

**PHIL 1105.21 WORLD RELIGIONS IN AMERICA:
RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PLURALISM**

FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2007

DR. KHYATI Y. JOSHI

TIME: THURSDAY 2- 4:30 PM **LOCATION:** BANCROFT HALL PROTOTYPE CLASSROOM

OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to a few of the myriad of world religions in the United States today because to understand the United States, one must know about religion and its role in our society. The purpose of this class is twofold: (A) To explore and explain the importance of religion as an element that has shaped American society; and (B) To analyze intercultural and interfaith issues in our changing world.

The marvel of America is its capacity to give a home to nearly every religion in the world. This course is an exploration of the changing religious landscape of the United States, looking at the history and dynamic interaction of the various religious traditions that now compose the American religious scene. We will look briefly at Native American, Christian, and Jewish traditions, but our focus will be more on the religious life of communities that have emerged in substantial numbers relatively recently, particularly Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

The role of religion in the United States is constantly increasing in light of immigration and geopolitical events. This course addresses the qualities and skills students as future leaders need in understanding and dealing with these issues in a rapidly changing and exciting world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The successful student in this course will:

1. Develop and demonstrate the ability to be introspective and view reality from multiple perspectives, including your own.
2. Understand and apply concepts related to religious and cultural pluralism in the United States.
3. Understand and discuss the ways in which different religious groups have been oppressed, both in religious and racial terms, throughout U.S. history and how this process continues today.
4. Develop and demonstrate a functional knowledge and understanding of the tenets of faith and foundational information related to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism.
5. Develop skills for discussing “touchy” topics in respectful and collegial manner.
6. Understand the interplay among the culture of various communities and the families that make them up.
7. Apply a critical analysis to topically-relevant literature, videos, and websites.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Joshi, K.Y. (2006) *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race and Ethnicity in Indian America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Prothero, S. (2006) *A Nation of Religions: The politics of pluralism in Multireligious America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wills, D. W. (2005). *Christianity in the United States: A historical survey and interpretation* (English language ed.). Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

Readings denoted by * available on Blackboard

Recommended Texts:

- Neusner, J.(2000). *World religions in America an introduction* (Rev. and expand ed.). Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press.

COURSE SCHEDULE:**1/ 25 Session 1 Introduction**

What is religion?
What does it mean to be an American?
Course information & logistics

2/1 Session 2 Religious Freedom & the Context for Religious Diversity

Wills Intro, Chapter 1 & 2
Bellah, Is there a common American culture?
Nation of Religions, Chapter 9

DUE: Weekly Memo
Learning Goals

2/8 Session 3 Religious Freedom & the Context for Religious Diversity

Davis, Derek, Explaining the Complexities of Religion and State in the United States
Beaman, Lori, The Myth of Pluralism, Diversity, and Vigor: The Constitutional Privilege of Protestantism in the United States and Canada
New Roots, Chapter 1

GVE: Jasmin Zine

DUE: Weekly Memo – no exemption

4/19 Session 11 Religious Oppression and Christian Privilege

New Roots, Chapter 4 & 5
Wuthnow Chapter 6

DUE: Weekly Memo

Expert Group:

4/ 26 Session 12 Islam in the US & Islam in Canada

Suleiman, Islam, Muslims and Arab in America
Zine, Examining the Proposal for Shariah Tribunals in Ontario, Canada
McDonough, Sheila, The Muslims of Canada

GVF: Jasmin Zine

DUE: Weekly Memo – no exemption

5/3 Session 13 Navigating Religion in Public Schools

Blumenfeld, Christian Privilege, the Public Schools, and the Promotion of "Secular" and Not-So
"Secular" Mainline Christianity
Wuthnow Chapter 10
Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education

STUDENT DEBATE

5/ 10 Session 14 Interfaith Dialogues

The Congregation: <http://www.pbs.org/thecongregation/manyvoices/interfaith/>

Nimer, Muslims in American Public Space
Nation of Religions, Chapter 10

DUE: Learning Report

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance & Participation (25%)

Each member of the class shares the responsibility for creating a positive and *challenging* learning environment. Preparation, participation, and respect for the ideas of other will allow for in-depth exploration of complex issues from multiple perspectives. The comments, questions and insights of each student are needed to enhance the learning of all students.

Different types of assignments will be given each week to help you synthesize the readings with your own experiences. Sometimes you will be given questions for critical reflection to prepare in advance of the next session. Other weeks, you will be presented with questions upon arriving in class and given time to think and synthesize concepts from the reading. Students are expected to participate responsibly in the class discussions. Oral contributions in

the course will be judged according to the following criteria:

- the degree to which they manifest genuine interest in, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

The approaches used for this class require active participation and demonstrated readiness to participate. The sensitive nature topics we discuss necessitate an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance needed to create trust.

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. *Being late to class will lower your grade.* Should an emergency arise (illness, accidents, etc.) that prevents you from attending a session, it is your responsibility to contact the professor. Class time provides opportunity for interaction and collaboration that cannot be easily “made up” in other ways. If an absence should become unavoidable, your responsibilities include the following:

- Inform me ASAP.
- Arrange for a peer to obtain hand-outs, announcements, notes etc. from class. Check with your peer **prior to the next class session. “I wasn’t in class...” does not fly.**
- Arrange for assignments to be turned in on the due date.

Participation = willing to answer questions, contributes positively to class discussions, cooperates with instructor and students in class presentations and activities;

Attitude = respects classmates, professors and guests; places high value on learning; makes honest effort to understand issues and the viewpoints of others;

Readiness = is prepared to start class at the scheduled time; reads course outline, readings, assignment instructions; knows due dates. Points awarded at discretion of instructor.

Participation: If you haven’t read the assignments, you can have little understanding of what the class session will be about and cannot contribute anything of your own. I do not summarize the readings for you in class. I work from the knowledge that you have read the material and are prepared to talk about it. When you read for class, read carefully. Read for comprehension, not simply to get through it. You may have to read through a selection several times. You may need to have a dictionary next to you. If you are having trouble understanding the reading, make an appointment to come see me. Reading an assignment for the first time the night before will often not give you an acceptable level of readiness for class. Your syllabus shows you what is scheduled so you have plenty of time in advance to prepare before the class.

1. What were the important points of this reading (or lecture, or class discussion)?
2. Do you agree or disagree with those points? Why?
3. What questions do you have about the reading (or lecture, or class discussion)?
4. How does the reading (or lecture, or class discussion) relate to your own experience, or to other outside reading/research that you have done?

Weekly reading question memos: At the beginning of each class you will submit a memo that includes

- 2-3 thoughtfully-crafted paragraphs that address the major topics from the reading.
- 2-3 thought-provoking questions that you would like to address in that day's discussion.

Your responses need not be extensive or overly-eloquent, but they should show that you have reflected on the readings and that you have a good command of the English language. You should not write only a one-sentence question or comment, but rather you should provide context for your question, explaining (for example) what the issue is, why it is important, what is at stake, and (perhaps) how you might answer it. Your responses will help me to tailor each class to your interests. You have 2 passes. Use them wisely.

Each individual will sign up for expert groups. On the day your expert group is assigned, Professor Joshi will call you on to explain ideas, pose your questions to the class and in general serve as her teaching assistant in the class. Please make sure to meet as a group before the course session to discuss macro and micro concepts. Please make sure you submit your weekly memo to Professor Joshi by Wednesday evening at 5pm, and please arrange to arrive for class on your day by 1:45.

Family Religious History project with two parts (15%)

(1) Develop a "Family Religious History" chart for three generations of your family, beginning with yourself. List the religious affiliations (or lack thereof) of each family member as fully as possible and briefly note other important religious/social data (*e.g.*, the person formed part of an ethnic immigrant community; she/he was converted in a revival context; she/he became alienated from Christianity due to an acrimonious church split.) (2) **Write a 3-5-page research paper, placing some aspect of your religious family history in the context of broader themes of the American Religious Experience. This paper should have 2-4 citations/references. You may use any of our readings or find other references.**

Group Presentation (10%)

Students working in pairs or trios will do a 15-20 minute presentation. Each group will present on one of the following: Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Professor will provide a handout with details.

Quiz (10%)

Learning Report (40%)

The Structure of a Learning Report

There are three distinct parts to your Learning Report: (1) Learning Goals, (2) Daily Learning Log, and (3) the final Learning Report.

1. Learning Goals - Set your learning goals in writing. Understand that they are flexible and may be altered as the term progresses. Establish a minimum of ten (10) things you would like to learn during the semester in this course. By the end of the term, your goals list should at least double in number. These may, for example, include new insights about your own religious experiences, insights about experiences of others that you have heard of, new skills in research or research tools, or relationship of previous learnings to the sociology of religion. The professor will likely want to review them occasionally throughout the course.

After preparing your initial goals, write after each of them 2-3 things you will have to do to achieve it. For example, if one of your goals is to gain a better understanding of a specific denomination which has always appeared strange to you, you might feel you need to visit its worship services, interview a pastor, and interview 2-3 active members of it to see where they are coming from. A copy of your Learning Goals will be turned in one week after the first day of class.

2. Daily Learning Log - Keep a "daily" diary of your learnings and observations relative to the course. Of course, there will be "blank" days, and other days rich in learnings. Note items in the readings, class lectures or discussions, field trips, audio-visuals, and other experiences that strike you. However, a mere compilation of class notes or "interesting" ideas in the readings is not sufficient. In particular, note the implications of various theoretical approaches in the Sociology of Religion to those experiences or your own life experiences. You may use a "stream of consciousness" approach, or order your diary in any way that makes sense to you. The instructor will review your Learning Log periodically. However, the contents will be kept confidential.
3. Learning Report - Based on your Learning Goals and your Daily Log, prepare a concluding Learning Report on your significant learnings, including the learnings you found particularly relevant to your own life, if appropriate. Your final Report should be at least 8-10 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. It should include references, at a minimum, to the readings and experiences in the course. It should also include footnotes and a bibliography in the proper academic paper form. Include your final Learning Goals and Daily Log with your Learning Report.

Your Learning Report should clearly communicate:

1. your awareness and understanding of terms and theories related to religious and cultural pluralism,
2. your ability to use the terms and theories to analyze and interpret social situations, conditions and realities, and
3. that you have read and understand the required readings.

REQUIRED NOVELL AND WEBCAMPUS ACCOUNTS

You are required to have a FDU (Novell) account for full participation in this course. Emails from the Professor to students will ONLY be sent to FDU email accounts.