CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

**---WORLD RELIGIONS---**

**RS 150 (13705)**

**Spring 2016**

**Instructor: John J. McGraw**

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**Class hours: Mondays & Wednesday 9:30-10:45pm / SH 390**

**Office hours: Monday 2:30-5:30pm (SSH 229) and by appointment (in person or via Skype)**

**Class blog:** [**worldsreligions.blogspot.com**](http://worldsreligions.blogspot.com/)

**Description**

This course reviews the major religious traditions of the world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will spend time looking at the “world religions” and time investigating indigenous religions, with an eye towards appreciating local and global convergences in religious belief and practice. In studying these topics, we will draw from a variety of sources, including primary texts, secondary literature, and documentaries. Additionally, we will investigate the importance of religion and mythology in establishing particular understandings of the world and the place of humans in that world.

**Student Learning Objectives**

Students will be able to recognize and to articulate (orally and in writing) the difference between an academic approach to religion and a personal, devotional approach.

Students will be able to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in recognizing the major contributors to the modern study of religion and their models/theories from philosophy, theology, the history of religions, and the social sciences.

Students will be able to understand the following terms in their conventional, popular usage, and then discuss the variety of ways that religious studies scholars have critiqued, expanded, or problematized these: religion, religious, myth, ritual, symbol, philosophy, subjectivity, objectivity, secular/secularization, cult, sect, mysticism, theism, atheism, polytheism, monotheism, spirituality, magic, paganism, animism, canon, religious violence, post-colonialism, individualistic compared to community-based religions.

Students will be able to explain and give basic examples of the social function of religion with regard to gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

Students will be able to recognize religiosity in an aspect of modern culture such as different forms of media, art, music, films, politics, sports, and the public discourse on science.

Students will be able to demonstrate a *basic level of proficiency* in describing two specific religious traditions (perhaps one from North America, one outside of it), including their historical development, major beliefs and practices, and demonstrate *a basic level of proficiency* in interpreting religious texts and rituals from each religious tradition.

**General Education Student Learning Goal**

Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literatures, religions, and philosophy.

**General Education Student Learning Objectives**

Students will be able to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in describing two specific religious traditions (perhaps one from North America, one outside of it), including their historical development, major beliefs and practices, and demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in interpreting religious texts and rituals from each religious tradition.

Students will explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures.

Students will analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities.

Students will produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms.

Students will demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities.

Students will use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

Students will describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

**Student Support & Resources**

*Learning Resource Center*:

[www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center](http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center)

*Counseling and Psychological Services*:

[www.csun.edu/social-behavioral-sciences/psychology/counselingpsychological-services](http://www.csun.edu/social-behavioral-sciences/psychology/counselingpsychological-services)

*Campus Ministry*:

[www.csun.edu/~uc14994/](http://www.csun.edu/~uc14994/)

*Disability Resources and Educational Services*:

[www.csun.edu/dres](http://www.csun.edu/dres)

**Grading and Methods of Evaluation**

You are required to read the material specified for each class **BEFORE** that class meeting. Those readings will determine the nature of the lecture and discussions. Your final grade will be determined by:

* **Class Participation (15%)**
* **Weekly Quizzes (25%)**
* **Midterm Exam I (20%)**
* **Midterm Exam II (20%)**
* **Final Exam (20%)**

**92-100 = *A* / 90-91 = *A-* / 88-89 = *B+* / 82-88 = *B* / 80-81 = *B-***

**78-79 = *C+* / 72-77 = *C* / 70-71 = *C-* / 60-69 = *D* / Below 60 = *F***

**Weekly Quizzes** will be administered each Monday at the beginning of class; ~10 minutes will be set aside for this purpose. You may not make up quizzes that you miss or fail. We have 14 quizzes scheduled during the semester. You may skip 4 quizzes or the lowest 4 quiz grades will be dropped from the set. The **average of 10 quizzes** will make up of **25%** of your grade for the course.

**The Midterms and Final Exams** will be composed of 40 multiple choice questions. The exams will not be cumulative; they will only cover material since the last exam.

**Class attendance and active participation**: Class attendance is necessary for your class participation grade. For class participation, a **check minus (50%**), a **check (75%**), or a **check plus** **(100%)** will be marked after each class. The **average of your class participation marks** will make up **15%** of your grade for the course. Not attending class results in a “zero” rather than a **check minus** (50%).

**Academic Integrity**

This is a rare time in history to be a student. The resources each of you has available would make scholars in any prior generation green with envy. But with this wealth of resources, the temptation to lift material is perhaps greater than ever as well. In this course, we will be strictly adhering to the Academic Dishonesty policy of CSUN:

[www.csun.edu/catalog/policies/academic-dishonesty/](http://www.csun.edu/catalog/policies/academic-dishonesty/)

**Required Texts**

I highly recommend purchasing these texts so that you can take your time with them, underline in them, and have something nice for your personal library.

**Smith, Huston. 1991. *The World’s Religions*. New York: HarperCollins.**

**Mitchell, Stephen. 2000. *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation.* New York: Random House.**

**Mitchell, Stephen. 1988. *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version.* New York: HarperCollins.**

**Course Schedule**

**Monday 1/25 ─ Introduction, p. 1**

**Wednesday 1/27 ─ Introduction, p. 2**

**Monday 2/1 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 2 up to “Four Paths…”)*

***Weekly Quiz 1***

**Wednesday 2/3 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 2 up to “Thou Before Whom…”)*

**Monday 2/8 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (remainder of Ch. 2)*

***Weekly Quiz 2***

**Wednesday 2/10 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Stephen Mitchell, Bhagavad Gita (Chs. 1-3)*

**Monday 2/15 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Stephen Mitchell, Bhagavad Gita (Chs. 4-7)*

***Weekly Quiz 3***

**Wednesday 2/17 ─ Hinduism**

*Reading ─**Stephen Mitchell, Bhagavad Gita (Chs. 8-11)*

**MIDTERM EXAM I**

**Monday 2/22 ─ Buddhism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 3 up to “The Four Noble Truths.”)*

***Weekly Quiz 4***

**Wednesday 2/24 ─ Buddhism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 3 up to “Basic Buddhist Concepts.”)*

**Monday 2/29 ─ Buddhism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 3 up to “The Secret of the Flower.”)*

***Weekly Quiz 5***

**Wednesday 3/2 ─ Buddhism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 3 up to “The Image of the Crossing.”)*

**Monday 3/7 ─ Buddhism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (remainder of Ch. 3)*

***Weekly Quiz 6***

**Wednesday 3/9 ─ Interlude**

**Monday 3/14 ─ Taoism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 5 up to “Efficient Power…”)*

***Weekly Quiz 7***

**Wednesday 3/16 ─ Taoism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 5 up to “The Mingling…”)*

**Monday 3/28 ─ Taoism**

*Reading ─**Stephen Mitchell, Tao Te Ching (Chs. 1-21)*

***Weekly Quiz 8***

**Wednesday 3/30 ─ Taoism**

*Reading ─**Stephen Mitchell, Tao Te Ching (Chs. 22-44)*

**MIDTERM EXAM II**

**Monday 4/4 ─ Judaism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 7 up to “Meaning in History.”)*

***Weekly Quiz 9***

**Wednesday 4/6 ─ Judaism**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 7 up to “The Hallowing of Life.”)*

**Monday 4/11 ─ Christianity**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 8 up to “The Good News.”)*

***Weekly Quiz 10***

**Wednesday 4/13 ─ Christianity**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 8 up to “Eastern Orthodoxy.”)*

**Monday 4/18 ─ Christianity**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (remainder of Ch. 8)*

***Weekly Quiz 11***

**Wednesday 4/20 ─ Christianity**

**Monday 4/25 ─ Islam**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 6 up to “Basic Theological Concepts”)*

***Weekly Quiz 12***

**Wednesday 4/27 ─ Islam**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 6 up to “Whither Islam?”)*

**Monday 5/2 ─ Contemporary Maya Spirituality**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 9 up to “The Primal World.”)*

***Weekly Quiz 13***

**Wednesday 5/4 ─ Syncretism & Hybridity: The Local and the Global in Perspective**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (remainder of Ch. 9)*

**Monday 5/9 ─ Course Review**

*Reading ─**Huston Smith, The World’s Religions (Ch. 10)*

***Weekly Quiz 14***

**Monday 5/18 ─ FINAL EXAM (8-10am)**