

Introduction to Religious Studies

RLST 2000

MW 1-2.15 PM

Classroom: CC 4

Office: CC 9; 974 1328

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I. Course Description

“Religion.” What is it? As the word “religion” is multivalent, so also phenomena usually labeled “religious” are complex and innumerable. Religion can be deeply personal and/or political, impersonal, or businesslike. Using a variety of effective methods (discussion, site visits, film, guests, interviews) this course is meant to bring us to engage with a multiplicity of religions, with multiple of ways of studying religion, and with the multifaceted nature of religious systems.

II. Specific Objectives

1. Learn basic facts about religions of the world.
2. Explore various conceptions of religion and various methods of studying religions.
3. Reflect on issues of usefulness and human fulfillment in regard to religions.
4. Create, satisfy, and perpetuate **curiosity** for religious learning.

III. Wait! How are we supposed to do all that?

Only you can prevent forest fires and only you can make this class valuable.

But the opportunity is yours for the taking, because we have many resources, including the following books, all of which invite and stimulate us to different kinds of thinking about religion:

1. Esposito, John et al. *World Religions Today*, Oxford, 2006.
2. Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Being Peace*. Parallax, 1988.
3. Prothero, Stephen. *Religious Literacy*, 2nd ed. Beacon, 2003.
4. Dennett, Daniel. *Breaking the Spell*. Penguin, 2006.

Here are the multiple ways we will engage our religious studies:

Learning Basic Information

Class Made Exam

Our textbook covers many religions. What should a college-educated person know about the major world religions? Intelligent students will make up exam.

Engaging Thoughtful Readings

Reading Reports/Reflections

There are thousands of books that are personal stories about, or personal instructions for, religious reflection. Our book by Hahn is of this type, focusing on one traditional religion. Our book by Prothero critiques our cultures knowledge of religions and offers a solution. Do you agree? Dennett attempts to explain religion through science—what do you think? With critical thinking we will engage all of these writings and use our best tools of analysis.

Observing Sacred Time/Space in Other Religions Sacred Time Reports

Many religious traditions have regular ties set aside for communal activity. Observing and participating (as appropriate) in such occasions allows one to gain information and personally engage the tradition at some level.

Identify your own religious tradition, or that with which you are most familiar, if any (one line). Describe the sacred event you witnessed of another tradition, ½-1 page. Using any of the categories of analysis we have used in class or in the book, analyze an aspect or aspects of the event., 1-2 pages total.

Opportunity to Present

Group Religion Discussion/Reports

You and your team have been asked to prepare class presentation and a riveting, accurate, detailed, fun article for a new encyclopedia, called *The Cool Peoples Helpful and Accurate Guide to All the Interesting Stuff about Religion* (TCPHAGAIRS). Work in groups of 4-5.

In addition, we will be educators at a local High School, teaching about religions as part of educational service learning through the Faith & Work Initiative.

Discussing, discussing, discussing

Classroom topics

Class time is organized around separate, stand alone key topics about religion and will provide opportunity to THINK and DISCUSS (BOTH!)

IV. Course Policies

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE of MILLSAPS COLLEGE

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, the students of Millsaps College affirm their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students' academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement.

The pledge signed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: "**I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)**" The abbreviation "Pledged" followed by the student's signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

2. Students and teacher are expected to attend class in a prepared manner; this is crucial for those desiring to make the most of their personal investments. Experience has shown that there are direct relationships between attendance and learning and final grade. Perfect attendance is seriously smiled upon ☺ and will result in 10 points being added to one's final exam. Persons are always responsible for material missed during absence.

3. Exam and assignments must be submitted at the scheduled time, except in cases of personal emergency. In such cases, appropriate documentation will be required. There will be no make-ups, except by special permission, in which case it must be completed within 1 week. Late papers will be discounted by one grading increment (e.g. B+ to B) per day.

4. Written assignments must be neatly typed and well organized and conform to appropriate academic standards.

5. Students with special needs because of a learning disability or other kind of disability are encouraged to discuss your needs for this class with me at your earliest convenience.

6. Email is an efficient and effective way to communicate with classes and so it will be used in this class. Students will need to read emails from me (or Religious Studies office worker) about this class and will be responsible for their content. I will be responsible not to send emails too close to class or deadlines. Papers will always need to be submitted in hardcopy.

7. At times the complexities and exigencies of life come to bear even on carefully designed course policies and otherwise idyllic classrooms. In other words, shit happens. Whenever you have a personal "issue" or question or difficulty, you are welcome to talk to me. I have never bitten anyone. If you

have any questions about this course, assignments, policies, grading etc. or about your ability to complete the tasks, please come talk to me. I can help you only if I am informed.

V. Outline and Assignments (Subject to revision)

Assignments are listed below in the boxes. EACH PAPER SHOULD INCLUDE AT THE TOP, YOUR NAME, DATE, NAME OF ASSIGNMENT, AND A STAPLE. NO TITLE PAGES OR COVER SHEETS. NO EMAILED PAPERS.

Week 1 26 Aug. W: Introduction

Week 2 31 Aug M: Prothero, 1-38
W:

Week 3 7 Sept M: Prothero, 39-55
W: Prothero, 59-86

Week 4 14 Sept M: Prothero, 87-121
W: Hahn, 1-58

Week 5 21 Sept M: Esposito, 2-33
W: Hahn, 61-117

Hahn report due

In a well written, carefully considered essay of 2-3 pages, address the following religious studies issues:
 1) Explain how the categories of sacred/profane relate to the religious thought of Hahn;
 2) Explain/describe/analyze how Hahn's religious thought is meaningful to him;
 3) Explain/describe/analyze the attitude/posture toward "outsiders" of Hahn's religious thought.
 Finally, some of your own personal reflections/reactions to Hahn are most welcome.

Week 6 28 Sept M: Esposito, 34-63
W: Dennett, xiii-28
Religion discussion/reports 1 & 2

Week 7 5 Oct M:
W: Dennett, 29-93
Religion discussion/reports 3 & 4

Week 8 12 Oct M: 1st Sacred Time report due
W: Dennett, 97-152

-----FALL BREAK-----

Week 9 21 Oct W: Dennett, 153-246

Week 10 26 Oct M: 2nd Sacred Time report due

W: Dennett, 249-277

Week 11 **2 Nov M:**

W: Religion discussion/reports 5 & 6
Dennett, 278-339

Week 12 **9 Nov M: Dennett report due**

1. Summarize the arguments of Dennett (1-1.5 pgs) 2. Choose 2 major points/contentions/arguments of Dennett that you think are the strongest and 2 that you think are the weakest. Thoroughly explain your reasons. (2-4 pages) 3. As always, I would be happy to hear your own reflections/reactions regarding Dennett's book.

W:

Week 13 **16 Nov M: 3rd Sacred Time report due**

W: NO CLASS--THANKSGIVING

-----THANKSGIVING BREAK-----

Week 14 **23 Nov M: Esposito, 496-531**

W: Religion discussion/reports 7 & 8

Prothero Response Paper Due—Saving the World

1. What is Prothero's prognosis and proposed solution? (1 page) 2. Reflecting on our entire class and your own learning, propose and argue for your prognosis and proposed solution(s)? (2-4 pages)

Week 15 **30 Nov M: 4TH Sacred Time report due**

W: LAST Day Class: **ATTENDANCE REQUIRED**

FINAL EXAM

VI. Grading

Class Made Exam	10
Reading Reports/Reflections (Hahn-5, Dennett-15, Prothero-20)	40
Sacred Time Reports (4) Religion News Reports (2)	25
Group Encyclopedia Project	20
Service Learning	5

Letter grades are assigned to increments of 10 on a scale of 100.

A 94-100 A- 91-93 B+ 88-90 B 84-87 B- 81-83

C+ 78-80 C 74-77 C- 71-73 D+ 68-70 D 61-67

A grade of A means you have produced work that is exemplary in almost every way. (E.g. You have presented your thesis coherently, you have organized your thoughts effectively, and you have supported your interpretations meticulously. An A paper is also one that is excellent in style and voice or tone. And in an A paper, attention to form (spelling, punctuation, grammar, documentation) is as rigorous as it is to the content.) Your work is superior.

A grade of B means you have gone beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment and have successfully balanced description with analysis. And you express yourself more clearly, meaningfully, and imaginatively than in C level work. Your work is good.

A grade of C means you have successfully completed the minimum requirements of an assignment. Your paper has no major problems of any kind, but there is still much for you to do to better your grade. Your work is average.

A grade of D means your work is seriously deficient in some way and is thus evaluated as below average.

A grade of F means your work is unacceptable.