# REL020D2: Comparing Religions

## Spring, 2020

## Professor Erica Andrus

481 Main St. room 205

656-0227

eandrus@uvm.edu

Office hours: Thursdays, 11:30am-1pm and by appointment

## Course Description

This course will expose students to a variety of ways of perceiving the world, humans, spirituality, and society. These ways of seeing and experiencing come from religious contexts, and can be off-putting and/or appealing; they can seem bizarre or disingenuous; they can provide answers to questions of what it means to be “good” or “saved” or “enlightened”. This is where it is important to understand that all of these approaches, practices, beliefs, etc. are, for us in this class, data. We are not here to determine which worldviews are most enlightened, most compelling, most correct, or most beneficial. We are here to explore them and compare them, and you are invited to apply them to your own life as you wish. However, we are not in this class searching for the “true” meaning of life or religion, we are merely seeking to find out what others have said, done, and believed in that realm.

Just as we are not here to find the “One True Religion,” we also reject the proposition that “all religions are One” – our empirical stance mitigates against this statement, and in fact leads us to conclude that no religion is one: **all religions are many!** In other words, although we do acknowledge similarities, shared values, and cross-religious influences, we also recognize profound differences in world view, and respect the different perspectives that religions understand to be the ultimate truth. Some versions of some religions are very open to accepting many paths to one truth, but others believe there is only one path only one truth, and that difference makes a difference, it has consequences in the real world, that we do not wish to downplay or deny.

## Course Learning Objectives

The goals of this course are

* to introduce students to basic facts and history about Buddhism, Islam, the Dineh and select other Native American religions/cultures
* to introduce students to the ways scholars and theorists have thought about religions, and how these thoughts and theories a) have changed over time and b) continue to be applicable to the data of religion that we can gather from reading and researching
* to give students practice applying scholarly theories and using discipline-specific terms and concepts
* to create an opportunity for students to produce a successful presentation using individual research combined with group digital media skills

Where does this course fit into your curriculum?

For Religion majors and minors this course fulfills the distribution requirement for an intro-level class (Category A).

For all students the course does two things: fulfills the 3-credit prerequisite requirement for all 100-level courses in the Religion Department, and fills the University D2 Diversity requirement and the CAS Non-European Cultures requirement.

## Required Course Materials:

Required Books: There are three “required” texts for the course. All are available from the UVM Bookstore, **and are also on reserve at the library**. This means there is no “I couldn’t access the readings” excuse – if your books have not arrived yet, or you have other priorities for where your money needs to go, that is completely fine. You are not actually required to buy the books, as long as you don’t mind using the library copies. If that is the case, to access the readings, you will go to the Howe Library circulation desk, request the book, then either read it in the library, or scan the relevant pages and email yourself the PDF of the reading for the assigned day. (Personally, I like this option because then I can annotate the readings.)

Please **bring the readings to class on the date that they are listed whenever possible**. You should **read them** **before** **class meets on the date indicated**. Assignments are due on the date listed, before class unless otherwise noted.

Textbooks:

*Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés.*Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin, eds. Bloomsbury, 2017. ISBN 9781474292191

*Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction.*by Damien Keown. Oxford University Press, 2013.

ISBN 9780199663835

*Native American Religious Traditions* by Suzanne J. Crawford, Routledge, 2007.

ISBN 9780131834835

## Blackboard:

Blackboard will be very strongly integrated into the course. The syllabus is posted there, and there are folders for online readings, films, etc. and another folder for assignments, and a folder for the group project. Your “Group” page will also be an important place to contact group members and post things, including the group’s final project. Additionally, each student will have a private journal to post the Reading Response Journals (RRJs). Only the instructor can see what you write there.

## Assignments

**Journals:**

By the last day of classes, submit 4 Reading Response Journals to Blackboard based on the chapters of the Stoddard and Martin book. You must include the chapter on “belief,” (Chapter 1) but the other chapters are up to you. The due dates for journals are indicated on the schedule. You may post journals at any time before the due dates. (**20%** -- graded cumulatively, based on completeness of answers)

**Exams and quizzes:**Exams are take-home, open book, short answer exams. There will be two exams during the semester and one final exam. (**60%** -- 20% each exam)

Quizzes will happen on a weekly basis on Wednesdays during the first 10 minutes of class, and will be based on knowing vocabulary, concepts, and stories that we discuss in class and in the readings. Quizzes cannot be made up, so do not be late. If you miss more than 3 quizzes your grade will be affected. Each completed quiz will be graded as .5 (✓) or 1 (✓+). (**10%**)

**Project:**

You will work on a group project that will consist of a reading assigned to your group about how one of our case study religions is lived in a particular part of the world. Each student will find 1 or more additional sources on one part of the topic. The group will then create a report on the topic to present to the class. The format of the report will depend on the group’s preference, but could be a slideshow, a podcast, a website, or a video. All projects will include both images with captions (or video with narration), and a bibliography. Presentations should be around 8-10 minutes long. See the schedule for dates. Students will have an opportunity to express a preference for a date and topic, but may not necessarily receive their first choices. (**10%**)

## Grading Criteria/Policies:

Attendance: Although you will not receive a letter grade for attendance, your attendance and participation are considered part of the class. **Chronic lateness or absences will affect your grade or cause you to fail the course.** If your attendance habits are endangering your grade I will alert you during the semester. Please see the resources pages for help if you are falling behind.

Grades:

I do not round up grades. An “A” is a 93.5 or above. A- is 90-93.49; B+ is 87-89.99, B is 83.5-86.99, etc.

|  | **REL020: Comparing Religions**Spring 2020Professor AndrusSchedule of Readings and Assignments(subject to revision/corrections) |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | **Readings/Preparation:** | **Assignments due:** |
| M, 1-13  | Welcome to the Class! |  |
| W, 1-15 | (Practice Quiz: The Syllabus; definitions)\*Cunningham and Kelsay, “Toward a Definition of Religion” from *The Sacred Quest: An Invitation to the Study of Religion* |  |
|  F, 1-17 | Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 1 “Buddhism and Elephants” |  |
| M, 1-20  | Holiday: No Classes |  |
| W, 1-22 | Quiz 1: Ninian Smart’s “Dimensions” and BuddhismRead this short piece:<https://qz.com/work/1225207/buddhism-in-america-before-mindfulness-was-popular-the-religion-was-considered-a-cult/>then divide up the links on [this page](http://pluralism.org/religions/buddhism/introduction-to-buddhism/) among your group members, then share what you find in your group’s discussion board. <http://pluralism.org/religions/buddhism/introduction-to-buddhism/> |  |
|  F, 1-24 | Stoddard and Martin, *Stereotyping Religion*, Ch. 1: Sean McCloud “Religions are Belief Systems”\*Asani, “Exploring Muslim Understandings of Islam”and \*Brown, “Islam in Global Perspective” | Journal 1 Due by the end of the day |
| M, 1-27 | Skim through [this webpage](http://www.native-languages.org/religion.htm) (<http://www.native-languages.org/religion.htm>) and follow any links you’re inspired to exploreAnd this piece from a member of the Abenaki community: [Smithsonian Institution article](https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/this-land-is-whose-land-indian-country-settler-protest?fbclid=IwAR1Lme_gFidv73go5WCpkF2MmS8UnLomHz4HymJJZmTl_pXQCd32LgLfPng)Report on your response to these websites on your group’s discussion board |  |
| W, 1-29 | Quiz 2: BasicsKeown, Chapter 2: “The Buddha” |  |
|  F, 1-31 | Keown, Chapter 3: “Karma and Rebirth” |  |
| M, 2-3 | Keown, Chapter 4: “The Four Noble Truths” |  |
| W, 2-5 | Quiz 3: Buddhist doctrines\*Toorawa, “Muhammad” |  |
|  F, 2-7 | \*Gary E. Kessler Ch. 7 “Experiencing the Sacred” read only: 7.1 and 7.2  |  |
| M, 2-10 | \*Esposito, “Quranic Universe” |  |
| W, 2-12 | Quiz 4: Doctrines of Islam; lives of Buddha and MuhammadGo over mid-terms; meet with groups | Mid-term I handed out in class |
|  F, 2-14 | Crawford, **Chapter 2**, “Philosophical Foundations: Religion as Relationship” |  |
| M, 2-17 Holiday |  |  |
| W, 2-19 | Mid-Term Due | Post your Mid-term I Exam before class |
|  F, 2-21 | \*Young, “Lakota Spirituality” |  |
| M, 2-24 | \*Young, “Dineh Creation Legends:” Read pp. 224-228 | Journal 2 due by the end of the day: your chapter choice |
| W, 2-26 | Quiz 5: Types of Rituals\*Kessler, – chapter 6, “Her Alone They Sing Over” and “Types and Functions” |  |
|  F, 2-28 | Presentations | Groups 1-4 presentations |
| M, 3-2  | Crawford, Chapter 1: “Religion in Action”  |  |
| W, 3-4 | Quiz 6: Native American ceremonials\*Spickard: “To the American Southwest” |  |
|  F, 3-6 | \*Bowen: “Rituals of Transition” |  |
| M, 3-9 Recess |  |  |
| W, 3-11 Recess |  |  |
|  F, 3-13 Recess |  |  |
| M, 3-16 | \*Aslan: Salah |  |
| W, 3-18 | Quiz 7: Rituals of Islam; Zen Keown: from chapter 6 “Japan” (including the box on nuns) | Journal 3 due by the end of the day, your chapter choice |
|  F, 3-20 | *Presentations*  | Groups 5-8 |
| M, 3-23 | \*Kondo: “The Way of Tea” |  |
| W, 3-25 | Quiz 8: Tea and Funerals\*Keyes: “Monastic Funerals”<https://blog.james-carr.org/three-days-as-a-theravada-buddhist-monk-ee34ad135268> |  |
|  F, 3-27 | \*Kessler, “Organizing the Sacred” from p. 240 to p. 246  | Mid-term handed out in class |
| M, 3-30 | \*Lefferts: “Buddhist Action: Lay Women and Thai Monks”  |  |
| W, 4-1 | Quiz 9: Social dimension; Buddhist monks\*Gutschow: “Novice Ordination”  |  |
|  F, 4-3 | Mid-term Exam Due | Post your Mid-term II Exam before class |
| M, 4-6 | \*Freedman: “Women, Islam, and Rights”  |  |
| W, 4-8 | Quiz 10: The veil\*Read and Bartkowski: “To Veil or Not to Veil” |  |
|  F, 4-10 | *\**Andi Smith: “For All those who were Indian in a Past Life” |  |
| M, 4-13 | \*Gary E. Kessler Ch. 7 “Experiencing the Sacred” read only: Intro, 7.3 and 7.4 |  |
| W, 4-15 | Quiz 11: Experiential dimension \*Excerpt from Gary Comstock, Religious Autobiographies. Lame Deer |  |
|  F, 4-17 | Presentations | Groups 9-12 |
| M, 4-20 | No assigned readings – catch up  | Journal 4 due by the end of the day, your chapter choice |
| W, 4-22 | Quiz 12 Sufis\*Brown, “Sufism” – read from p. 197 “The Spiritual Master” to the end of the selection |  |
|  F, 4-24 | \* Excerpt from Gary Comstock, *Religious Autobiographies:* Satomi Myodo  |  |
| M, 4-27 | *Presentations and Review* | Groups 13-15Final Exam handed out in class |
| W, 4-29 | Quiz 13 shamans; presentations\*Michael J. Harner “The Sound of Rushing Water” |  |
| F, 5-1 | *no readings: wrap up discussion; course evals* |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |