SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Introduction to Religious Studies

RST 101 Fall 2014
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00PM – 2:15PM
FH 106

GRI Office phone:
E-mail:
Office Hours:

Course Description: Religion, arguably, is central to all societies, even those that profess an official secularism. The study of religion from a scholarly perspective encompasses a wide gamut of approaches, goals, and concerns. Religious studies aims to investigate religion and its historical, cultural, and social context from a detached perspective. It is not theology. Religious Studies intersects and interacts with closely allied intellectual projects in the philosophy of religion, the anthropology of religion, the psychology and sociology of religion, historical studies, archaeology, law, and the historical analysis and exegesis of sacred text.

This course examines the evolution and impact of a variety of religious beliefs practiced in different societies and time periods. Students will analyze how diverse religious communities define and regulate appropriate human behavior and values from historical and contemporary perspectives. They will also study the experiences of religious minority groups in societies where their beliefs or practices are devalued or suppressed.

Silver Core Objectives
This course satisfies CO 10 Diversity & Equity and CO 12 Ethics.

Description of CO 10
Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity through courses that focus on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, language, and/or social class with an emphasis on the analysis of equity. Students will apply and evaluate approaches or modes of inquiry used to analyze diversity and equity and the social barriers to these goals.

Description of CO 12
Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

Student Learning Outcomes
- identify and contrast the diverse belief systems represented in major world religions. (CO10)
• describe the development and practice of ethical principles within a particular religious community. (CO12)
• analyze “religion” as a fundamental element of human intellectual, cultural and social life, and history
• define and explore the varieties of religious expression, including ritual and prayer
• define and explore religious issues, such as the existence and nature of God, life and death, good and evil, the just construction of society, sexuality, etc. (CO 12)

Course Requirements

Short examinations.
In fulfillment of COs 10 and 12, four examinations assess your knowledge of the material presented in lectures, handouts, presentations, visual images, and readings discussed in class. Successful exam answers will show your sense of the ethical implications of world religious systems. Each examination will include a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. To do well on the examinations, you must attend class regularly, read the assigned texts closely and carefully, fully participate in discussions and other class activities, and seek my help if necessary. Please do not hesitate to come to office hours if you have any concern, require guidance, or feel that you have not understood something. Please do not conclude at the end of the semester that you should have come to see me during office hours. Take copious notes during lectures and discussions in a style which encourages thoughtful review, such as the Cornell style.

Analysis statements
In fulfillment of COs 10 and 12, you will be required to write four, concise analysis statements of readings during the semester, discussing both your evolving sense of ethics and the diversity of religious experience. You will have a limit of two hundred words. I will provide you with guidance on how to write your analysis statements.

Seminar conversation I will explain my expectations for this at length in class. A more apt term for what we will do is fishbowl seminar, a form of seminar conversation that has both active discussants and active observers. Each of you will be expected to be both a discussant and an observer over the course of the semester but not in the same discussion. If you are a discussant for a fishbowl seminar that is your role.

Course Texts There is no textbook for this course; rather, we will read and analyze a series of articles and other works over the course of the semester representative of the scholarly study of religion or of cultural discourse involving religion.

Grade distribution Grades will be based on your performance on the short exams and on your assignments. Classroom participation in discussions and seminar will also constitute a portion of your grade. Classroom participation is pass/fail. All other components of your grade are on a point system.
The Plus/Minus system of grading applies in this course. The following schedule will be used for calculating the final grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading weights</th>
<th>Grade assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>classroom participation</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fishbowl seminar</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first exam</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second exam</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third exam</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourth exam</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first analysis</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second analysis</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third analysis</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourth analysis</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendance** Attendance is mandatory. Our common goal should be to create a atmosphere that is conducive to discussion, questions, and learning. *Regular attendance is important to this goal.* In addition, please note that the examinations are based on classroom lectures, discussions, and readings. Consequently, excessive absences will seriously hinder your ability to do well on the exams and the assignments and, therefore, the class. *University policy stipulates that there are no official absences from class.* Please consult with me if you must be absent from a class.

**Please arrive ON TIME to class. We will begin promptly at 1:00 PM.**

**Cellphones and computers** Please remember to turn off your cell phones during class. You are welcome to use a computer to take notes during lectures; however, it should not be utilized to check your email, your Facebook account, tweet, or play games, etc. while in class. Please be courteous and wait until our class is over to engage in such activities.

**Packing up** Please refrain from packing books and other items until the instructor formally ends the class.
Email correspondence  Please make sure that you identify yourself when you send a message to the professor, as well as use proper salutations. For example, “Dear Dr./Prof. von Nagy: this is Robert/Sally and I was wondering when you planned to teach your course on Pilgrimage?”

Academic Success Services  Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

Students with disabilities  The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact the instructor and the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Academic dishonesty policy  Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student’s enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment.

Statement on Audio and Video Recording  “Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and sessions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.”
Tentative Lecture and Reading Guide

UNIT 1: What is Religion and What is it For? (This unit addresses CO 12)

FIRST WEEK
August 25 Introduction to the Class, On the nature of religion
August 27 Understanding Religion
  readings: Martin “Delimiting Religion.”

SECOND WEEK
September 3 A Brief History of Religious Studies
  readings: Marx, “Religion is the Opium of the People”; Eliade, Excerpt from *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*
  Seminar conversation

THIRD WEEK
September 8 The Psychologists and Religion
  readings: Freud, Excerpts from *The Future of an Illusion* and “Obsessive Acts and Religions Practices”; Jung, Excerpts from *Answer to Job*

September 10 The Psychologists and Religion, cont.

FOURTH WEEK
September 15
  readings: Otto, Excerpt from *The Idea of the Holy*; Tillich Excerpt from *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*

September 17 **First exam, Analysis statement due**
UNIT 2: Religious Experience Across Cultures (this unit addresses CO 10)

**FIFTH WEEK: RITUAL**

September 22 Ritual Space, Ritual Time
readings: Miner, “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema”; Excerpt from Bell *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Napolitano “Becoming a Mujercita: Rituals, Fiestas, and Religious Discourses”; Excerpt from Rappaport *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*

September 24 Why Ritual?

**SIXTH WEEK: SACRIFICE**

September 29 Feasting with the Gods
readings: Detienne “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice”; Excerpt from Pahl *Empire of Violence*

October 1 Social Violence and Sacrifice
Seminar conversation

**SEVENTH WEEK: PILGRIMAGE AND SACRED LANDSCAPES**

October 6. Landscapes of Power and Wonder
readings: Excerpt from Eck *India: A Sacred Geography*; Rockman Napaljarri “Wawarljakurlu: The Man from Wawarlja”

October 8. Journeys

**EIGHTH WEEK: PRAYER**

October 13. Supplication and Altered States
readings: Luhrmann *Why We Talk in Tongues*

October 15 **Mid-term exam, Analysis statement due**
Lecture and Reading Guide, continued

Unit 3: Controversial Religious Issues (This unit addresses CO 12)

NINTH WEEK
October 20 Religion and Healing
    readings: Douglas “Ritual Uncleanliness” and “Secular Defilement” from
    Purity and Danger; Friedson, Excerpt from Dancing Prophets: Musical
    Experience in Tumbuka Healing
October 22 Vimbuza Chilopa.
    Film: Vimbuza Chilopa

TENTH WEEK
October 27 Religion and Science
    readings: Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System”; Dawkins “Explaining
    the Improbable” from The Blind Watchmaker
October 29 Religion and Science, cont.
    Seminar conversation

ELEVENTH WEEK
November 3 Bio-ethics and Ecology
    readings: Maguire “Population, Religion, and Ecology”; Shannon “Genet-
    ic Engineering and Nature”; Landis Barnhill “The Spiritual Dimension of
    Nature Writing.”
November 5 Ethics and Ecology, cont.

TWELFTH WEEK
November 10 Text
    readings: Excerpt from Pagels The Origin of Satan, “The Social History of
    Satan”; Anonymous The Gospel of Thomas
November 12 Third exam, Analysis statement due
Lecture and Reading Guide, continued

Unit 4: Cultural Differences in Religion’s Societal Role (this unite addresses CO 10)

THIRTEENTH WEEK:
November 17 Religion and contemporary society
   Readings: “Desire, Delusion, and DVDs”; “Marketing the Dharma”; “Taming the 'I Want' Mind.”
November 19 Religion and contemporary society, cont.

FOURTEENTH WEEK:
November 24 Religion and Law
   Film: Sita Sings the Blues
November 26 Discussion and film analysis

FIFTEENTH WEEK
December 1 Religion and Law
   Readings: Readings: Gonzales v. O Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal and Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah

December 3 Religion and Law
   Seminar conversation

SIXTEENTH WEEK
December 8 Religion and History

FINAL (FOURTH) EXAM
Monday, December 15, 10:15-12:15 a.m
Analysis statement due
Guidelines for writing assignments

ESSAYS QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

A is an exceptional grade reserved for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that have all the qualities of the B essay, and in addition are well written and display analytical skills and/or originality. The last two criteria are extremely important. A essays do not merely summarize material from the readings or lectures. In addition, ideas must be expressed clearly, no matter how insightful or interesting they are.

B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class and being analyzed, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, an argument, and a conclusion. Usually, either writing problems or a lack of analysis is what prevents a B essay from being an A.

C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material, answers the central questions posed, and is mostly accurate, but lacks the sophistication of either the B or A student. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence or details, or it might have problems with organization or writing style. Sometimes a C essay is merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It is does not answer the central questions posed in the assignment. It suggests one of three things: 1) the student has barely been paying attention to the course, 2) s/he has problems understanding the material, 3) s/he has problems expressing ideas in writing.

Please feel free to come and discuss a work with me before the assignment is due. I would also gladly look over rough drafts as long as they are given to me in a timely fashion.