

Department: Anthropology

Course No: 3401 [269]

Credits: 3

Title: World Religions

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Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: 269. World Religions. Either semester. Three credits. Linnekin. A survey of religious belief systems, both polytheistic and monotheistic, from around the world.

Course Information: a. This course is a survey of the world's major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The format is primarily lecture, augmented by class discussions, group exercises, discussion of Web site material, iconography (presented through PowerPoint), and musical examples. Students learn to describe and compare the major features of the world's major religions.

b. The requirements are two mid-term exams, a final exam, three independent projects (described below under Content Area Justification), and a variable number of quizzes, exercises, and assignments. Required texts include a survey volume on the major world religions and a complementary collection of scriptural texts.

c. For each religion, the following topics are studied: historical emergence, cultural context, scriptural sources, theology, core doctrines, moral teachings, key symbols, iconography, ritual practices, gender roles, and individual spiritual experiences.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: This course promotes the following goals of General Education: 6 (primarily); 1, 2, 3, and 4 (equally); 5.

1. To demonstrate competence in course content, students must be able to define and explain unfamiliar and often difficult abstract concepts. Formal assessments include very few short-answer questions, and require students to demonstrate competence in written expression. They must be able to articulate key religious concepts, explain symbolic frameworks and points of theology, and do exegesis of sacred texts.

2. Most college students today are woefully ignorant of the core features of Christianity and Judaism and most harbor confused and stereotypic perceptions of Islam. This course educates students in the Abrahamic religions and in non-Western faiths, both monotheist and polytheistic, through scriptural readings as well as descriptive material on ritual practices and spiritual experiences. Students acquire detailed knowledge of very unfamiliar faiths and learn to relate

religious doctrine to social structure, gender relations, and mundane aspects of daily life, such as eating and dress. They must be able to explain how rituals and diurnal customs are part of a context of beliefs.

3. This course challenges students' preconceptions and stereotypes about the world's major religions. Most college students today are "unchurched" and hold uninformed opinions and/or blatant prejudices about the dominant North American faiths, not to mention Islam and the religions of Asia. Students are taught to analyze the causes of modern religious conflicts in historical, social, and cultural terms. Thus they learn to think critically about popular assumptions, media portrayals, and simplistic analyses of contemporary religious issues.

4. Class presentations, readings and assignments in this course teach students tolerance of different faiths. Doctrinal comparison of the major religions reveals striking similarities in moral teachings, commonalities that are surprising and thought provoking for many students.

5. It seems hardly necessary to defend the timeliness, indeed the critical importance, of teaching young adults about religious diversity in the current era. When many national leaders are casting the "war against terror" as a battle between Christian civilization and a supposedly unregenerate Muslim world, it is absolutely vital that our students gain objective, dispassionate knowledge about the world's major religions.

6. Religious diversity, the primary content of this course, is a form of "multiculturalism" that is particularly salient in world events today. In this course students learn about the variety of human belief systems, ritual practices, and spiritual experience.

CA1 Criteria: 1. The study of each religion traces its historical emergence, founding figures, principal teachers, scriptural development, and transformation over time (both doctrinal and ritual). Specific areas of historical analysis include the transition from Temple-centered to post-Second Temple rabbinical Judaism, the consolidation of Christian doctrine in its first few centuries and the Reformation, changes in women's status over time in several religions, and the division of Buddhism into several modern schools.

2. This course treats each religion as a thought system and addresses the standard doctrinal problematics discussed by scholars of religion: theology, theodicy, cosmology, soteriology, eschatology, and ethical teachings.

3. All major world religions have key symbols, both literary (scriptural) and graphic. This course examines key religious symbols from a historical and cultural perspective. For related religious traditions, such as Christianity and Judaism, and Hinduism and Buddhism, symbolic representations of deities and other key symbols are compared for their historical relationships and thematic similarities.

4. The study of mythology and scripture (which frequently includes legendary and ancient literary material, e.g., Genesis Chapter 2 and the Book of Job) Iconography, sacred music, and ritual performance are part of the presentation of each religion.

CA4 Criteria: 1. As narrated in detail above, the primary objective of this course is to teach students about the variety of belief systems, moral teachings, ritual practices, and religious experiences found within the major global religions, both Western and non-Western.

2. The cultural embeddedness of religious beliefs and rituals is a fundamental teaching of this course. Also emphasized is the connection between religious world views and cultural ideologies and practices. Students must be able to articulate examples of connections between religion, social structure, gender ideology, and daily behavior.

3. A primary theme of this course is that the world's major faiths exhibit startling similarities in their fundamental moral teachings, in certain modes of spirituality (mysticism, for example), and in the basic structure and function of ritual.

4. Religious conflicts abound in the world today. The course examines several religious conflicts, historical and modern, and relates them to issues such as social inequality, political separatism, and ethnic/religious nationalism. The status and treatment of women in each religion is also an important and consistent theme.