Theo 107: Introduction to Religious Studies

Syllabus Fall Semester 2018

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Course Description

In the first two weeks of this course you will be introduced to the subject of Religious Studies, identifying methods of studying religions distinct from theological approaches. Taking a broad perspective, you will also begin to examine the dissimilarities and similarities between traditions associated with the West, along with their historical colonial impact, and those traditions of Asian origin.

As you begin to look more closely at different traditions, their distinctive beliefs and practices become more evident. Taking the three themes: Sacred Text, Ritual and Pilgrimage, you will have the opportunity to observe and analyse how these religious phenomena shape the identities of particular traditions and their faith communities. As part of this course you will participate in off-site classes including a visit to the Jewish Quarter and synagogue in Rome.

A recurring theme throughout the course will be to highlight how religions meet contemporary global challenges. In this way you will be studying religious belief as a living phenomenon, constantly evolving in the modern world.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class, students should be able to:
- Understand the complexities involved in studying the origins and contemporary beliefs and practices of diverse religious traditions
- Determine the appropriate methods and approaches to studying religions
- Apply their research skills to construct a well-informed argument in writing and orally

Required Text / Materials

Resources will be posted on Sakai to be read by all students in preparation for every class. Each week one or two students will prepare a presentation to introduce the class discussion.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy:

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence.
- For all classes meeting twice a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.
- For all classes meeting three times a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.

This course meets once a week, thus a total of one unexcused absence will be permitted. Unexcused absences beyond these will result in a lowering of your final grade.
Evaluation
- Participation and Presentation 33⅓%
- Midterm and Written Paper 33⅓%
- Final Exam 33⅓%

Grading
94-100: A 90-93: A-
87-89: B+ 84-86: B 80-83: B-
77-79: C+ 74-76: C 70-73: C-
67-69: D+ 60-66: D 59 or lower: F

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago’s guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola’s standards here: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml. You are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism according to the LUC Student Handbook.

Disabilities
Students with documented disabilities who wish to discuss academic accommodations should contact me the first week of class, as well as the Senior Academic Services Advisor.

Written assignment
One written paper to be submitted during Week 7. Late submission without permission will result in grade reduction.

Class presentations
The presentation should last 15 minutes and:
- Briefly summarise the set reading for the topic
- Include comment based on further reading if recommended
- Identify any material that needs clarification
- Provide questions for the class to discuss and facilitate the discussion
- Summary (1 page) submitted
Students should come and see me to discuss their presentation prior to the week they are presenting.

Exams
The midterm and the final exams include essay writing and short questions.

Course Outline

Introduction to Studying Religions

Week 1
Introduction to Religious Studies
Religions and global issues today

Week 2
Our father Abraham
- introducing Judaism, Islam and Christianity
Re-birth, release and devotion
- introducing Asian religious traditions

Week 3
Judaism – The people and the land of promise
Islam – The many faces of *Jihad*

Week 4
Catholic Christianity – identity, faith and global outlook *nostra aetate*

Sacred Text – Scripture and interpretation shaping traditions

Week 5
Off-site visit to the Rome Jewish Quarter and synagogue

Week 6
Scripture and Tradition – Catholic understanding of revelation
*Dei verbum*

Week 7
Spring Break
Week 8
Midterm and Written Paper due

Ritual – Formation of identity and beliefs

Week Nine
Buddhism Rituals and Festivals
Buddha’s birthday – Vesak Day

Week Ten
Baptism and the meaning of ‘sacrament’,
- individuals/communities, inclusion/exclusion

Pilgrimage – Faith as a journey

Week Eleven
Introduction: spiritual/material experience
- the river Ganges in Hindu myth, life and death

Week Twelve
Mecca and Jerusalem
- idealism and practice

Week Thirteen
Ancient and new spiritual pathways
- The Francigena: Canterbury to Rome
- The Camino: Santiago de Compostella to Finisterre

Week Fourteen Review of class presentations and course review