that our eyes, ears, brains and bodies all work a little bit differently. If you have, or think you may have a learning disability, please work with the Office of Student Academic Services to determine what strategies and accommodations are appropriate for your situation, and then do speak with me early on so that we may arrange appropriate accommodation.

http://cmsauthor.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/

E. Academic Honesty: Making references to the work of others strengthens your own work by granting you greater authority and by showing that you are part of a discussion located within a community. When you make references (by quotation or paraphrase) to the work of others, it is essential to provide proper attribution and citation. Failing to do so is considered academically dishonest, as is copying or paraphrasing someone else’s work. Please consult Appendix B for the citation format I recommend for your work in this class.

Any confirmed instances of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication or facilitating academic dishonesty) in this course will result in the work in question receiving a zero. Assignments that receive a zero for this reason may not be rewritten or redone. As per the Skidmore College Honor Code, documentation of the infraction will be kept on file with Dean’s office and may impair eligibility for honor societies, study abroad, etc.

Provisional Schedule of Classes and Assignments Subject to Change

Week One – Introduction to Course

Th 9/4 – What is Religion?

Pass out syllabus; defining religion

Week Two – Lakota Spirituality

T 9/9 – The Great Vision

Read: *Black Elk Speaks*, preface through chapter IV (The Great Vision), pp. xv-60

Key terms: soteriology, cosmology, wakan, wakantanka, wakanpi, wicasa wakan, White Buffalo Woman

Homework: Please bring in the index card with a photograph and some information about yourself that will help me get to know you a little better.

Th 9/11 – Religious Knowledge and Its Transmission

Read: Sam Gill, “The Shadow of a Vision Yonder.” pp. 26-36 (Blackboard Electronic Reserve [ER])

Read: Ake Hultkranz, intro to “Native Religions of North America,” pp. 266-282 (ER)

Week Three – Lakota Spirituality

T 9/16 – The Indian Wars

Read: *Black Elk Speaks*, chapters V-IX (61-130)

Read: Timeline of post-contact history of Lakota people (ER)

View in Class: *The Spirit of Crazy Horse* (Dir. James Locker, 1990)

Key terms: wasichu, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Sun Dance, waga chun

Th 9/18 – Enacting the Vision

Read: *Black Elk Speaks*, chapters XIII-XVIII

Quiz on Lakota Religiosity today

Week Four – Making It Really Real

T 9/23 – An Anthropological Definition of Religion

Read: Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (1973), 87-125 (focus on: 89-114, 119-top of 120, 123-125).

Due: Response paper due today

Th 9/25 – NO CLASS - ROSH HASHANAH (Jewish New Year)

Week Five – Religion as Resistance

Monday, 9/29 – first paper due by 12 noon via Blackboard Assignments

T 9/30 – The Ghost Dance Religion

Read: *Black Elk Speaks*, chapters XIV – XXIII

Read: DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account,” pp. 385-405 (ER)

Th 10/2 – Religion and Resistance

Read: Patricia Limerick, “The Repression of Indian Religious Freedom,” *Native American Rights Fund Legal Review* 18, 2 (1993): 9-13 (ER)

Read: “Bruce Lincoln, Notes toward a Theory of Religion and Revolution,” pp. 266-292.

View: The Spirit of Crazy Horse pts 3 & 4

Week Six – Religion as Resistance

T 10/7 – Representations: Truthful, Partial, Pious

Read: Black Elk Speaks, XXIV-postscript

Read: Steltencamp, *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala*, 29-77

Th 10/9 - Representations: Truthful, Partial, Pious

Read: Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”

Due: Response paper due today

Week Seven – Buddhism

T 10/14 – Introduction to Buddhism - Buddha

Read: Gethin, the Foundations of Buddhism, Introduction and Chapter 1: The Buddha, 1-34

Th 10/16 – Hindu roots of Buddhism

Read: Two Jataka Tales, ER (Meeting with Buddha Dipamkara and The Great Monkey King tale)

View: Representing the Buddha in Early Indian Art Slideshow

Key words: karma, dharma, samsara, renunciation, householder, puja, devotion

Friday 10/17 – Second Paper Due in Blackboard dropbox via Assignments- Black Elk’s Life and Its Religious Significance

Week Eight

T 10/21 – Buddhist Literature - Dharma

Read: Gethin, Ch. 2: The Word of the Buddha, pp. 35-45

Read: Gethin, Ch. 3: The Four Truths

Th 10/23 – The Four Noble Truths in Practice

Read: Linda Hess, “Craving,” pp. 197-206 (ER)

Read: Sallie King, “Enlightenment Experiences of Soto Zen Nuns,” 513-524 (ER)

Week Nine

T 10/28 – Buddhist Community – Sangha

Read: Gethin, Ch 4: The Buddhist Community, 85-111

Read: Vinaya text on Rules for Taking Alms (ER)

View in class: The Long Search – In the Footprints of the Buddha

Th 10/30 – The Buddhist Cosmos and Its Interconnections

Read: Gethin, Ch 5: The Buddhist Cosmos

Quiz on Buddhist key terms today

Week Ten

T 11/4 – Buddhist Philosophy

Read: Ch. 6: No Self (difficult reading – please allow sufficient time to read carefully, and re-read if necessary)

Th 11/6 - Faith, Good Conduct, Meditation

Read: Gethin, Ch. 7: The Buddhist Path

Week Eleven

T 11/11 - Mahayana Buddhism

Read: Gethin, Ch. 9: The Mahayana, 224-244; Ch. 9: Schools of Buddhism, pp. 266-276 (Tibetan Buddhism, and Buddhism in West).

Th 11/13 Tibetan Buddhism

Read: Luis Gomez, “Two Visualizations of the Goddess Tara” (ER)

View in class: Werner Herzog, *The Wheel of Time: Kalachakra Mandala*

Week Twelve

T 11/18 Buddhism in the West

Read: Rick Fields, excerpts, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, 3rd edition (Boston: Shambala Press, 1992) (ER)

Read: Jan Nattier, “American Buddhists: Who Are They?”

<http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha175.htm>

Th 11/20 Buddhism in the West

Read: Pema Chodron, *Things Fall Apart*

Due: Response Paper due today

Week Thirteen

T 11/25 Buddhism in the West

Read: Pema Chodron, *Things Fall Apart*

View: *Crazy Wisdom: The Life and Times of Chogyam Trungpa* (Dir. Johana Demetrakas, 2011)

Th 11/27 - NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Week Fourteen

T 12/2 Race/Ethnicity and Religion

Read: TBD

Read: Rick Fields, “Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism” (ER)

Th 12/4 - Race/Ethnicity and Religion

Read: TBD

View: *The Dhamma Brothers: East Meets West in the Deep South* (dir., Andrew Kukura, Jenny Philips, Anne Marie Stein, 2008)

Week Fifteen

T 12/9 – Conclusions, Comparisons

Read: TBD

W 12/17 – 9 am – 12 noon – Final Exam

Take home final exam paper due on Buddhism and its transformation in Tibet and the US

Final quiz on key terms from throughout course

Bibliography of Electronic Reserve (ER) Readings
In order of appearance

Gill, Sam. "The Shadow of a Vision Yonder," in *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1987), pp. 26-36.

Hultekrantz, Ake. "Native Religions of North America: The Power of Visions and Fertility," in *Religious Traditions of the World*, ed. By H. Bryon Earhart (San Francisco: HarperCollins 1995), 266-282.

Geertz, Clifford. "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125.

DeMallie, Raymond J. "The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account." *Pacific Historical Review* 51, 4 (Nov. 1982): 385-405.

Limerick, Patricia. "The Repression of Indian Religious Freedom," *Native American Rights Fund Legal Review* 18, 2 (1993): 9-13.

Steltenkamp, Michael J. Excerpts from *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 29-77.

Asad, Talal. "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27-54.

Kawasaki, Ken and Visakha. "Mahakapi Jataka: The Great Monkey King (Jataka 407)," In *Jataka Tales of the Buddha, Part III* (1998). Access to Insight Website [http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/kawasaki/bl142.html#top]

Strong, John. "Remembering Past Lives – Planting the Seeds of Buddhahood," in *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995).

Hess, Linda. "Craving," in *Being Bodies: Buddhist Women on the Paradox of Embodiment*, ed. by Lenore Friedman and Susan Moon (Boston: Shambala Press, 1997), 197-206.

King, Sallie. "Enlightenment Experiences of Soto Zen Nuns," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 513-524

Rhys Davids, T.W. and Hermann Oldenberg. "Sekhiya Dhamma," in *Vinaya Texts, Translated from the Pâli Part I: The Pâtimokkha, The Mahâvagga, I-IV. Vol. XIII of The Sacred Books of the East* (New York: Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1881). [http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe13/sbe1310.htm]

Gomez, Luis. "Two Visualizations of the Goddess Tara," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 318-327.

Fields, Rick. "When the Iron Bird Flies," and "In the Land of the Red Man." In *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, 3rd edition (Boston: Shambala Press, 1992), 273-338.

Fields, Rick. "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism." In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. by Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1998), 196-206.