

10/17/18

**Religions of the Ancient World  
Religious Studies (RELS) 209-500  
Fall 2019**

Instructor:	Donnalee Dox	Instructor Office:	256 LAAH
Instructor Contact:	<a href="mailto:dox@tamu.edu">dox@tamu.edu</a>	Office Hours:	Tues 11:00-1:30
Meeting time:	Tues/Thurs 9:35	Location:	LAAH 262
Core Area:	Language, Philosophy & Culture		
Elective in:	US Religious Thought, Practices & Culture major and RELS minor		

**Catalog Course Description**

Credit 3. Religious traditions, ideas, and practices of ancient cultures. Connections to modern religious traditions.

**Required Text**

Christopher Partridge, ed. *Introduction to World Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 2005  
Additional readings in eCampus.

**TAMU LPC Core Curriculum Objectives aligned with RELS 209 course objectives.**

- **Critical Thinking.** Discover ways people in ancient cultures conceived of a transcendent or divine reality by *inquiry* into the historical evidence for ancient beliefs and practices through written questions submitted to eCampus.
- **Critical Thinking.** Explore how ancient societies articulated conceptions of a transcendent or divine reality in philosophical treatises, legends and myths, histories, and visual art through *analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of source information* in small group discussions, class discussion, and a final exam.
- **Communication.** Demonstrate and improve *written and oral* communication through 2 research essays, 5 reflection essays, and 1 verbal presentation.
- **Social Responsibility.** Compare religious belief systems and consider how these systems change over time and are adapted within different cultures to hone the *ability to engage effectively in local, national and global communities* today.
- **Personal Responsibility.** Recognize varieties of religious experience in the ancient world to develop flexible thinking, respect for religious traditions today, and intercultural competence in order to cultivate the *ability to connect life choices and actions with ethical decision-making* in encounters with religious traditions today.

**RELS 209 Learning Outcomes**

- Analyze diverse methods and strategies for studying religion as a way to cultivate the personal and social responsibility required to recognize how different perspectives shape knowledge of ancient religions, and of religion today.
- Evaluate a variety of ancient religious beliefs and practices in order to transfer that mental flexibility into reflection and critical thinking, which are essential to thinking about religion and secularity in the modern world.
- Apply critical first-person analysis of encounters with religion in the modern world, as well as third-person analysis of research on ancient religions to develop the intellectual and practical skills essential for all learning.

**Attendance**

The University views class attendance as the **personal responsibility of an individual student**. Attendance is essential to complete the course successfully. University rules related to excused and unexcused absences are located on-line at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>. In RELS 209, you may miss one class without an excused absence. More than one unexcused absence lowers your final point total by 5 points per unexcused absence.

Assignments are due by the beginning of class time, 9:35. Late assignments accepted only with a university excused absence (see above).

### Grading Rubric for Assignments

Questions on eCampus	not graded, your social responsibility to the class
In-class presentation	100 points
5 Reflection writings	100 points (20 points each)
Research Essay 1	100 points
Research Essay 2	100 points
Final exam	100 points
<b>Total points</b>	<b>500 points</b>

### Assignments

- **Questions on readings. Critical thinking—inquiry.** For each week's readings until Week 14, send at least one question to our eCampus discussion board no later than Thursday 9:35 a.m. Bring your questions to class, be ready to speak about them. These are part of your **social responsibility** to the class. [eCampus discussion board](#)
- **5 reflection writings. 20 pts each, 100 total. Communication—written and critical thinking—creative thinking.** We will view and discuss 5 films. After each film, write a 1-2 page reflection. These writings help you incorporate **visual and aural imagery** into your learning, and learn to analyze visual images and sound. Discuss how the images and sounds of the film influenced your understanding of ancient religious traditions. [eCampus](#)
- **Lead an in-class discussion. 100 points. Communication—oral and visual communication.** You will contribute to a class discussion with a 5-10 minute PowerPoint presentation on an ancient religious belief or practice (may be one of your essay topics). Based on research, use visual imagery to illustrate your research. PowerPoint due by 9:35 the day you present. [eCampus](#)
- **2 Essays. 100 pts each. Critical thinking, social and personal responsibility.** Essays develop **written communication** skills as you synthesize and analyze information. Each essay asks you to reflect in some way on **social and personal responsibility** as defined by an ancient religious tradition. [eCampus](#)
  - Minimum expectations are 5-10 pages, double-spaced, 1,500+ words (250 per page), a clear topic statement, a statement explaining your approach to the ancient religion you are exploring, and *at least* five sources beyond class readings/notes cited with a bibliography.
  - Note: *the syllabus builds in research reading for your essays and discussion of your research.*
  - Your own sense of social and personal responsibility can expand as you learn to recognize and respect the ways people in the ancient world positioned themselves in relation to a transcendent, divine, or non-human realm. For each essay, **choose a religion of the ancient world** to explore in depth. Address *at least* 2 of the questions below:
    - What scholars of religious studies provide a perspective or theory that helps you **think critically** about this religion?

- What is the world-view of the tradition? How does this world-view provide a structure in which people understood their **personal or social responsibility** in relation to a divine or transcendent realm?
  - What are the specific characteristics of this religion (polytheistic, monotheistic, urban, rural, personal, collective, transcendent, immanent, etc.)
  - What is the conception of divinity in this religious tradition? Are there deities, and if so how do deities function in this religion? Are they active in people's daily lives or distant (for example, personifications of nature, spirits that interact with humans, abstract beings that exist apart from humans, etc.)? How are deities related to social order (for example, are human kings considered divine)?
  - What **ethics** does this religion espouse? How are adherents expected to behave? How does this religious tradition shape **personal or social responsibilities**? How are those responsibilities enforced?
  - What experiences do people in this religious tradition value? Are any particular aspects of life emphasized (for example, fertility, natural events such as volcanic eruptions or monsoons, death, birth or re-birth, eating, etc.). What are the historical sources for this information?
  - What are historical origins of the traditions? Does it have a founder, prophet, or central human figure? Is this a synthetic tradition, or specific to one culture? Are there ruptures or breaks in the tradition in its history? How do people interpret these breaks?
  - What traces of this ancient religion do you find in today's world? How have the traditions for personal and social responsibility changed?
  - How does this tradition identify cultural, social, or religious outsiders? How does this tradition view gender? What social divisions does this tradition make (by ethnicity, class, gender, culture)?
- **Final exam. 100 points.** In our last class meeting, you will be presented with a religious tradition we have not studied this semester. The final exam will consist of five questions that test your ability to **think critically** about an unfamiliar religious tradition by comparing it with traditions you have worked with over the semester. You will be asked to analyze the new tradition using one method or strategy, evaluate the new tradition's beliefs and practices, and apply third-person analysis based on your learning during the semester (see Learning Outcomes).

### Grading Scale

**A=450-500** Exceptional ability to conceptualize and present ideas; effort beyond meeting basic criteria; you have sought out new ideas and information; your work is thorough and original; your work shows initiative and imagination; there are few to no errors in your written work; overall your work shows a trajectory of development and growth. You have exceeded expectations for research, writing, or speaking at in a core curriculum course in a Research I university.

**B=400-449** Solid work; meets basic requirements; evident language competency; few errors; you are able to engage but generally do not go beyond information and ideas readily accessible through class, readings, and discussions. Your research, writing, and speaking are commensurate with core curriculum expectations at a Research I university.

**C=350-399** Marginal work; writing assignments and discussions demonstrate limited ability or effort to engage ideas and information; written assignments have many errors (sentence structure, spelling, grammar, etc.) and/or are underprepared. Your research, writing, and speaking are slightly below expectations for core curriculum learning in a Research I university and should be improved with additional effort.

**D=300-349** Quantity and quality of work falls far below the expectations of core curriculum standards in a Research I university. You are either not expending enough effort or you need help to accomplish the work required.

**F=below 300** Usually the result of missing work, missed classes, inattention, lack of preparation, unwillingness to engage, etc.

### **Students with Disabilities**

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>

### **Plagiarism and Aggie Honor Code**

According to the Aggie Honor System plagiarism is “the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit”. Any evidence of plagiarism will be pursued according to A & M university guidelines. See <https://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/> and <https://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/Rules-and-Procedures/Rules/Honor-System-Rules>

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

### **Classroom Guidelines for Respect**

Remember that our classroom includes people with many different experiences, backgrounds, and ideas. Members of our group represent a diversity of individual beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. Each and every member of this class is responsible for behaving in a manner of respect toward others. As you speak and participate in class sessions, you can expect and create an atmosphere of respect.

- Be sure your speech and actions respectful of others.
- Expect that others will respect you.

This includes respect for views you do not agree with as well as respect for the diversity of identities within our group (including gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, culture, political views, etc. If there are breaches in our collective commitment to treating each other with respect, please bring them to my/our attention.

### **Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality**

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

- Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

- Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

## Course Schedule subject to change pending course developments

### Week 1

Introduction to the course and overview of syllabus.

Discussion. Thinking critically about religion. What do we mean by “religion”. Using the study of ancient religions to hone your *ability to engage effectively in local, national and global communities* in the modern world and *reflect on how you connect your own life choices and actions with ethical decision-making* as you study how ancient religious traditions shaped people’s ethics, choices, and actions.

**Visual images** for analysis in discussion: 5 ancient deities and their myths.

### Week 2 Partridge, *Introduction to World Religions*, Part One 10-37

Analyzing religion and evaluating religious traditions in the ancient world.

Seeing different views of the world with objectivity: overview of the Americas, the Near East, Celtic religions, Egypt, South Asia, East Asia, Scandinavia, the Siberian Steppes, Africa. Analyzing religions of different cultures and time periods. Critical thinking about ancient religions and posing questions. Methods in the study of religion: historical, anthropological, phenomenological, sociological psychological, critical theory, race and ethnicity studies, gender studies, mythology, and symbolic analysis.

Film: Animism : Living in the Dreamtime (2004) for reflection writing

### Week 3 Partridge, *Introduction to World Religions*, Part Three, pp. 100-133 **Reflection 1 due** Indigenous religions and case studies.

### Week 4 Partridge, Part Eight, pp. 242-264 **Reflection 2 due** Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian religions; Zoroastrianism Film: Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World (2005) for reflection writing

### Week 5 Partridge, Part Two, pp. 38-99 **Reflection 3 due** Egyptian and North African religions Film: Voices of the Gods (2007) for reflection writing

### Week 6 Partridge, pp. 394-420 **Reflection 4 due** Religions in Japan and China Film: What is Shintoism (\*) for reflection writing

### Week 7 Begin research for essay 1 **Reflection 5 due** Minoan, Archaic Greek and Classical Greek religions

### Week 8 Research for essay 1-- in-class discussion of research progress Syro-Canaanite religions, Judean and Israelite religions

### Week 9 Partridge, Part Four, pp. 134-164 **Essay 1 due** South Asian Vedic (astika) religions

The Buddha (2010)

*Week 10* Partridge, Part Six, pp. 188-215 and Part Five, pp. 165-187  
 South Asian nastika religions, Buddhism, Jainism.  
 Film: Yogis of Tibet (2002)

*Week 11* Begin research for essay 2  
 Etruscan and Early Roman religion  
 Iranian religions  
 Film: Iraq : the cradle of civilization; India : empire of the spirit (2002)

*Week 12* Research for essay 2 -- in-class discussion of research progress  
 Indigenous Celtic religions  
 Native American religions

*Week 13* Partridge, Part Ten, 311-350  
 Judaism and early Christianity

Essay 2 due

*Week 14*  
 Review for final exam, exam questions.

*Week 15*  
**Final Exam**