

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

(ANTH 234/INTST 234)

Bellevue Community College - Fall, 2008

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Welcome to Comparative Religion! There is much fascinating material to come and I hope you are ready to start. My assumption is that you already have the basics of computer and Internet use; it's enough of a task just learning to use this learning program. I will not be on the BCC campus--I presently live in California--but you can always reach me via the Mail tool within Vista. For this course to work, you need to check into this Comparative Religion web site very regularly and stay in touch via the Discussions.

This course concerns the religions of humankind. Though it includes material approached from an anthropological perspective, it covers primarily the field of study known as "History of Religions" (or "Comparative Religion"). The content of the course will consist of the weaving together of themes growing out of the following three issues:

- The historical question: How have religious traditions developed and manifested themselves in world history?
- The social scientific question: How are religious beliefs and practices related to social organization and broader cultural contexts?
- The philosophical question: Why are there religions and how are they best understood?

COURSE OUTCOMES - I hope that by the end of the quarter you will be able to:

1. Identify the different approaches to the study of religion that distinguish comparative religion, philosophy of religion, and theology
2. Explain the theories of religion associated with Freud, Jung, Marx, Durkheim and Weber
3. Explicate the complex definitions of religion provided by thinkers such as Geertz and Oxtoby, and explain the "family resemblance" approach to defining religion
4. Describe some of the major characteristics of the oral religions of primal societies
5. Describe the history of the development of Hinduism and the diverse paths that are included within Hinduism today; as well as define the key concepts of Hinduism such as karma, moksha, and atman

6. Explain the key concepts of Buddhism, including the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, the importance of the major events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama, and the differences among the various Buddhist denominations
7. Identify the key elements and vocabulary of Taoism and Confucianism as well as the feature that unify early Chinese philosophy
8. Describe the major events in Jewish history from the Biblical through Rabbinical and Modern developments
9. Describe the significance of the life of Jesus for Christians, the basic elements of the early creeds, as well as the historical divergence of Christian denominations
10. Describe the origins of Islam, Islam's connections with Judaism and Christianity, the life of Muhammad, the Four Pillars, and the expansion of Islamic civilization
11. Describe the nature of modernity and secularism and their interaction with traditional religious thought and identify some of the newly emergent religions

TEXTS AND LECTURES: The texts are Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions (Fourth Edition)* and Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*. The first source is a new textbook. It takes a sympathetic approach to the world's religions and tries to get the reader to develop an understanding of how each religious tradition is experienced from within its community of believers. The publisher of the text has online resources available. Just click on <http://www.mhhe.com/molloy4> and once there go to the "Student Center" and you will find study aids (including multiple-choice questions, glossary, and links) for each of Molloy's chapters. Use the site to study and test yourself. It should be very helpful. The second source, Mehta's novel, portrays the religions of India in rich personal and cultural contexts. The lectures and reading are somewhat independent and complement rather than duplicate each other. I will present lecture material primarily from a historical angle with the purpose of showing how various religious traditions developed. I will also introduce lecture topics of a more social scientific and philosophical variety.

EXAMS AND GRADING: Your final grade will be based on six online quizzes, a mid-term, and a final exam, plus your class participation. Class participation refers to your ongoing contribution to the online discussions on topics in comparative religion. Throughout the quarter I will initiate new topics for forum discussions and will track student participation carefully. There will be new Discussion topics in each module of the course as we move through them.

Your grade for Participation will be based not simply on whether you participate in each forum but the degree to which your comments are informed by what you have learned from lectures and reading. The Participation grade is relative to the class as a whole, so there is no absolute number of contributions for calculating a grade. It is a qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation of contributions to the discussion forums. I look at: 1.How

many contributions have been made? 2. How well do they cover the full range of topics (forums) included in the course? 3. Do they meaningfully advance the class discussion? 4. How well thought out and developed are they? 5. Are they substantive and on topic? 6. Do they reflect that you have been studying and learning from the course material?

The six quizzes will count 40% of your final grade; the Mid-Term will count 20% and the Final will count 20% of your final grade; regular class participation will account for the final 20% of your grade. Your final grade will be calculated as a total percentage then converted to a letter grade as follows: 90% and above is in the A range; 80-89% is in the B range; 70-79% is in the C range; and 58% or above will be necessary for passing the course. For general Social Science Division policies and rules regarding such matters as grading and withdrawals, click on [Social Science Guidelines](#).

I should add that this is a course in which YOU WILL GET OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN. If you are self-motivated and put in a good effort EACH WEEK, you will learn a lot and end up with a good grade. It will be necessary to put in a steady effort. Stay on schedule. I do not accept late work. If you have any problems regarding the course please feel free to contact me at anytime through Vista's Mail.

TABOO ONE - NO PREACHING: It is necessary that you become acutely aware of how to discuss religion specifically in the context of a comparative religion course. There are many different ways one can discuss religion. Just think about how you might speak about religious topics among fellow believers in your place of worship versus at a political convention, or in the supermarket. A comparative religion course requires a particular form of discourse. This course is not about arguing the validity of one religion over another. Comparative Religion means looking at different religions objectively and attempting to understand them from the inside. It does NOT mean "comparing" in the sense of arguing which religion is better or worse. You must avoid such judgments in all of your discussions this quarter. While you have every right to hold any religious (or non-religious) opinion you wish, my suggestion is that you do not make your personal religious views a focus of your discussions during the quarter. There are dangers in adopting any "label" for your beliefs in a public forum: Others' understanding of what you mean by a specific religious label are often quite different from what you intend. I will assume that students in the class have a wide variety of personal opinions regarding religion, but I will also assume you are in the class to learn about the world's religions, not to try to convert others to your views. There is nothing worse for the learning environment of a comparative religion course than having a student try to preach his or her religion to others. Though this virtually never happens in my classroom courses, it is more tempting for some students in an online course due to the anonymity. Your grade for class participation will depend very much on the degree to which your contributions reflect that you have learned to discuss religion from the comparative religion point-of-view. But further, I will make it a hard and fast rule: Proselytizing or preaching of one's own religious views will be considered grounds for dismissal from the class. If you find that you are unable to avoid testifying, preaching, or trying to convince others in the class to believe what you believe, I suggest that you withdraw from the course.

TABOO TWO - NO PLAGIARISM: It is strictly against BCC rules for a student to borrow from another source without crediting this source. Because it is so easy to get material from the Internet, those of us who teach online have found that students sometimes think they can incorporate online material, or "borrow" from one another without proper citation. This is called plagiarism. Bellevue Community College has rules that make plagiarism grounds for failure in a class and ultimately expulsion from the school. Remember, if a student's essay answer is basically identical to that of another student (from this or a previous quarter), there are only two possible reasons: either the answer was copied from the one student by the other or they both copied it from the same source. In both cases this is plagiarism. If you copy you must use quote marks and a citation. For the purposes of the quizzes and exams in this course, don't be worried about the exact form for citations. I'm only concerned that you give credit where it is due. But even if you are taking material from the lectures or from assigned reading you do need to be clear that is what you are doing. You might say, for instance, "According to the lecture...." or, "Molloy says..." And if it is a direct quote be sure to use quote marks.

Each week you will need to do the following:

- 1. Read and study the assigned textbook material and use the online study aids for the text;**
- 2. Spend some time reading the lecture (you will probably want to print it out) and look over the associated slides;**
- 3. Go over any handouts and links;**
- 4. Be involved in class-related conversations with your fellow students in the Discussions.**

The boxed material that follows is the basic outline and structure of the quarter's work. New lectures will be posted as we move through the course modules. The Quizzes and exams will be available for you to take over a two day period; you will find completion dates for each of the six quizzes below. The Quizzes are half-hour multiple-choice tests. They cover particular material, but since some of the material is cumulative in nature the expectation is that you will be able to show that you know more and more as the quarter proceeds. Finally, note that there will be an hour and a half Mid-term and Final Exam, each of which will cover one-half of the material for the course. Each of the two Exams will include multiple-choice as well as essay questions.

TOPICS COVERED:	TEXT ASSIGNMENTS AND TESTS:
LECTURE ONE: What is Religion and How is it Studied? Definitions of Religion; Aspects of Religion; Theology, Philosophy of Religion, and Comparative Religion; Psychology and Sociology of Religion.	Read: Text Chapter 1 (1-27)
LECTURE TWO: The Anthropology of Religion Anthropological theories; the Primal Religions; The World Religions--Eastern and	Read: Text Chapter 2 (29-69) Quiz 1 (Covering Lectures 1 and 2 and

Western.	Text chapters 1 and 2) - Available Monday morning, September 29. Complete by midnight, the end of Tuesday, September 30.
LECTURE THREE: Hinduism Pre-Vedic origins; Vedic Religion; Upanishads; The Paths to Moksha.	Read: Text Chapter 3 (70-117) Quiz 2 (Covering Lecture 3 and Text chapter 3) - Available Wednesday morning, October 8. Complete by midnight, the end of Thursday, October 9.
LECTURE FOUR: Buddhism The Life of Buddha; Dharma; Theravada; Mahayana; Zen.	Read: Text Chapter 4 (118-183) <u>and</u> start reading <i>A River Sutra</i> Quiz 3 (Covering Lecture 4 and Text chapter 4) - Available Friday morning, October 17. Complete by midnight, the end of Saturday, October 18.
LECTURE FIVE: Other Religions of Indian Origins Jainism; Sikhism.	Read: Text Chapter 5 (184-205) <u>and</u> finish reading <i>A River Sutra</i> Mid-Term Exam: One and a half hour exam covering the first half of the course. Available Sunday morning, October 26. Complete by midnight, the end of Monday, October 27.
LECTURE SIX: Religions of Chinese Origins Early Chinese philosophy; Taoism; Confucianism.	Read: Text Chapters 6 and 7 (206-281) Quiz 4 (Covering Lecture 6 and Text chapters 6 and 7) - Available Monday morning, November 3. Complete by midnight, the end of Tuesday, November 4.
LECTURE SEVEN: Judaism Early Hebrews; the Prophets; Rabbinical Judaism; Modern Developments.	Read: Text Chapter 8 (282-339) Quiz 5 (Covering Lecture 7 and Text chapter 8) - Available Tuesday morning, November 11. Complete by midnight, the end Wednesday, November 12.
LECTURE EIGHT: Christianity Life of Jesus; The Gospels; Early Christianity; Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant developments.	Read: Text Chapter 9 (340-429) Quiz 6 (Covering Lecture 8 and Text chapter 9) - Available Friday morning, November 21. Complete by midnight, the end of Saturday, November 22.
LECTURE NINE: Islam Arabian setting, Life of Muhammad; The Qur'an; The Islamic Tradition; The Expansion of Islamic Civilization.	Read: Text Chapter 10 (430-487)
LECTURE TEN: New Religions and Modernity New Religious Movements; Modernity, Science, and Secularism; Conclusions.	Read: Text Chapters 11 and 12(488-561)
Suggested Future Reading - Bibliography	Final Exam: This is a one and a half hour exam covering the second half of the course. Available Sunday morning, December 7. Complete by midnight the end of Monday, December 8.

