

IPS 403-002
Spiritual Paths in World Religions
Fall, 2008 – Online

Instructor: Heidi Russell, Ph.D., Lewis Towers, #630B

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:30-11:30 and Thursdays, 6:00-6:45pm

Class Meets: August 25 – December 5

Required Texts:

- Eck, Diana. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. NY: HarperCollins, 2002. pbk.
- Halevi, Yossi. *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*. NY: HarperCollins, 2002. pbk.
- Sharma, Arvind, editor. *Our Religions*. Harper Collins, 1994. pbk
- Teasdale, Wayne. *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*. CA: New World Library, 2001. pbk.

Course Description: Greater knowledge and understanding of religious and spiritual traditions is an absolute necessity today. Recent international events, the cybernetic age, and worldwide immigration patterns as well as the frequency of interfaith marriages and the popularity of interfaith prayer services contribute to a developing new context for church ministers and service professionals. This course, in addition to presenting the origins, histories, beliefs, scriptures, and rituals of the world's religions, focuses on enhancing spirituality and renewing religious identity in the contemporary world. Resources available to parish ministers, hospital chaplains, religious educators and social service professionals will be highlighted as part of this course.

Instructor's Expectations/Course Requirements/Grading Standards:

- **REGULAR ON-LINE PARTICIPATION:** It is very important that students connect with the course on a regular basis by spending several hours on-line, accessing material, posting written assignments, responding to others' postings, and participating in our on-line discussions. Each week students will be engaged in on-line discussion boards: posting written assignments and responding to others' postings. **Assignments/initial postings will always be due on Wednesdays and your responses to others' assignments or postings will be due on Fridays.** Every assignment will include your responses to the other students' work, so you will submit assignments directly to the professor and post them on the discussion boards. Learning happens through the exchange of ideas. These requirements are meant to foster that exchange, so feel free to continue the conversation beyond the minimum required entries! Not participating in the course on a regular basis will create serious problems for students wanting to complete the course successfully. If you need to absent yourself due serious illness or other very important reasons, you need to call the instructor's voice-mail (312/915-7476) to explain your situation.
- **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** The on-line discussions presume that students have done the readings for that week. Doing the assigned readings is preparation for the significant on-line work, including viewing and listening to the instructor's on-line postings, the on-line discussions,

etc. There will be weekly postings relative to the readings. There will be two required aspects to this participation:

1. Online journal entries: For the assigned journal entries, you will be expected to post a journal entry on that week's assigned readings and post at least two responses to other students' journal entries. The entries should be a couple of paragraphs long and cover the following points: a. What concept in the reading either struck you as profound or was new to you? b. Note any questions that arose for you in the reading (these questions may be technical/informational or philosophical) c. How might you use some aspect of what you learned in a ministerial setting? **15 pts.**
 2. Discussion Threads: For each question posted, students to post an answer and at least two responses to other students' answers. **15 pts.**
- **REFLECTION PAPER:** Choose one of the religions we have studied (or you can choose one we have not covered with pre-approval of professor), and address what you believe it offers to the world. In other words, explain how you think this religion can make the world a better place. In doing so, you can focus on one specific problem you think the religion addresses, eg., promoting peace in the world, addressing the problem of suffering, ending poverty, etc. or a goal (personal, spiritual, or global) that it promotes. You must explain how you think it approaches the problem/goal and ways it could do so to an even greater extent. If you see shortcomings within the religion, aspects that might hinder it from reaching this goal, address those as well. Also explain why you chose the religion you chose instead of a different religion. What is it in the religion that draws you personally? Do you think that it has the power to draw others as well, either as believers or admirers (those who might choose some aspect of the religion to appropriate for themselves, but are not believers in the theological system behind that aspect)? The paper should be 1000-1500 words (roughly 3-5 pgs. double spaced). All papers will be both submitted directly to the professor and posted on the discussion board. Students must also read and post a response to another student's paper. **10 pts.**
 - **VISIT AND INTERVIEW:** The most important part of learning about other religious traditions is interaction and dialogue.
 1. To that purpose, each student is asked to visit and experience a religious tradition different from his/her own and write a reflection about that experience. The reflection should be 1000-1500 words and will be both submitted directly to the professor and posted on the discussion board. Students must also read and post a response to another student's paper. **10 pts.**
 2. In addition, each student must find an individual that practices a different faith from one's own and interview that person about his/her experience of that tradition. For some good ideas on interviewing people about religion, check out NPR's *Speaking of Faith* at <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/>. The person you interview need not be from the same religious tradition that you visit. The interview may be written or submitted as an audio and/or video recording. **10 pts.**
 - **BOOK REVIEWS:** Each student will be asked to write a book review on *Mystic Heart* and on *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*. These book reviews should include your own reaction to the text as well as ways in which you believe the text would lend itself to your current or future ministry. All papers will be both submitted directly to the professor and posted on the discussion board. Students must also read and post a response to another student's paper. **20 pts.** (10 pts. each)
 - **FINAL PROJECT:** Your final project will be a presentation you might be asked to give at your church/place of ministry, etc. (e.g., a Theology-on-Tap) on the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Obviously this topic is vast, so you will have to choose one aspect on

which to focus (e.g., common spiritual practices, historical aspects, a theological concept, social justice, etc. – be creative!). Presentation should be 45 min. long with time for questions/discussion at the end. Ideally students would make a video (audio if video is unavailable) recording of this presentation and submit it to the professor online or via mail/drop it off at the IPS office in DVD/VHS/CD/audio tape format. If this is not possible, talk to the professor about making other arrangements (if necessary, a written copy instead of a video/audio presentation will be accepted). All students are also asked to hand in a written outline or copy of the presentation. **15 pts.**

Grading Grid:

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| 94-100 = A | 92-93 = A- | 90-91 = B+ | 87-89 = B | 85-86 = B- |
| 83-84 = C+ | 81-82 = C | 80 = C- | Below 80 = F | |

Plagiarism, Cheating, Academic Dishonesty: Students are hereby advised of the strong sanctions against plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism will result in an automatic "F" in the course and possible expulsion from IPS. *If you have any questions about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials, you should consult the instructor.* Proper citation procedures are provided in all standard writing manuals. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see the instructor.

Calendar/Reading Assignments:

Week of:

8/25 Introduction/Religious Literacy/Interspirituality

9/1 Indigenous Religions **Journal Entry #1**
Eck, Ch. 1 & 2 (note that these chapters address next week's subject, Religious Diversity in America)

9/8 Religious Diversity in American **Journal Entry #2**
Christopher Hitchens, "Religion Kills," *God is Not Great*, 15-36; on e-reserve.
Eck, Ch. 6 & 7
"Toward a Global Ethic" by the World Parliament of Religions
http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/TowardsAGlobalEthic.pdf

9/15 Hinduism **Journal Entry #3**
Sharma, Ch. 1
Eck, Ch. 3

9/22 Hinduism **Mystic Heart Book Review Due**
Have read *Mystic Heart* and posted book review.

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| 9/29 | Jainism “Pushing the Boundaries of Personal Ethics: The Practice of Jaina Vows,” Ethics in World Religions, 196-216; on e-reserve. | Journal Entry #4 |
| 10/6 | Buddhism – Theravada Sharma, Ch. 2 | Interview Due |
| 10/13 | Buddhism – Mahayana Eck, Ch. 4 | Reflection on visit due |
| 10/20 | Confucianism Sharma, Ch. 3 | Journal Entry #5 |
| 10/27 | Taoism/Zen Buddhism Sharma, Ch.4 | Reflection Paper Due |
| 11/3 | Judaism Sharma, Ch.5 | Journal Entry #6 |
| 11/10 | Islam Sharma, Ch. 7 | Journal Entry #7 |
| 11/17 | Islam Have read <i>At the Entrance</i> and posted book review. Eck, Ch. 5 | <i>At the Entrance</i> Book Review |
| 12/1 | Christianity/LDS/Jehovah’s Witness | Presentations Due |