

EXPLORING RELIGION: RELIGION AND THE BOOK

(RELG 101-001)

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Course Overview:

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion with a thematic focus on “the Book” in various religious traditions, and with particular attention to ancient Egyptian religion, Islam, Hinduism, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism). We explore the origin, history, and central tenets of these religious traditions and in doing so dwell on the roles that various kinds of books have played therein—as ritual objects; as texts to be read, interpreted, sung, memorized, and recited; and as secrets to be guarded from outsiders or tools used to recruit new followers. These traditions are explored from the points of view of believers as well as from various “outsider” perspectives, and throughout the course we grapple with the two deceptively simple questions of “What is religion?” and “What is a book?”

This course satisfies the GSS requirement in the Carolina Core.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:
- Describe some of the main tenets and practices of the religious traditions discussed in the class.
- Discuss the ways in which human behavior is shaped by beliefs in a divine being or beings,
- Demonstrate an understanding of some of the various methods scholars apply to the analysis of religion.
- Read religious texts critically and analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse.
- Analyze and compare specific examples of religious social formation.
- Articulate their own views effectively in discussion and writing about the religious traditions

Required texts:

Geraldine Pinch. *Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-192-80346-8.

Carl Ernst, *How to Read the Quran: A New Guide with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-4696-0976-8.

Kim Knott. *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-192-85341-4.

Richard Bushman. *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-195-31030-6.

Other readings will be provided on Blackboard.

Grading:

Grades will be based on participation, a number of very short (4-5 sentence) in-class writing assignments, four at-home essay quizzes (600-800 words), and a take-home essay final (1200 words).

Participation	%20
In-class writing assignments	%20
4 at-home essay quizzes	%40
At-home final exam	%20

Participation

The participation grade reflects students' preparation for and active contributions to class. Participation in class means being present and attentive and being willing and able to make meaningful contributions to discussions (which in turn requires having carefully completed the assigned readings for each class-meeting). Good participation does not require that you have understood every single thing you have read or heard. Indeed, one of the best ways to participate is to ask questions about the things you have not understood. The more everyone participates the more productive, interesting, and fun the class will be.

In-class writing assignments

In-class writing assignments are short (usually 4-5 sentences) writing tasks that in most cases are directly related to the readings. They will be given approximately once a week. They are intended to help everyone get their thoughts together about the readings prior to discussion, and also to check that people are doing the readings. They will be collected and graded on an A, B, C scale (or a zero if the student is absent), on the basis of the degree of engagement with the readings they demonstrate.

Essay quizzes

There are four at-home essay quizzes, one at the end of each of the main units of the class. They are administered via Blackboard. Each consists of a single question, and the answer should be 700-1000 words in length. These quizzes are open-book, open-notes. It is required, however, that students compose their answers individually rather than working in groups. The quizzes will be graded on a 100pt./A-F scale.

At-home final exam

The at-home final exam will be given during the finals period. It will consist of two essay questions that ask students to draw connections between the four main units of the class. Answers should be around 1600-2000 words long in total. The final is open-book, open-notes. It is required, however, that students compose their answers individually rather than working in groups. The finals will be graded on a 100-pt./A-F scale.

Late or missing work policy:

All work should ideally be handed in on time. Students who fail to complete more than one of the four essay quizzes or the final paper will automatically fail the course. Late quizzes will almost certainly be accepted if the student discusses the matter with the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the due date, but may or may not be accepted under other circumstances.

Class guidelines:

Unless you have a medical note stating that you must use one, no laptops, tablets, etc. are allowed in class. Please bring a paper notebook and a writing instrument for taking notes and quizzes. Also, please keep all phones silent or turned off and put away during class. You're welcome to bring food to class if you need to. Please try to avoid particularly loud, crunchy foods or anything that might otherwise distract the rest of the class.

Discussion etiquette:

Everyone in the classroom has the right to hold and express their ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Discussion and debate are at the heart of this kind of learning, and you are free—even encouraged—to disagree with the instructor and/or your classmates. However, when you do so, be sure to criticize the idea a person has expressed and not the person herself/himself. Follow basic rules of civil conversation: try not to interrupt or shout over each other, and be sure to give everyone a chance to talk. If anyone feels that he or she is being mistreated in classroom discussions then please come talk to the instructor outside of class as soon as possible. All such discussions will be kept confidential.

Accommodations:

Please notify the instructor by the end of the first week of classes if you require any special accommodations for the class and furnish any qualifying documentation.

Academic integrity:

As in all classes, students are bound by the University of South Carolina Honor Code with regard to cheating, plagiarism, lying, etc. For more information please refer to the Office of Academic Integrity's student resources page:

<https://www.sa.sc.edu/academicintegrity/honor-code-policy-information/>

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

1. Reading: Read the syllabus carefully!
2. Reading: J. Hinnells. "Why study religions?" in J. Hinnells, ed.,
3. Reading: Jacobson & Jacobson, "Sacred Words, Stories, Writings

UNIT 1: MYTH, RITUAL, AND THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD

4. Readings: Pinch, *EM*, Ch. 1, p. 3-24.
R. Segal, "Myth," in R. Segal, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the*
5. Reading: Pinch, *EM*, Chs. 2-3, p. 15-42.
6. Reading: Pinch, *EM*, Ch. 4, p. 43-53.
7. Reading: Pinch, *EM*, Ch. 6-7, p. 66-88.
8. Readings: C. Bell, "Ritual," in R. Segal, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the*
9. Reading: Pinch, *EM*, Chs. 9-10, p. 100-122.
10. Reading: Goelet & Faulkner, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going*
11. Reading: Goelet & Faulkner, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, selections (on

First essay quiz due

UNIT 2: THE QUR'AN, INTERPRETATION, AND AUTHORITY IN ISLAM

12. Reading: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 1-7.
13. Reading: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 21-32.
14. Reading: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 37-52.
15. Readings: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 58-72.
C. Martin, "Authority," in *A Critical Introduction to the Study of*

- 16. Readings: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 83-92.
- 17. Readings: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 98-104.
Quran, Sura 53. (On Blackboard)
- 18. Reading: Quran, Sura 5. (On Blackboard).
- 19. Reading: Ernst, *HTRQ*, p. 190-204.
- 20. Review for quiz prep

Second essay quiz due

UNIT 3: HINDUISM AND WESTERN READINGS OF HINDUISM

- 21. Reading: Knott, *H*, Ch. 2, p. 10-22.
- 22. Reading: Knott, *H*, Ch. 3, p. 23-37 .
- 23. Reading: R. King, "Orientalism and the study of religions," in J. Hinnels, ed.,
- 24. Reading: Knott, *H*, Chs. 4-5, p. 38-61.
- 25. Reading: Hindu holy texts. (On Blackboard)
- 26. Reading: Knott, *H*, Ch. 6, p. 62-73.
- 27. Reading G. Oddie, "Hindu religious identity with special reference to the origin and
- 28. Reading: Excerpts from William Ward, *The Hindoos* (1817). (On Blackboard)
- 29. Review for quiz prep.

Third essay quiz due

UNIT 4: MORMONISM AND THE PRINTING REVOLUTION

- 30. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 1, p. 1-15.
- 31. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 2, p. 16-34.
- 32. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 5, p. 64-80.
- 33. Reading: R. Laurence, "Moral Sensationalism and Voracious Voracious Readers," in *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), p. 12-39.
- 34. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 3, p. 35-48.
- 35. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 4, p. 49-63.

36. Reading: Bushman, *M*, Ch. 6-7, p. 81-116.
37. LIBRARY VISIT: Rare books and special collections
38. Review for quiz prep.
Fourth essay quiz due Sun 16 Apr at midnight.

CLASS WRAP-UP

39. Flex-day/prep for final.
40. Class wrap-up, prep for final.

Final exam