

RELI 231 – Religions of the World – Eastern Religions

Northern Virginia Community College

Fall 2021

Section 040

M/W 2:20-4:05 p.m.

Online

Instructor: Akshay Gupta

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Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Studies religions of the world with attention to origin, history, and doctrine. Part I or II. Includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and New Religious Movements. Lecture 3 hours per week.

GENERAL COURSE PURPOSE

To introduce the origins, teachings, organization, and practices of Eastern religious traditions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Daoism and Confucianism, Shinto) with an emphasis of their role in motivating, shaping and inspiring their adherents through myths, rituals, symbols, ethical codes and religious experiences, and to examine the varied issues, problems and concerns of the religions studied.

COURSE PREREQUISITES/COREQUISITES

None

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the completion of the course, you will be able to examine the history, belief and the practice of Eastern religious traditions. Specifically, you will be able to:

- Identify and define relevant terminology such as asceticism, *dharmā*, *karma*, *samsara*, *moksha*, *nirvana*, *yoga*, *ahimsa*, *guru*, *bodhisattva*, *lama*, *Dao*, *wu wei*, *kami*, *khalsa*, filial piety, *ren/jen*, etc.
- Explain the role great religious founders have filled in human history
- Summarize the origins, teachings, organization and practices of the religions studied
- Interpret some of the sacred writings and mythic imagery and practices of the religions studied
- Compare and contrast recurring themes in the religions studied such as: mysticism, loving devotion, reincarnation, ultimate liberation
- Discuss the historical connections among the religions studied
- Analyze the complex relations between religion and society/culture in various historical and contemporary contexts
- Respectfully discuss previously unfamiliar religious events/communities or their participation in them

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Living Religions 10th Edition by Mary Pat Fisher (buy from student store).

Note: You must buy the textbook from the student store; however, if you find a cheaper price on another website, the student store will match the price.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are a total of 1000 points possible in this course, allocated in the following way:

Attendance (250 points)

Regular attendance in class is mandatory. You get two “free” unexcused absences. However, every absence thereafter will deduct 10 points from your attendance grade. These absences may be excused if there are good reasons for doing so (sickness, travelling for sports, doctor appointment, etc.). There are a total of 250 points you can acquire via attendance. Causing classroom disruptions can lead to points being deducted from your final grade.

Short Responses (250 points)

Every class for which there are readings, you will have the opportunity to write a short response (300-600 words) to the readings. You have the flexibility to write about anything so long as it pertains to the readings. However, short responses should illustrate that you have carefully read the readings and have thought critically about the issues or topics discussed therein. Each short response counts for 50 points, and you must write five short responses to get the full 250 points. **At least 3 of these 5 responses should be before the withdrawal date (November 4th) however.** Points will be deducted from papers if it is evident from reading them that you did not carefully read the readings and think critically about them.

Send your short responses in a word document to agupta@nvcc.edu before class to receive credit for the paper. Late papers will not count as one of your five short responses.

Religious Site Visit/Online Religious Visit (200 points)

200 points of this course will come from a paper based on your visit to a religious site or to an “online religious site visit.” You have one of two options. You can either 1) visit a place of worship connected to one of the religious traditions that we cover in class (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Daoism, Shinto, or Confucianism) in person. Or, 2) you can view a ceremony, ritual, festival, etc. of one of these traditions online. On account of COVID-19, you are not required to do an in-person site visit, and you will not be penalized for choosing option 2).

In your paper, you should discuss your observations. Your essay should not simply be a report of the visit: “first we took off our shoes, then . . .” Rather, you should organize your essay around one or two themes that struck you during your in-person or online visit and provide an in-depth analysis. There are many things you might focus on—a particular ritual that you observed, the various functions served by the place of worship, a specific festivity, the philosophical viewpoint of the priests or congregation, and so on. You should connect your observations with what we have studied in class or your own life experiences.

The essay should be well-organized, with a clear flow of reasoning. If you choose to do an in-person visit, list the date, time, and place of your visit somewhere in the beginning of your paper. If you choose the online option, list the names of the videos you watched and put a link to them at the bottom of your paper.

Your essay should be at between 1000-1500 words, double spaced, with 12 point font and 1 inch margins. You should submit your essay on Canvas, where it will be checked for plagiarism. Papers are due by October 25th, and points will be deducted for late work. However, I understand that these are trying times, so if there are circumstances that prevent you from submitting this assignment on time, you can contact me and we can discuss the possibility of extending the due date.

Note: In order to get credit for the paper, you should not do an in-person visit or online visit to a place of worship that belongs to a religious tradition that you or your family practice. So, if you are a Jain, do not do your paper on your visit to a Jain temple.

Final Paper (300 points)

The final paper counts for 300 points. The paper should be 10-12 pages, double spaced, in Times New Roman font. The paper can be on any topic as long as it is related to at least one of the religious traditions that we have covered in the course. To receive the full 300 points, you should not merely describe or summarize the course readings. Instead, you should strive to critically analyze one or more of the traditions that we have studied. The best papers will address questions such as “how do Buddhism and Hinduism differ in their valuation of asceticism?” Alternatively, you might seek to understand how the doctrine of reincarnation is different across Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions. Or, you might choose to explore the significance of say, karma, or Confucian ethics.

To get full points on the paper, your paper should be insightful, demonstrate your knowledge of the religious tradition(s) you focus on, and reference articles or books related to your topic.

Papers are due on December 8th at 2:00 p.m. Late work will not be accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Students are responsible for knowing and following the policies in the [Student Handbook](#). The following are highlights that students should be aware of as they begin a course.

Academic Integrity Policy

NOVA does not tolerate academic dishonesty. As outlined in more detail in *The Student Handbook*, academic dishonesty can include, but is not limited to, cheating on an exam or quiz and submitting work that is not your own (plagiarism). Because faculty members share a responsibility for a student's education and the value of a NOVA degree, they seek to prevent unethical behavior and, when necessary, respond to infringements of academic integrity. Penalties can include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, suspension, or expulsion from the college. Procedures for disciplinary measures and appeals are outlined in the [NOVA Student Handbook](#) and the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Closing Information

NOVA announces campus and college closings on the NOVA homepage. You can also receive notification by cell phone or email if you ~~register for~~ [NOVA Alert](#).

When a course is canceled due to a weather event or other unforeseen situation, check the course Canvas site or NOVA email as soon as possible for instructions and assignments to avoid falling behind in coursework. You are expected to be up to date with all assignments the next time the class meets.

If there are emergency closures lasting longer than a day, we will plan to meet as usual on Zoom, unless you are informed otherwise via email.

Please also review the [college policies regarding emergency closings and late openings](#).

Communication

Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) faculty, staff, and administrators communicate with students through their official NVCC email accounts (____@nvcc.edu). Students are likewise required to use their VCCS email accounts (____@email.vccs.edu) to communicate with instructors and other college personnel and should check their email accounts regularly.

Course Drop/Withdrawal Policy

Please note two important dates related to your enrollment in a course:

- The 'census' date for a course is the last day to drop a course and receive a full tuition refund, and also the last day to change your grade status to audit.
- The 'withdrawal' date is the last day to withdraw without grade penalty.

Dropping a course after the census date and before the withdrawal date will result in a "W" grade appearing on your transcript. To identify these dates for your courses, please visit the [College Academic Calendar](#) and scroll down to the specific session for your course.

Note: You will be withdrawn from the course if you do not do attend one class prior to the census date or submit one graded assignment prior to the census date.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Students with Disabilities: Your access to and inclusion in this course is important to me. Please request your accommodation letter early in the semester, or as soon as you become registered with Disability Support Services so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations.

Accommodations are provided for in-person, online and remote/virtual learning. To get started, review NOVA's Disability Support Services website (<https://www.nvcc.edu/disability-services/index.html>). Following a meeting with a Disability Support Services (DSS) Counselor you will be issued a Memorandum of Accommodation (MOA). You must provide your MOA to your professors, testing proctor or tutoring center in order to receive your accommodations. You may provide your MOA any time during the semester, however, accommodations are not retroactive.

You may email your MOA or provide me with a paper copy. I will send an email to acknowledge receipt. If I have any questions or if there is anything about your accommodations you wish to explain, we will schedule a meeting outside of class for that purpose. Please remind me of any special arrangements that must be made in advance of tests and assessments.

If you need a Sign Language interpreter or CART Captioning, contact Interpreter Services (interpreters@nvcc.edu).

GRADING

Letter Grades (In Points)

930-1000 = A
900-929 = A-
870-899 = B+
830-869 = B
800-829 = B-
770-799 = C+
730-769 = C
700-729 = C-
670-699 = D+
630-669 = D
600-629 = D-
Below 600 = F

COURSE SCHEDULE

September 8: Introduction

Readings:

Course Syllabus

September 13: Analyzing Religion Part 1

Readings:

LR (Living Religions): 1-12

September 15: Analyzing Religion Part 2

Readings:

LR: 13-27

September 20: Hinduism Part 1

Readings:

LR: 72-83 (Stop before the section “Devotional Traditions”)

****NOTE – This is the Census Date****

September 22: Hinduism Part 2

Readings:

LR: 83-93 (Start on the section “Devotional Traditions and go until “The Hindu Way of Life”)

September 27: Hinduism Part 3

Readings:

LR: 93-115 (Start on the section “The Hindu Way of Life”)

October 4: Buddhism Part 1

Readings:

LR: 136-148 (Stop at the section “the spread of Buddhism”)

October 6: Buddhism Part 2

Readings:

LR: 148-163 (Start at the section “the spread of Buddhism” and read until “Pure Land: Devotion to Amitabha Buddha”)

October 11: No Class

October 13: Buddhism Part 3

Readings:

LR: 163-182 (Start at the section “Pure Land: Devotion to Amitabha Buddha” and read until “Key Terms”)

October 18: Jainism

Readings:

LR: 119-133

October 20: Jainism/Sikhism

Readings:

LR: 432-438

October 25: Sikhism

Readings:

LR: 439-452

****Note: Site Visit Papers Due****

Oct 27: Daoism

Readings:

LR: 187-205 (Stop at the section “Confucianism-the practice of virtue”)

November 1: Daoism/Confucianism

Readings:

LR: 205-210 (Start at the section “Confucianism-the practice of virtue” and stop at the section “Neo-Confucianism”)

November 3: Confucianism

Readings:

LR: 210-217 (Start at the section “Neo-Confucianism”)

****November 4: WITHDRAWAL DATE****

November 8: Shinto

Readings:

LR: 222-234 (Read up until the section “State Shinto”)

November 10: Shinto/New Religious Movements

Readings:

LR: 234-238 (Start at the section “State Shinto”); 456-463 (end at the section “Offshoots of older religions”)

November 15: New Religious Movements

Readings:

LR: 463-479 (Start at the section “Offshoots of older religions”)

November 17: New Religious Movements

Readings:

LR: 480-490

November 22: Further Readings for South Asian Religions

Readings: To be determined by class vote

Nov 24: No class

November 29: Further Readings for Southeast Asian Religions

Readings: To be determined by class vote

December 1: Review

Readings:

December 6: Review

Readings:

December 8: Final Papers Due