



COURSE OUTLINE

Course Number: REL-101 **Course Title:** Introduction to Religious Studies **Credits:** 3

Course Length: 15 Weeks **Co- or Pre-requisite:** None **Implementation sem/year:** Fall 2009

Catalogue description: An introduction to the study of religions, focusing on that nature of religious beliefs and practices, such as sacred power, myths, texts, art and rituals, the problem of evil, and the relationship between cultures, ethics and religions. *3 lecture hours.*

Is course New, Revised, or Modified? [Modified courses are those which have a new prefix or course number]: Revised

Required texts/other materials: Studying Religion, Gary Kessler, 3rd edition, McGraw Hill, 2008,
ISBN:9780073386591

Optional materials: Copies of additional materials not contained in digital or handout libraries to be
supplied by/to the philosophy coordinator prior to the beginning of any term
of instruction.
Other materials per the section instructor.

Information Resources: Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*
Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*
Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*
Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*
Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief*
John F. Haught, *What is Religion?*

Revision date: 7/29/09 **Course Coordinator:** Ken Howarth, 570-3809, howarthk@mccc.edu

Additional resources: The College library's text and NetLibrary and ebrary electronic resources, accessible through http://www.mccc.edu/student_library.shtml, as well as the Library Resource page (under development) provide a wide range of philosophical reference and topic specific texts. The Philosophy Repository on the College online course platform, Angel, contains specific auxiliary readings accessible for all sections that utilize Angel as at least a 'shell' resource for even classroom-based sections. A library of targeted readings handouts is also available in the Coordinator's office.

Learning Center Resources: There are no tutors or study groups through the Learning Center for philosophy topics, though there are tutors for writing. There are limited volunteers in the Philosophy S.P.A. Club available for peer-to-peer tutoring, and Professor Howarth is available to meet with students for tutoring to augment students meeting with their class professors.

Course Competencies/Goals [to be listed on each course syllabi]:

If the student does the work assigned for this course, s/he will be able to:

1. Identify and define the key religious terms, traditions, practices, materials, issues and theories
2. Employ critical thinking and academic religious studies methods and criteria to determine and analyze the different ways Western and non-Western religions influence the lives of their followers and others, individually and collectively, within and across different cultures
3. Distinguish and analyze how religious considerations relate to philosophical and scientific considerations with regard to fundamental questions (origins, meaning, etc.) and contemporary ethical, political, economic and other issues and events
4. Describe, explain, interpret, and compare the differing religiosities of individuals and groups as expressed traditionally, formally, textually and in actual practice, including factoring the issues of respect and rights
5. Frame and present your own views on religious issues, both orally and in writing, with logical and critical precision, clarity, coherence and rigor.

Each goal or outcome relates to “religious studies literacy” with respect to content knowledge and to the “discipline-specific methodologies” of the study of religion with respect to relevant content material. Other learning goals may be specified in particular sections by the instructor with the course coordinator’s approval in addition to but not as a replacement for the above listed goals.

Course-specific General Education Knowledge Goals and Core Skills.

General Education Knowledge Goals for this course:

Goal 1. Communication. Students will communicate effectively in both speech and writing.

Goal 5. Social Science. Students will use social science theories and concepts to analyze human behavior and social and political institutions and to act as responsible citizens.

Goal. 6. Humanities. Students will analyze works in the fields of art, music, or theater; literature; philosophy and/or religious studies; and/or will gain competence in the use of a foreign language.

Goal 7. History. Students will understand historical events and movements in World, Western, non-Western or American societies and assess their subsequent significance.

Goal 8. Diversity. Students will understand the importance of a global perspective and culturally diverse peoples.

MCCC Core Skills for this course:

Goal A. Written and Oral Communication in English. Students will communicate effectively in speech and writing, and demonstrate proficiency in reading.

Goal B. Critical Thinking and Problem-solving. Students will use critical thinking and problem solving skills in analyzing information.

Goal C. Ethical Decision-Making. Students will recognize, analyze and assess ethical issues and situations.

Goal D. Information Literacy. Students will recognize when information is needed and have the knowledge and skills to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information for college level work.

Goal F. Collaboration and Cooperation. Students will develop the interpersonal skills required for effective performance in group situations.

Goal G. Intra-Cultural and Inter-Cultural Responsibility. Students will demonstrate an awareness of the responsibilities of intelligent citizenship in a diverse and pluralistic society, and will demonstrate cultural, global, and environmental awareness.

Units of study

Unit 1: Introduction to Religious Studies

Unit 2: Engaging the Sacred – Some Common Aspects of Religions

Unit 3: Living with Religion – Individuals & Communities

Unit 4: Religious Grounds and Challenges

The general plan for this course is broadly the study of religion in its various dimensions across the spectrum of myriad religions. Our REL-102 course, Living World Religions, is our “comparative religion” offering; REL-101 focuses on the study of religion more than the study of religions, even while through the examination of cases, religions do wind up being the means of studying religion. The first unit serves as a primer of religious studies approaches, dealing with definitions, stances, etc.; while Unit 2 address various aspects of religions, Unit 3 looks at issues pertaining to living in the world religiously, before winding up with Unit 4 on the interplay between religion and the wider world of understanding the fundamental human issues of the self and others.

A key consideration is for students to learn to frame discussion of religion and religious practices in “sets of terms”, by becoming aware of them and the differences between them. Many students arrive into this course with robust, even rigid ideas, expressed assertively or by retreating into a sort of us/them disengagement. Like ethics, relativistic and/or absolutist ideas about course issues should be dealt with head on; the first Unit is in place to address these, emphasizing difficulties in defining religion without bias. A general inclination to challenge or move students out of their inertial comfort zones may prove difficult or not, but in any case probably useful, even if being sure not to over-challenge or be antagonistic to their own personal commitments. A balancing act. I sometimes use the phrase, “For the purposes of our coursework...” to encourage students what we do in a college course is not necessarily at odds with or “going after” what they may do/think/say elsewhere, emphasizing the difference of the different arenas may work to soothe defensiveness. Generally, debate is less likely to be as good as discussion, with respect to the difference of emphasizing cooperation over competition. And clear dissuasion of statements of faith or other personal declaratives by students, but especially faculty, is usually the best way to keep the atmosphere academic.

Also, comparing & contrasting morality with religion, as well as religion with governance are important considerations. There are no doubt other germane or timely issues that could be taken up per each instructor’s judgment and resourcing. I’ve included some suggested examples for homework in the listing below. I have taught with this text before. Additional supplementary readings may be especially appropriate to this course.

Units of Study in Detail

Unit One: Introduction to Religious Studies

Learning Objectives - The student will be able to...

- Identify reasons for studying religion and different religions
(Course Competencies 1, 2; General Education Goals 1, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A,B,G.)
- Distinguish between the major areas of religious studies and their central concerns
(Course Competencies 1, 2; General Education Goals 1, 6, 7, 9; Core Skills A,B,C,G.)
- Explain key religious concepts, elements, practices and traditions from both internal and external perspectives
(Course Competencies 1, 2; General Education Goals 1, 6, 7, 9; Core Skills A,B,C,G.)
- Identify and use the principles and practices of reasoning, arguments and judgment
(Course Competencies 1, 2, 3; General Education Goals 6,9; Core Skills A,B,C,G.)

Unit 2: Engaging the Sacred – Some Common Aspects of Religions

Learning Objectives - The student will be able to...

- Identify common features of religions, including sacred power, space and time, myths and texts, individuals and communities, ritual and religious experiences (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, E, F, G)
- Critically distinguish between different religious traditions' practices and beliefs regarding common religious features and functions, applying categories & methods from sociological, anthropological, psychological and other fields (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A,B,C, D, E, F, G)
- Critically distinguish between different religious traditions' practices and beliefs regarding common religious features and functions, employing studied examples and case study techniques (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)

Unit 3: Living with Religion – Individuals & Communities

Learning Objectives - The student will be able to...

- Identify & critically distinguish common features of religious accounts of good and evil, suffering and success
(Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
- Critically distinguish between different religious traditions' grounds and practices regarding individual ethical beliefs and actions, applying examples, case studies, and categories & methods from philosophical and scientific fields (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
- Critically compare and contrast different religious traditions' grounds and practices regarding community and societal political, economic and other cultural organizational authorities, structures and actions, applying examples, case studies, and categories & methods from philosophical and scientific fields
(Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A,B, C, D, E, F, G)

Unit 4: Religious Grounds and Challenges

Learning Objectives - The student will be able to...

- Identify & critically distinguish common features of religious accounts of the nature of existence, the human condition, and meaning (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
- Critically distinguish between how different religious traditions' grounds and practices about how individuals'

Lives and communities purposes and ultimates relate to each other, applying examples, case studies, and categories & methods from philosophical and scientific fields (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)

- Critically compare and contrast how different religious traditions' grounds and practices about what truth is and its nature, role and relationship to other religious commitments in personal and societal contexts, applying examples, case studies, and categories & methods from philosophical and scientific fields (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
- Critically relate how different religious traditions' grounds and practices about other peoples, the challenges stemming from changing exposure to other people, technologies, opportunities and other sources of diversity in personal and societal contexts, applying examples, case studies, and categories & methods from philosophical and scientific fields (Course Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; General Education Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8; Core Skills A, B, C, D, E, F, G)

Evaluation of student learning:

- Citizenship: Course-long assessment of how students demonstrate philosophical literacy and practice through their contributions to the class learning environment, that may include such factors as attendance, the amount and manner of class participation, helpfulness to other students' understanding, oral presentations (may be broken out as a separate grading category), etc.
- Homework: 6 or more short assignments aimed at having the student demonstrate that they did the assigned reading assignment and can address the issues covered in their own words.
- Quizzes: 2 or more brief assessments to allow students to demonstrate philosophical literacy in a specific unit of instruction
- Tests: 1 or more class-length assessments to allow students to demonstrate philosophical literacy in covered units of instruction
- Examinations: 1 or more class-length assessments to allow students to demonstrate philosophical practices (and literacy) as applied to units of instruction; includes one comprehensive final exam
- Essays: 1 or more assessments to allow students to demonstrate philosophical literacy and practices as applied to units of instruction. Well-argued papers are the first goal here, as a demonstration of philosophical reasoning, though assigning and assessing, in part a research dimension to the assignment is fitting, especially for 200-level courses.

Course Grade Breakdown:

Citizenship	10-15%
Homework	10-15%
Quizzes	5-10%
Tests/Exams	30-50% (no test or exam greater than 20% of overall course grade)
Essays	30-50% (no one paper greater than 25% of overall course grade)

There is a minimum of two test/exams with a final exam, and one paper of sufficient length to allow the student to develop a sustained argument on a course topic. Within the assessment percentage category ranges listed above, no one assessment can figure greater than 25% of the overall course grade. The particular grading breakdown is to be determined by each instructor and listed clearly in her/his syllabus. Care should be taken to see that the course's goals are assessed. It is important to "test what you teach", while, of course, avoiding any semblance of "teaching to the test"! Aligning your lesson planning and teaching to stated goals is the best way to achieve this.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Mercer County Community College is committed to Academic Integrity -- the honest, fair and continuing pursuit of knowledge, free from fraud or deception. This implies that students are expected to be responsible for their own work, and that faculty and academic support services staff members will take reasonable precautions to prevent the opportunity for academic dishonesty.

The college recognizes the following general categories of violations of Academic Integrity, with representative examples of each. Academic Integrity is violated whenever a student:

A. Uses or obtains unauthorized assistance in any academic work.

- copying from another student's exam.
- using notes, books, electronic devices or other aids of any kind during an exam when prohibited.
- stealing an exam or possessing a stolen copy of an exam.

B. Gives fraudulent assistance to another student.

- completing a graded academic activity or taking an exam for someone else.
- giving answers to or sharing answers with another student before, during or after an exam or other graded academic activity.
- sharing answers during an exam by using a system of signals.

C. Knowingly represents the work of others as his/her own, or represents previously completed academic work as current.

- submitting a paper or other academic work for credit which includes words, ideas, data or creative work of others without acknowledging the source.
- using another author's words without enclosing them in quotation marks, without paraphrasing them or without citing the source appropriately.
- presenting another individual's work as one's own.
- submitting the same paper or academic assignment to another class without the permission of the instructor.
- falsifying bibliographic entries.
- submitting any academic assignment which contains falsified or fabricated data or results.

D. Inappropriately or unethically uses technological means to gain academic advantage.

- inappropriately or unethically acquiring material via the Internet or by any other means.
- using any electronic or hidden devices for communication during an exam.

Each instructor and academic support service area is authorized to establish specific guidelines consistent with this policy.

Consequences for Violations of Academic Integrity

For a single violation, the faculty member will determine the course of action to be followed. This may include assigning a lower grade on the assignment, assigning a lower final course grade, failing the student in the course, or other penalty appropriate to the violation. In all cases, the instructor shall notify the Chair of the Academic Integrity Committee of the violation and the penalty imposed.

When two (or more) violations of academic integrity are reported on a student, the Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) may impose disciplinary penalties beyond those imposed by the course instructors. The student shall have the right to a hearing before the AIC or a designated AIC subcommittee.

Appeals

The student has a right to appeal the decision of the instructor or the Academic Integrity Committee. Judicial procedures governing violations of Academic Integrity are contained in the Student Handbook.

Approved: Board of Trustees May 19, 1983

Revised: May 18, 2000, March 18, 2004

Students with Disabilities:

Any student in this class who has special needs because of a disability is entitled to receive accommodations. Eligible students at Mercer County Community College are assured services under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you believe you are eligible for services, please contact Arlene Stinson, the Director of Academic Support Services at LB221, (609) 570-3525, stinsona@mccc.edu.