

STANDARD SYLLABUS

**Introduction to Hinduism
THEO 282**

This course provides an introduction to Hinduism.

Knowledge Area(s) satisfied: Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge
Skill(s) Developed: Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions
Values Requirement(s) satisfied: Understanding Diversity in the United States or the World, Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

Learning Objectives:

Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):

By taking this course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge, with attention to historical development, of the central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of Hinduism. By way of example, students who take this course should be able to: (1) name and discuss some of the most important Hindu scriptures; (2) Articulate the general outline of the historical evolution of Hinduism; (3) Define and discuss key Hindu concepts, terms, values, and religious practices; and (4) recount and analyze basic narratives and imagery associated with some of the most important Hindu deities.

The course also addresses other competencies as well. By taking this course, for example, students should be able to analyze and interpret Hindu religious texts, beliefs, and practices using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency a). For example, students should be able to analyze and interpret some Hindu scriptures and scriptural passages and discuss the distinctive role of the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures in the lives of believing Hindus. Students taking this course will also be able to demonstrate knowledge of the central ethical teachings and perspectives of Hinduism (competency e), e.g., the foundations of dharma. Finally, students taking this course will be able to evaluate the religious perspectives of Hindus (competency d) in light of what they learn about the teachings and practices that are foundational to Hinduism in its many forms.

Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):

Students will:

(1) "comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of varying forms of communication."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will demonstrate the ability to comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and/or contextualize a variety of religious texts, histories, and ideas, as well as scholarly arguments about those texts, histories and ideas.

(2) develop "strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support an argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will be encouraged to articulate reasoned arguments about materials studied in the course or to critique arguments to which they are exposed in the class.

(3) monitor students' own "individual thinking or behavior" in relationship to Hinduism "in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct" their presuppositions and prejudgements.

Class discussions and the field trip (when included as part of the class) will require students to reflect on their own presuppositions and correct erroneous opinions by appealing to data and reasoned argumentation.

Values Area (Understanding Diversity in the United States or the World):

(1) Because this class is taught at a Catholic school with an overwhelmingly Christian undergraduate body, I generally use Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism as a comparison when talking about Hinduism. For example, I contrast Christian emphases on belief with Hindu emphases on practice as foundational to religion. In discussing the nature of "God" in Hinduism, I contrast Hindu conceptions with Christian and Jewish conceptions. Hence class discussions emphasize diverse ways of being religious on a regular basis. Furthermore, since there are always students of diverse faith backgrounds in this class--I have never taught a section that did not have both Christian and Hindu students taking it, for example--questions of religious difference arise out of course materials and are addressed in class discussion.

(2) This course satisfies competency (d) under diversity, "identify distinctive patterns of thought and behavior that contribute to the formation of a culture different from one's own." The culture in question is Indian Hindu culture. We have a negligible foreign student population in our undergraduate body, so all students taking the class, Hindu or not, will learn about a culture that is very different from American culture.

(3) The content is diverse. I talk about diverse regions of India and branches of faith orientation within Hinduism--e.g., Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism--that have historically seen themselves as divergent traditions. The course also addresses not just mainstream, "Orthodox" Hinduism, but also forms of religiosity developed by and for groups that lie outside "Orthodox" Hinduism, which was created by and for high-caste males. For example, sections of the course may consider the following topics: the place of women in Hinduism and women's reactions to "Orthodox" discourses about gender; the reaction of low-caste and untouchable Hindus to high-caste hegemonic discourse about caste; outcaste religious practices; the rise of devotional traditions as forms of protest against high-caste orthodoxy; the place of (non-Hindu) religious minorities in contemporary (Hindu-dominated) India.

Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):

By taking this course, students will be able to "demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to articulate the foundations of" Hinduism, whether they are Hindu themselves ("one's own" belief

or faith tradition") or not ("others' beliefs or faith traditions"). They will also be able to "demonstrate how faith traditions or belief systems"--in this case Hinduism--have been or can be related to the intellectual and cultural life of Hindus (e.g., Hindu systems of philosophy, Hindu marriage practices and ritual customs, beliefs about the relationship between humans and other kinds of living beings, beliefs about the human body and how illness and healing take place, and so forth.)

Learning Activities:

Possible array of texts:

- C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*
- R. K. Narayan, trans., *The Ramayana*
- Barbara Stoler Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*

Note: (Instructors may vary the textbooks.)

Possible evaluation methods:

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Writing assignments
- Examinations
- Presentations
- Field trips

Note: (Instructors may vary the evaluation categories.)

Sample Semester Schedule:

- Week 1: What is Hinduism? Some basic Hindu concepts
Historical overview of Hinduism
- Week 2: Historical overview (continued); Hindu scriptures; the three 'paths' or spheres of
discipline
Action as a sphere of concern: Vedic sacrificial tradition; ritual action and moral
action
- Week 3: Dharma, varna and jati, ashrama, varnashramadharm
the four Aims of Life (purusharthas); further remarks concerning varna and jati;
Women's dharma and the pativrata ideal
- Week 4: The Samskaras; discussion of selections from Laws of Manu
- Week 5: Intuitive and intellectual knowledge as a sphere of concern: The Upanishads
discussion of the Upanishads
- Week 6: Beyond the Upanishads: Advaita Vedanta; Samkhya-Yoga; the professional
religious
- Week 7: further remarks on notions of Karma and misfortune in contemporary India;
notes on the Brahmin, King, and Renouncer; The Mahabharata and the
Bhagavad-Gita
The Bhagavad-Gita
- Week 8: Bhagavad-Gita continued
the sphere of devotion, bhakti: images, puja, vrata, temples, pilgrimage

- Week 9: Vishnu and his avatars; Krishna the avatara of Vishnu
- Week 10: Krishna myths and images
devotion to Krishna; begin the Ram Story
- Week 11: The Ram Story
worship of Ram and Nirguna Bhakti; comparison of Krishna and Ram
- Week 12: Shiva as the unity of polarities; images of Shiva
the worship of Shiva; Goddesses and the Great Goddess: the Feminine Principle
as Shakti/Prakriti
- Week 13: Goddess devotion; animal sacrifice

Note: (Instructors may vary the presentation of topics to some degree, but the material covered will remain the same.)