Introduction to Religious Studies
Religion 110

Dr. K. Vehlow (vehlow@sc.edu)
324 Rutledge College (above the chapel on the Horseshoe)
University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, Tel. 803-777-1494

Office hours: before class and by appointment

Course description
This course is an introduction to the study of religion at the example of the three major traditions of the west: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Taking a scholarly approach that respects both the texts and the study of these traditions, we will begin by exploring the category “religion”. What constitutes religion? How was and is religion studied? How do I, as a USC-Columbia student, encounter and evaluate the traditions this class will expose me to? We will then turn to each religion and make ourselves familiar with their basic stories, texts, tenets, and historical development. At the end of the class, we will look at religious pluralism in the US and, in general, emphasize the US-American presence of these religions.

This course consists of two weekly lectures and a recitation session that deepens the week’s topics and introduces students to critical reading.

Course Texts
Revealing World Religions 3.1. Thinking Strings (dvd)
Reader – available at the Universal Copy Shop

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, students will be able to
● Synthesize the basic tenets, practices, and ideas of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
● Communicate effectively in written work and oral presentations.
● Analyze the impact of contemporary cultural and political ideas on these traditions.
● Analyze primary texts in terms of their specific religious and historical messages.

Grade Breakdown (1000 points total)
3 short answer tests (100 points each) 300 points
10 response papers 100 points
1 group discussion 100 points
Midterm 200 points
Final 200 points
Participation 100 points

Dates to keep in mind
The short answer tests are on February 6, March 20, & April 17.
The midterm is on February 27.
I belong to student team _______. We lead group discussion on _________.

Grading Scale
1000-900 = A
860-899 = B+
800-859 = B
760-799 = C+
700-759 = C
660-699 = D+
600-659 = D
< 599 = F
Short-answer Tests (each 100 points)
There will be 3 in-class short-answer tests which will include the following: identification of key terms, persons or concepts, identification and commentary (ca. 3 sentences) explaining selected passages/characters/events, etc. Anything covered in the readings or discussed in class is eligible for the test. Tests/quizzes cannot be made up unless an official note verifying a legitimate absence with specific date and time is produced.

Reading Responses (100 points, 10 each)
You will be asked to submit 12 response papers (200-300 words—less will not fulfill the requirement) online by 5 p.m. on the day preceding class, out of which 10 count towards your grade. Usually, I will ask you to consider specific questions or themes (s. syllabus) though at other times, you will be free to let your own interests in and ideas about the texts guide you. These papers cannot be summaries of the readings; rather, they provide a forum in which you will engage with the material and prepare your own thoughts, questions and insights for class discussion. Use specific details, quotes, and lines to prove your points and clarify your ideas. Keep your recitation narrow! Late papers will not be accepted. If you miss class, or are having problems accessing our blog, you must email your homework as a readable attachment (pdf, rtf, Word) by the deadline. My address is vehlow@sc.edu.

Why do you do them? These papers will help you read with a sharp and inquisitive eye, and will permit you to develop a critical viewpoint by drawing attention to elements of the material that a less careful or less curious reader might overlook. You should use your insights, the questions you raise and issues you note to contribute to class discussion, which will allow you to help determine the course our class takes.

Grading criteria
10-9 points:
- This is an excellent response paper that shows that the writer has carefully read, considered and attained a strong understanding of the complexities of the text(s).
- The discussion in the response paper is insightful, probes beneath the surface of the text, and shows the writer’s own innovative, creative and critical thinking. This writer has posed a probing question(s), or drawn attention to an issue, passage, motif, theme or other element that seems to be important to understanding certain aspects of the text.
- The writer typically uses specific details or passages convincingly in the text to support the point(s) that he or she is making in the response paper.
- Furthermore, the arguments and the conclusion(s) the writer makes, are, on the whole, convincing based on the evidence and exploration of ideas provided in the entry.
- This response paper is well organized, generally free of grammatical and spelling errors, and the writing style is occasionally stylish.

8 points:
- This is a very strong response paper that also shows that the writer has carefully read, considered and attained an understanding of the complexities of the text(s). It is similar to an A entry in many ways, though a B response paper is lacking in 1 or 2 of the following areas:
The discussion in the response paper shows that the writer has thought about the complexities of the text, and has identified important areas for discussion, but the writer needs to push his or her analysis and critical thinking a bit further to try and get at the root of the issue and develop his or her ideas in greater depth and detail, or

The writer uses evidence and passages from the text, but does not analyze or discuss this material effectively and therefore it does not necessarily advance the argument or support the point(s) that the writer is making in the response paper, or

The points, arguments and/or conclusion(s) the writer makes in the entry are not necessarily supported by discussion in the entry, overlook important evidence found in the text, or are unconvincing for other reasons.

This response paper is also well organized, generally free of grammatical and spelling errors, and the writing style is sometimes stylish.

7 points:

- This is a decent response paper that demonstrates that the writer has read the text(s), but needs to put more time into thinking critically about the text(s). This response paper is similar to A and B entries but is deficient in 3-4 of the following areas:
  - The discussion in the response paper identifies areas for discussion, but they may be too broad or too general. The writer needs to show more analysis and critical thinking to try and get at the complexities of the text and the issues raised. This writer needs to develop his or her ideas in greater depth and detail, or
  - The writer needs to incorporate relevant details and evidence (perhaps in the form of quotes) from the text to support his or her discussion. The writer might also need to spend more space in the entry analyzing and discussing this material in order to make the importance of the discussion clear, or,
  - The writer needs to organize his or her thoughts more clearly, or
  - The writer overlooks important parts of the text which make his or her arguments unconvincing and untenable, or
  - The points, arguments and/or conclusion(s) the writer makes in the entry are not necessarily supported by discussion in the entry, overlook important evidence found in the text, or are unconvincing for other reasons.
  - This response paper is also well organized, generally free of grammatical and spelling errors, and the writing style is sometimes stylish.

0-6 points:

- This response paper is deficient in multiple ways. The writer hasn’t read the text carefully or put much demonstrable energy in thinking about the text.
  - This response paper that demonstrates that the writer needs to spend more time reading and thinking about the way the text(s) works. This response paper is deficient in four or more of the following areas:
    - The discussion in the response paper does not clearly identify relevant areas for discussion, or if identified, they are too broad or too general. The writer needs to use more analysis and critical thinking to gain insight into the complexities of the text and the issues raised. This writer needs to develop his or her ideas in greater depth and detail, or
    - The writer needs to incorporate relevant details and evidence (perhaps in the form of quotes) from the text to support his or her discussion. The writer might also need to spend more space in the entry analyzing and discussing this material in order to make the importance of the discussion clear, or,
    - The writer needs to organize his or her thoughts,
The writer overlooks important parts of the text which make her or his arguments unconvincing and untenable, or
The points, arguments and/or conclusion(s) the writer makes in the entry are not necessarily supported by discussion in the entry, overlook important evidence found in the text, or are unconvincing for other reasons.
This response paper may have multiple problems with organization, grammar and spelling.

Presentation: Leading a Class Discussion with Discussion Questions
(100 points)
Your group will take responsibility for leading the class through discussion questions. You must come to my office hours and discuss your texts, questions, and approach with me in advance.

Read the assigned texts closely, clarify the background, cultural history, setting, etc. Narrow the topic you find most engaging and want to discuss, and locate specific passages that will allow the class to ponder possible answers to your questions.

In a brief presentation of 2-3 minutes, explain to the class why you think your questions are important and relevant, and provide any background info necessary. Put some time into constructing appealing, interesting, and discussion-worthy questions, and think about how you will get the class involved in the discussion.

You must have 3 examples, lines, paragraphs, etc., from the text that you will direct the class to enable the class as a group to consider your question in concrete detail. Think through possible responses from the class ahead of time so that you can respond and keep the discussion going. You will need to bring these texts, and our understanding and experience of them to life for the class, so be creative and original!

You must provide either a handout or a Powerpoint so that the class has your questions in front of them.

Grading Criteria for the presentation
1. Discussion Questions and Examples used to explore questions: (30 points)
2. Your explanation of question’s relevance and interest to us, any background material, presented in 2-3 minute introduction (keep to time!): (20 pts.)
3. Presentation style: innovation and creativity, ways in which you engage the attention of the class and make the material relevant, smooth delivery. (20 pts.)
4. Handout/Powerpoint with clear presentation of your questions and necessary background info. – put it into a visually or otherwise engaging format! (30 pts.)

Areas to get you started on
You might begin by looking at the reading strategies discussed below or focus on the following to get you thinking about the texts:
1) interesting or troublesome points or issues within your text
2) the role of the audience (i.e., how would the understanding of a section of this text vary for people of different gender, social class, religion, race?, etc.). This may involve comparing or contrasting the text you chose with other readings from this class, books you have read, films, life experiences, etc.
3) how you respond to this text as a modern reader. (Are there any modern parallels? How can you relate the texts etc. to your own life? What about the text grabs, shocks, bores, surprises, or confuses you? Why?)

4) what does the text tell us about the societies that wrote and listened to or read them. (What sort of textual community can you imagine for the text? Who might the text be directed at? Does it provide any models for behavior?)

5) what do you think was the text’s goal? Was it successful?

5) Assorted other questions to consider: What is the text’s tone? Why does it address this particular topic(s)? Does it react to religious/ cultural/ theological arguments you know or does it help to establish those?

Reading strategies

Whether we are bookworms or prefer videos, each of us has individual reading and learning strategies and this class will give you opportunities to further hone your skills! Some readers prefer to take notes or mark up texts, others are stimulated by visual or acoustic cues. In this course, we will be using a dvd with hypertexts that also reads aloud, with podcasts (on the accompanying website http://thinkingstrings.com/Product/WR/index.html) and built-in reading assignments. At times, I will provide guided reading questions addressing major concerns or issues we are dealing with in class.

We will also use a more conventional reader with primary texts. These texts reflect the joys, concerns, specific situations, and vocabulary of individuals from times past and are not always easy to decode. At the same time, deciphering them is rewarding in itself because by doing so, we can gain a first-hand glimpse of the issues at hand. Questions you might ask when approaching this material are for instance:

- Who wrote this? Does the text tell me? Are there additional texts that can tell me?
- Who is the primary audience for this text?
- Where was the text authored?
- When was this written?
- What does the text tell me? Openly? In passing?
- Why was this written? Does the text tell me?
- Why in this form? Why did the author chose this genre?
- Do you think that the text achieves its goal?
- How else could the author have addressed the same issue?
- How do you react to the text? Why? Explain!

If you would like to explore additional suggestions for reading and studying, feel free to contact me or explore http://www.studygs.net/.

Attendance Policy

More than 3 absences will result in losing 50 points from the final grade each time, i.e., for the fourth absence, 50 points will be deducted from the final grade, regardless of the cause of the absence. ALL ABSENCES WILL BE COUNTED, regardless of cause (i.e., documented illness,
funeral, other emergency, appointment, etc.). Therefore, BUDGET YOUR ABSENCES CAREFULLY, AND RESERVE THEM FOR REAL EMERGENCIES!

Tests, midterm and final cannot be made up unless an official note verifying a legitimate absence WITH SPECIFIC DATE AND TIME is produced.

If you require special accommodations due to learning difficulties, medical needs, religious practices, etc., or any other issues that should be taken into consideration, I must be notified by the second week of class.

Classroom Rules
Be in class on time, with your cell phone turned off and out of sight. Be prepared to discuss your own ideas and bring in your questions! Be respectful of other participants in class, which means, among other things, engaging with other people’s ideas in a respectful, constructive manner, not chatting during class, not leaving the classroom for any reason, etc. TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE BEFORE CLASS!! 50 points will be deducted from the final grade for every cell phone use (texting, checking for messages or time).

Late Assignments
RESPONSE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE – NO EXCEPTIONS! If you miss class, or are having problems accessing Blackboard, you must email your homework as a readable attachment (pdf, rtf, Word) by the deadline. My address is vehlow@sc.edu.
Schedule of Readings

Introduction

January 12. Introduction.
What does the name of your student group refer to? Be ready to explore in class.

January 14. What is religion?
DVD Exploring Religion Section 1, 2.

January 16. What is religion?
Blog 1: Formulate your own definition of religion, considering the readings. Note criteria or points of interest you plan to apply to the traditions we will cover this semester.

January 21. What are religious studies?
DVD Exploring Religion Section 3.

January 23. Recitation.

Judaism

DVD Judaism Section 1, 2. Reader pp. 1-3.
Blog 2: Choose 3 central events or ideas that shape or have shaped Jews and Judaism. Explain your choice.

January 28. The Jewish Library.
DVD Judaism Section 3; Reader pp. 4-13.
Book tip: Thomas Mann’s Joseph and his Brothers.

January 30. Recitation.
Blog 3: How would you characterize the Jewish Library and Jewish texts? Produce at least 3 arguments.

February 2. Ancient History.
Film tip: The Ten Commandments (); Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (2000)

February 4. Diaspora.
DVD Judaism Section 5; Reader pp. 25-27.
Movie tip: School Ties (1997); Protocols of Zion (2005); The Reader (2008)

February 6. Recitation.
Short-answer test.

DVD Judaism Section 6; Reader pp. 28-38
Blog 6: Which stream of American Judaism can you identify with or not understand at all? Explain your choice.
Movie tip: A Life Apart: Hasidism in America (1997); Schmelvis (2002); Divan (2003); When do we eat? (2006); Manhattan (1979), Annie Hall (1977), Hannah and her Sisters (1986); Crossing Delancy (1988)

DVD Judaism Section 7; Reader pp. 39-41.

**February 13. Recitation.**

**February 16. Practices.**
*DVD Judaism Section 8; Reader pp. 42-48.*

**Blog 5: What is the functions of Shabbat?**

Movie tip: *Keeping up with the Steins* (2005)

**February 18. Holidays.**

*DVD Judaism Section 9, 10; Reader pp. 49-56.*


**February 20. Recitation.**

**February 23. Women.**

*DVD Judaism Section 11. Reader pp. 57-59.*

Movie tip: *My Father, My Lord* (Israel 2007)

**Christianity**

**February 25. Jesus.**

*DVD Christianity Section 1.*

Book tip: Bart D. Ehrman’s *The New Testament*


**February 27. Midterm**

**March 2. Early Christianity.**

*DVD Christianity Section 2; Reader pp. 60-73.*

Book tip: Augustine’s *Confessions*, especially Book 10.

**March 4. The Christian Library.**

*DVD Christianity Section 3.*

**Blog 6: What does the existence of a vast Christian library in addition to the New Testament mean for our understanding of early Christianity?**

**March 6. Rise of the Church.**

*DVD Christianity Section 4; Reader pp. 74-84.*

**March 16. Medieval Christianity.**

*DVD Christianity Section 5; Reader pp. 85-91.*

**Blog 7: Explain the rise of the worship of the Virgin Mary. Why do you think she became so central in so many Christian traditions?**

Movie tip: *The Name of the Rose* (1986); *Brother Son and Sister Moon* (1972, on Francis of Assisi); *Saint of 9/11* (2006)

**March 18. The Protestant Reformation.**

*DVD Christianity Section 6; Reader pp. 92-96.*

**Book tip: Thomas Nashe’s The Unfortunate Traveler**


**March 20. Recitation.**

Short-answer test.
Blog 8: React to one of the figures/events and explain their significance for the history of Reformation (Protestant and/or Catholic) Christianity.

DVD Christianity Section 7; Reader pp. 97-105.

March 25. Holidays.
DVD Christianity Section 8.
Blog 9: What do you consider to be the central Christian holiday? Explain and name some of its elements.
Movie tip: 4 Christmases (2008)

March 27. Recitation.

March 30. Christianity in the 21st Century
DVD Christianity Section 9; Reader pp. 106-125.
Movie tip: Jesus Camp (2006); Martin Luther King: I Have a Dream (2005); My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002); Romero (1989), Leap of Faith (1992), The Rapture (1991)

Islam

April 1. Muhammad.
DVD Islam Section 1; Reader pp. 126-132.
Blog 10: What is the significance of the Khadija’s reaction to the first revelations given to Muhammad?
Movie tip: The Message (1976; youtube); Muhammad: The Last Prophet (2001)

April 3. Recitation.

April 6. The Islamic Library.

April 8. Major Tenets.

April 10. Recitation.

April 13. Practices.
DVD Islam Section 4; Reader pp. 137-154.
Blog 11: Which Muslim practice would you like to explore? Choose one, explain its significance and why you are attracted to this practice.
Movie tip: An American Convert’s Journey to Hajj (youtube)

April 15. The ‘umma.
DVD Islam. Section 5.

April 17. Recitation.
Short-answer test.

April 20. Sufism.
Book tip: Rumi; Annemarie Schimmel’s Introduction to Sufism

April 22. Islam Today.
DVD Islam Section 8.
Movie Tip: Sleeper Cell (2007); Day Break (2005)

April 24. Recitation.
Blog 12: What do you regard as a major Muslim achievement in the 20th/21st century? Explain!
Movie tip: Cat Stevens’ transition to Yusuf Islam (youtube)

April 27. Islam Today and Women.
DVD Islam Section 7, 9; Reader pp. 166-185.
Movie tip: The Last Supper (Iran, 2002); The Day I Became a Woman (Iran, 2002); Persepolis (2007)

April 29. Religion in America.
DVD Religious Pluralism Section 1; Reader pp. 186-187, West Wing (on Death penalty)

May 1. Religion in America.
DVD Religious Pluralism Section 2.

May 4. Religion in the South.
Movie tip: The Apostle

May 6. TBA