RELIGION 101
EXPLORING RELIGIONS

BULLETIN INFORMATION
RELG 101 – Exploring Religions (3 credit hrs)
Course Description:
Introduction to the beliefs and practices of the world’s religions and to the methods scholars use to study them.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW
This course introduces students to the range and variety within the world’s religions. Students will gain familiarity with the distinctive doctrines, rituals, festivals, and transformative practices of specific religious traditions, both past and present, as well as with selected themes and ideas shared by many different traditions. The course serves as an introduction to various approaches in the academic study of religion. Using the insights of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, students will learn to read religious texts critically and to analyze the ways that the ethical and metaphysical assumptions of religious traditions influence contemporary social and political activities. Readings, lectures, discussions, and other in-class activities encourage students to consider how individuals and groups organize themselves around beliefs in the existence of god/s, spirits, and ancestors, and how recourse to such posited agents affects the legitimacy, authority, and authenticity of particular practices and institutions.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES
Upon successful completion of RELG 101, students will be able to:
1. Recognize and describe the key ideas and practices of several religious traditions
2. Discuss the ways in which human behavior is shaped by beliefs in a divine being or beings, spirits, ancestors, or other non-empirical agents
3. Read religious texts critically and analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse
4. Analyze and compare specific examples of religious social formation
5. Explain the main approaches, methods, and critical terms in the academic study of religion, and identify current issues and debates in the field
6. Articulate their own perspective on the current issues under examination and discuss the strengths and limitations of that perspective
7. Engage deeply and respectfully with views other than their own.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

3. Other readings mentioned in the following course outline will be available on the Blackboard site for the class [Include any other required materials]

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS

1. **Quizzes:** Three quizzes (each quiz counting for 5% of the final grade) assess students’ ability to articulate the central terms, ideas, practices, institutions, and cultural systems of varied religious traditions active throughout the world.

2. **Short papers exploring topics in readings and lectures:** The five short papers (typically one and one-half to two double-spaced pages in length) are written at regular intervals to provide an opportunity for students to analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse as encountered through the readings and the lectures. The assigned prompts emphasize the close reading of key passages.

3. **Independent project focused on comparison:** The individual project chosen by each student requires the student to compare two traditions by focusing on a single issue. Using the form of a report, the student chooses an apt framework to make a meaningful comparison in the field of religious studies; he or she explores religious and cultural difference by means of the comparison; reflects upon the implications of such difference; and, finally, considers ways in which the apparent conflict or disagreement might be addressed so as to facilitate humane dialogue and a resultant deeper mutual understanding.

4. **Midterm Exam:** The in-class, written midterm exam gives the student an opportunity to synthesize our study thus far. The student is to explain in essay form how religious traditions affect social, economic, cultural, and/or political formations, and, vice versa, how those formations shape, and influence the ongoing development of worldwide religious traditions.

5. **Final Exam:** On the in-class, comprehensive, final exam the student applies our study of various theoretical frameworks for analyzing the role of religion. The student is asked to use those frameworks to illuminate actual cases that we have discussed in the world. The exam thereby evaluates a student’s grasp of the content that we have studied about religious traditions as well as his or her grasp of the methods used to examine those traditions. Potential essay questions for study will be distributed in advance.

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

**Week 1:** The Social Scientific Study of Religion: Points of Departure, Definitions & Approaches

- The Seven Dimensions of Religion

- The Shifting Contours of the Object of Study: The Problem of Defining Religion
- The Unique Challenges Inherent in Studying Religion

**Week 2:** Christianity: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice
- Primary Sources: "Christianity," chapter six of The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions
- "Christian Traditions," chapter four of A Concise Introduction to World Religions
- QUIZ #1

**Week 3:** Christianity and the Study of Religious Symbolism within a Culture
- Signs, Symbols, and Cultural Systems as Applied to Religion
- SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE

**Week 4:** Judaism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice
- Primary Sources: "Judaism," chapter five of The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions
- "Jewish Traditions," chapter three of A Concise Introduction to World Religions

**Week 5:** Judaism and the Study of Ritual
- The Many Sides of Ritual as a doorway to the Study of Religion

• QUIZ #2

**Week 6:** Islam: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Islam," chapter seven of The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions
- "Muslim Traditions," chapter three of A Concise Introduction to World Religions

• SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE

**Week 7:** Islam and the Relation between Society and Religion

• Sociology and Religion

• MIDTERM EXAM

**Week 8:** Hinduism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice

- Primary Sources: "Hinduism," chapter one of The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions
- "Hindu Traditions," chapter six of A Concise Introduction to World Religions

• SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE

**Week 9:** Hinduism, Liminality, and Communitas


• QUIZ #4
Week 10: Buddhism: Doctrines, Institutions, Key Texts, and Practice
- **Primary Sources:** 
  - "Buddhist Traditions," chapter eight of A Concise Introduction to World Religions
- **SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE**

Week 11: Buddhism, Psychology, and the Mind Sciences

Week 12: Religion and Science in the Modern World
- **SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER #5 DUE**

Week 13: The Nature and Purpose of Comparison in the Study of Religion
- **Why Do Comparison?**

**INDEPENDENT PROJECT FOCUSED ON COMPARISON DUE**

**Week 14: What Have We Learned about Religion? Retrospective and Synthesis**
- "The Nature of Religion," chapter one of A Concise Introduction to World Religions

**FINAL EXAM according to University exam schedule**