

RELS 200. Religions of the World

TR 12:45pm - 2pm, LAAH 463 (3 credits)

Fall 2018

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Robin Globus Veldman

Office: 302D Bolton

Phone: 979-845-2780

Email: rgv@tamu.edu

Course webpage:

ecampus.tamu.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3pm, in person or via Skype at [robinglobus5](https://robinglobus5.com), or by appointment.

RELS 200. Religions of the World. Introduction to academic study of religion and some of the world's major religions; emphasis on the nature of religion, diversity of practice across religious traditions, religious appropriation, and functions of religion. Prerequisites: None.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will introduce you to the academic study of religion and to some of the world's major religions, including Indigenous traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and New Religious Movements. We will highlight the diversity of practice within these traditions, regionally and across time, while also considering issues such as how to define religion and challenges with doing so; how the concept of world religions was "invented," religious difference; religious appropriation; how competition among traditions promotes religious vitality and the functions of civil religion.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The aims of this course are (1) to introduce you to the basic beliefs, practices, and rituals of some of the world's major religious traditions: Indigenous traditions, Hinduism(s), Buddhism(s), Sikhism(s), Judaism(s), Christianities, Islam(s), and New Religious Movements (2) to invite you to think critically about the study of World Religions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Jeffrey Brodd, Layne Little, Brad Nystrom, Robert Platzner, Richard Shek and Erin Stiles. 2015. *Invitation to World Religions, 2nd ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*All other readings will be posted on eCampus.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Describe the three main methods scholars use to define religion and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
2. Identify the major beliefs, practices, rituals and histories of the traditions listed above.
3. Explain why some religions are considered “world religions,” and why this classification scheme may be misleading or problematic.
4. Explain the difference between religious appropriation and syncretism/bricolage.
5. Explain how the concept of freedom of religion may apply differently to different religious traditions.
6. Define and apply the concept of “civil religion.”
7. Use evidence to communicate clearly, effectively, and judiciously about religions.
8. Communicate in a team setting.

RELS 201 meets the core curriculum Language, Philosophy, and Culture (KLPC) foundational component area. The core curriculum objectives for this course are:

1. **Critical Thinking:** creative thinking; innovation; inquiry; and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information
2. **Communication:** effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication
3. **Social Responsibility:** intercultural competence; knowledge of civic responsibility; and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities
4. **Personal Responsibility:** ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making

Additionally, RELS 201 meets the International and Cultural Diversity (KICD) graduation requirement. The learning outcomes for KICD courses are that the successful student should be able to:

1. Live and work effectively in a diverse and global society.
2. Articulate the value of a diverse and global perspective.
3. Recognize diverse opinions and practices (including but not limited to economic, political, cultural gender, and religious opinions) and consider different points of view.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. REFLECTION PAPERS

The material we will be covering this semester is designed to “make the strange familiar, and make the familiar strange.” You will write two reflection papers about this course. Detailed instructions will be discussed in class and posted on eCampus, including length and formatting.

In the first reflection paper you will consider your conceptions about religion and religious studies prior to taking this class, and whether/how these conceptions have changed.

Course learning outcomes: 1, 2, 7

Core learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3

ICD learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3

The second paper will include your reflections about the material presented in the second half of the semester, as well as reflections about your effort in the course, challenges, how you worked to overcome them, advice to future students, and how your understanding of religious studies and religions of the world have influenced your perspective as a person who is responsible to others and an informed citizen of the world.

Course learning outcomes: 4, 5, 7

Core learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 4

ICD learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3

2. CURRENT EVENT POSTER PRESENTATION

At the beginning of the semester students will subscribe to the Religion News Service’s daily newsletter (<https://religionnews.com/get-rns-inbox/>) so that you will be able to stay abreast of religion-related news during the semester. You will then sign up to present a poster on one of three dates that fall at the end of each unit. Your poster and accompanying 5-minute presentation will analyze a current event discussed in an RNS article from the perspective of a theme developed in that unit. The presentation will be graded on your visual and oral communication skills.

Poster Session 1 themes: what counts as religion; the invention of world religions; how religions change in different cultures or in different time periods.

Poster Session 2 themes: religious violence and intolerance; religious freedom; issues related to religious clothing or accoutrements; the experiences of religious minorities.

Poster Session 3 themes: civil religion; religious economies; the experience of religious minorities and new religious movements.

Course learning outcomes: 1-7

Core learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3

ICD learning outcomes: 1, 2, 3

COMPONENTS OF THE FINAL GRADE

Reflection Paper #1	40 points
Reflection Paper #2	40 points
Current Event Analysis	
Poster	20 points
Presentation	20 points
Team Maintenance	20 points
Midterm Exam	90 points
Final exam	70 points

TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS 300 points

Grading Scale (%)

A	90-100	(270-300 points)
B	80-89	(240-269 points)
C	70-79	(210-239 points)
D	60-69	(180-209 points)
F	0-59	(0-179 points)

3. MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAMS

The midterm and final exam will be multiple choice. The midterm covers Units 1 and 2. The final exam covers Unit 3; it is NOT cumulative.

Course learning outcomes: 1-6

4. TEAM MAINTENANCE

Your teamwork skills will be evaluated twice during the semester by the other members of your group. The evaluation will be based on the following four factors:

- (1) Preparation (were you prepared when you came to class?)
- (2) Contribution (did you contribute productively to group discussion and work?)
- (3) Respect for others' ideas (did you encourage others to contribute their ideas?)
- (4) Flexibility (were you flexible when disagreements occurred?)

The first evaluation will not count toward your grade. Rather, it is chance to learn from your peers if anything you are doing is detracting from the team's effectiveness, so that you can alter your behavior in time for the final team maintenance grade.

Course learning outcomes: 7, 8

Core learning outcomes: 2, 4

ICD learning outcomes: 1, 3

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. You may miss 2 classes with no penalty. Subsequent absences will result in a 10 point deduction from your final grade per absence. Excused absences are exempt; prompt notification of upcoming excused absences is required.

- Please be aware that **you are responsible for material covered on days you are absent.** Please ask a classmate to provide you with notes and visit office hours if you have questions.
- **Late/Make-Up Assignments with an excused absence(s):** If you are late turning in an assignment or exam or miss an in class assignment/exam due to an excused absence, you will have an opportunity to make it up. A list of excused absences and guidelines and timing for proper documentation can be found there: <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>.
- **Late/Make-up Assignments with an unexcused absence(s):** In the case of late or missed assignments/tests due to unexcused absence(s), your grade will drop by one third of a letter grade for each day the assignment is late (i.e. from an A- to a B+, etc.). No last minute extensions will be granted for computer failure and similar mishaps, so please plan ahead by backing up your work.

Common Courtesy: Cell phones must be turned off during class. Students who receive or make calls or texts during class or engage in other disruptive behaviors (whispering, sleeping, reading a newspaper, checking Facebook) will be asked to leave.

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do." Please visit <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu> for further information.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

UNIT 1: WHAT IS RELIGION? / HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

Week 1

T Aug. 28 Course Introduction
R Aug. 30 Brodd, Ch. 1

Week 2

T Sept. 4 McCutcheon, "What's in a Name?" and "The History of Religion"
*meet in front of the Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue in Academic Plaza for observation
R Sept. 6 Prothero, "God is Not One"

Week 3

T Sept. 11 Brodd, Hinduism, pp. 91-105 and "Hinduism as a Way of Life," pp. 125-138
R Sept.13 Ghandi (2009) "Yoga in 19th Century America," pp. 45-50
NBC News: "Yoga Lawsuit: Schools Accused of Spreading Gospel" + individually assigned readings
Team Activity #1, Yoga application exercise

Week 4

T Sept. 18 Brodd, Buddhism, pp. 145-176 (through "Mantra, Liturgical Ritual and Chanting")
Film: The Buddha: A Film by David Grubin
R Sept. 20 Lecture: Buddhism and Buddhism as a World Religion

Week 5

T Sept. 25 MSBR readings posted on eCampus; **Team Activity #2, meditation application exercise**
R Sept. 27 **Poster Session 1.**

UNIT 2: RELIGION, RESISTANCE, CRITIQUE / ISLAM AND NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIONS

Week 6

T Oct. 2 Brodd, Ch. 13: Islam, p. 469-488
R Oct. 4 Brodd, "The History of Islam" and part of "Islam as a Way of Life," pp. 488-512
Team Activity #3

Week 7

T Oct. 9 Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and On Our Heads"
 R Oct. 11 Film: "Divided We Fall". **Reflection Paper #1 due in class**

Week 8

T Oct. 16 Vine Deloria (1973) "The Indian Movement" and Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility" from *God is Red*
 R Oct. 18 Film: "In the Light of Reverence"
Team Activity #4, "The Wintu and Mt. Shasta" application exercise

Week 9

T Oct. 23 Practice peer evaluations; Review for exam; **Poster Session 2**
 R Oct. 25 **MIDTERM**

UNIT 3: RELIGIOUS VITALITY AND COMPETITION / CHRISTIANITY, JUDAISM, NRMs**Week 10**

T Oct. 30 Brodd, Ch. 12: Christianity 411-448.
 R Nov. 1 Finke and Stark, "On Religious Economies," from *The Churching of America*

Week 11

T Nov. 6 Market Theory of Religion application exercise
 R Nov. 8 Field trip to A&M United Methodist Church

Week 12

T Nov. 13 Brodd Ch. 11, Judaism, pp. 351-361, Albanese, "Civil Religion"
 R Nov. 15 Sarna, "Is Judaism Compatible with American Civil Religion?"
Team Activity #5, The Christmas Problem application exercise

Week 13

T Nov. 20 Begin work on final reflection paper independently. Virtual office hours.

THANKSGIVING BREAK**Week 14**

T Nov. 27 New Religious Movements, focus to be decided by class vote
 R Nov. 29 New Religious Movements, continued. **Poster Session 3**

Week 15

T Dec. 4 Course wrap up and review for final exam.
Due: Reflection Paper #2 (may be turned in any time after Thanksgiving Break)
Team maintenance grades must be emailed to Prof. Veldman before class

FINAL EXAM: December 12, 8-10am