

Religions of the Western World
840:212
Spring 2014
M W | 2:50-4:10
SC-214 | College Ave.

Dr. Joseph Williams
Office: Loree 114, Cook/Douglass
Office Hours: Wednesday 12:00-2:00
Email: jwillia@rci.rutgers.edu

Course Description: This course surveys the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Several questions drive the organization of this course: What are the historical origins of these religious traditions? What key beliefs and practices characterized the main branches of these religions? How have the ideas and rituals connected with these traditions changed over time in response to trends associated with politics, science, technology, gender relations, the economy, etc.? (We will pay special attention to the way in which themes originating in the formative and classical eras of these traditions have been interpreted in contemporary societies shaped by modernizing and globalizing forces.) How have these three monotheistic traditions shaped adherents' everyday experiences and helped them navigate the transitions and unpredictability of life?

Course Objectives:

This course seeks to encourage critical thinking about the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. After taking this course, students should:

- become familiar with the diversity within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- gain a broad outline of major historical developments that have shaped each of these religious traditions, including the influence of modernizing and secularizing forces
- appreciate the complexity of adherents' religious experiences as they incorporated religion in their daily lives
- be introduced to some basic theoretical approaches involved in the academic study of religion

SAS Core Curriculum Goals

This course meets the following specific SAS core curriculum goals associated with Historical Analysis (HST), Social Analysis (SCL), and Philosophical and Theoretical Issues (AHO):

- Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
- Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science.
- Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors.
- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization
- Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations.
- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

I will look for evidence of your mastery of these goals in the writing assignments and exams.

Course Texts (other readings are available on the internet or through Sakai):

Esposito, John L., Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis *Religions of the West Today*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2011.
ISBN-10: 0199759502
ISBN-13: 978-0199759507

Suggested:

Robert E. Van Voorst, ed. *Anthology of World Scriptures: Western Religions*
Wadsworth Publishing, 2004
ISBN-10: 0495170593
ISBN-13: 978-0495170594

Course Requirements:

Visitation Response: Early on in the semester you will need to attend a Jewish, Christian, or Islamic house of worship (please select a house of worship that you are not very familiar with). You will then write a 5 page response (at least 1250 words) that 1) describes your experience and 2) explores connections between what you observed and specific themes that we have discussed in class. I will provide more specific guidelines in class, including specific questions for you to answer in your response.

Essay: You will be required to write one main 7-8 page essay (at least 1750 words) this semester. In your essay you will explore a topic related to a particular tradition within Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. There will be a research component to this essay. I will provide more specific guidelines in class.

Requirements for the visitation paper and essay: Papers turned in after class has started on the due date will be considered late and lose 5%. Papers also may be turned in for late credit (minus 15%) one class period after the due date. **No papers will be accepted if they are turned in more than one class period after the due date** unless arrangements have been made with the instructor *prior to the due date*. **In addition to the hard copy of your paper turned in during class, you should also submit your exam/paper to Turnitin.com via Sakai on the due date of the paper. You will lose 10% off your paper if you do not submit it electronically via Sakai on the due date. **Please note, your paper is not officially turned in until I have a hard copy of the paper.** Email submissions *will not* be accepted.

**Plagiarism and cheating will be handled in accordance with university policy. See <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml#plagiarism>

Mid-term and Final Exam: There will be a mid-term and final exam based on class lectures and readings. The final exam will be given during the scheduled final exam period.

Quizzes: There will be unannounced quizzes throughout the semester based on the course readings. **Readings should be read by the date they are listed on the syllabus.** Anyone who has read the assigned pages should have no problem answering the questions. One quiz score may be dropped and will not count towards the final grade (this includes a missed quiz). Make-up quizzes will only be allowed for excused absences approved by me beforehand (for funerals, heart bypass surgeries, et cetera). ****It is your responsibility to make sure you have read the material by the due date.** Problems downloading the online readings will not excuse you from taking a quiz.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Please note: A record of attendance will be kept throughout the semester. More than 4 missed classes will negatively impact your participation grade (you will lose 10% off your participation grade for each absence above the first four).

Grading System:

2 Exams: 40% (20% each)
1 Essay: 25%

Visitation Response: 15%
Quizzes: 10%

Participation: 10%

100-92 A, 91-87 B+, 86-80 B, 79-77 C+, 76-70 C, 69-60 D, 59-below F.

Course Schedule (Fine Print: I may make changes to the course readings, schedule, and policies as the course progresses. It is your responsibility, even if you miss classes, to keep yourself up-to-date on the course requirements.)

INTRODUCTION

1/22 Introduction

1/27 How is Religion Studied? The complexity of “lived religion.”

1/29 Religion in Modern Societies. Please read RWT, Introduction.

JUDAISM

2/3 Please read RWT, Ch. 3, Overview – the Formative Era.

2/5 Please read selections from the Hebrew scriptures (see Sakai for list of specific passages).

2/10 Please read RWT, Ch. 3, the Classical Era and selections on “Jewish-Christian Relations,” available on Sakai.

2/12 Please read RWT, Ch. 3, the Modern Era – Conclusion, and selections on “Reform Judaism,” available on Sakai.

2/17 Please read an excerpt from Elie Wiesel, “Night,” and selections related to “Zionism,” available on Sakai.

CHRISTIANITY

2/19 No class—in lieu of class, please visit a house of religious worship for your visitation assignment.

2/24 Please read RWT, Ch. 4, Overview – the Formative Era.

2/26 Please read selections from the Bible (see Sakai for list of specific passages).

3/3 Visitation Assignment Due.

3/5 Catch-up day. No reading due.

3/10 Exam #1

3/12 Create Your Own Religion Assignment.

Spring Break, No class 3/17, 3/19

3/24 Please read RWT, Ch. 4, the Classical Era.

3/26 Create Your Own Religion Presentations.

3/31 Please read RWT, Ch. 4, the Modern Era – Conclusion, and selections on the “Protestant Reformation,” available on Sakai.

4/2 Please read selections on “Vatican II,” and Rabateau, “Slave Religion,” available on Sakai.

ISLAM

4/7 Please read RWT, Ch. 5, Overview – the Formative Era.

4/9 Please read selections from the Qur’an (see Sakai for list of specific passages).

4/14 Please read RWT, Ch. 5, the Classical Era and selections related to the use of the term “Jihad” in Islamic discourse. **Essay due.**

4/16 *Inside Mecca* (no reading due)

4/21 Please read RWT, Ch. 5, the Modern Era – Conclusion

4/23 Please read selections on “Islam and Gender,” available on Sakai.

JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION
--

4/28 Please read selections on “Religion and Globalization,” available on Sakai.

5/1 No reading due.

5/5 Summary and conclusion of course.

Final Exam Time: Wed. May 14, 12:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.