

**Syllabus: RS 255 Living Religions:
Ethnography and Women's Religious Experience, Spring 1999
MWF 1:50-2:50
Professor Julie Ingersoll
Office Hours in 110 Clough Hall, MWF 10:30-11:30 (and by appointment)**

Course Description:

Historically, the religions of the world have been studied as belief systems and the authority to articulate "orthodox" beliefs within those systems has been assumed to reside with the elites who have battled over the various formulations. In this approach, Christianity becomes a collection of creeds, Islam becomes the practice of the "five pillars," and so forth. More recently, however, religious traditions have been increasingly recognized as cultural systems that include beliefs, but in which beliefs may not be the central component. Issues of ritual, practice, identity, and community become more central in these approaches.

This change in emphasis has been greatly facilitated by the growing interest in the study of women's religious experience and by the growing interest in ethnography as a method of studying religion.

It will be the purpose of this course to explore "world religions" with these issues in mind. We will read ethnographic treatments of various religious communities and discuss the ways in which these particular "windows" into religious worlds give us pictures of those religious worlds that would be different if we were looking through different windows.

Required Texts:

Godly Women, Brenda Brasher
Rachels' Daughters, Rebecca Kaufman
Veiled Sentiments, Lila Abu-Lughod
Women Living Zen, Paula Kane Robinson Arai
Dharma's Daughters, Sara S. Mitter

Recommended Texts:

Judaism: a Very Short Introduction, Norman Solomon
Islam: a Very Short Introduction, Malise Ruthven
Buddhism: a Very Short Introduction, Damien Keown
Hinduism: a Very Short Introduction, Kim Knott

Course Requirements:

There will be a mid-term and a final exam as indicated in the Course Outline; these tests will not be cumulative. At the beginning of each class period, students will be permitted to hand in one 3X5 index card with notes from the day's assigned readings (cards may be handed in **only** at the beginning of the class period). At each test, I will return to each student the cards he or she has given to me, for his or her use on the test. This means that if you do your reading before class, make an outline of the assignment for the day, and hand it in on time, you will have the use of notes for taking your tests.

Students must participate in class on a daily basis and will be required to lead class discussion as part of a group on one of the occasions marked in the course outline as "Tradition Overview." It will be your responsibility (along with the members of your group) to prepare an informative and creative presentation that will introduce the specified religious tradition to the other members of our class. You may use artifacts, visual aids, and handouts as

you wish; but you may not use the entire period to show a video. Try to show the parts of the world in which this tradition is practiced a little about its rituals, its history, its beliefs, and its variety.

You will be required to conduct an ethnographic study of a religious community of your own choosing (you must choose a community other than your own). The study should produce an eight page paper that explores some issue facing the religious community. In addition to field research, the paper should draw on some supplementary documentary evidence, should include adequate bibliography and citations (in the citation form of your choice) and should demonstrate some level of sophistication and reflection about the theoretical issues involved in ethnography as we have explored them in class. At the end of the semester you will be required to make a presentation of your research to the class.

Grading:

The grade of A is given for truly outstanding work. An assignment that receives an A will be excellent in all respects, including research, reasoning, creativity, and presentation.

An A-, B+, or B is given for above average work. Assignments that are excellent in some respects but need improvement in others will be assigned one of these above average grades.

B- represents average work that meets all the requirements of the assignment.

C+, C, C- will be assigned to work that meets most of the basic requirements but that falls short of those requirements in some important respect. Specific areas of concern include inadequate research or other preparation, poor reasoning, and/or weak writing.

D papers are those that are seriously inadequate but that have some redeeming qualities. Specific problems that might lead to such an assessment include poor research and writing, but most often have to do with issues relating to the student's failure to follow the assignment.

An F will be assigned to work that is fundamentally flawed, work that is in violation of the honor code (plagiarism or cheating), or work that is not turned in or that is turned in too late to receive credit.

Course Grades will be calculated as follows:
Ethnographic paper 30%
Mid-term and Final exams 30% each
Presentations 10%

Course Guidelines:

This course requires your meaningful and active participation. This means that you must come to class prepared for our discussion of the reading materials. Your grade will depend on it. When I say that you should be "prepared" for each class, I mean that you should have completed the assignments for the day and that you should have spent some time reflecting on those assignments and their significance for the issues we are discussing. Meaningful participation means that you engage constructively with the ideas presented in those readings, by me, and by your fellow students.

Class attendance is required. After four absences your final grade will **be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade** for each additional absence. These first four absences are your "excused absences" (for illness, travel, job interviews, or watching *The Young and the Restless*). In other words, how you use them is up to you, you need not explain your choices to me. But if you use them unwisely, explanations for absences five, six, and seven are also unnecessary.

I reserve the right to adjust your final grade (up or down) based on your performance, attendance, preparedness, and so forth. When you must miss class, remember that it is your responsibility to check with me or your classmates to find out what you missed.

I rarely accept excuses for late work or schedule make up tests. If you encounter an unavoidable problem, see me as early as possible. The earlier I know about it the less it looks like poor planning and the more sympathetic I am likely to be. However, computer problems and the like are inevitable and you should plan for them. Grades on late papers will be reduced by 5 points for each twenty four hour period they are late.

Please take advantage of my office hours to get whatever help you need. Feel free to come by my office at other times as well; whenever I am there and the door is open you are welcome to drop in. If you cannot meet me at the times I have set aside, I will make arrangements to meet with you at another time. Just ask.

Finally, the Religious Studies Department has established the following inclusive language policy that applies to your work in this course:

In accordance with the editorial policy and practice with the majority of publications in our field, and consistent with the policy of the official Rhodes publications, the department of Religious Studies will require students in their written work to avoid the use of "man" (including also "men," "mankind," "family of man," "brotherhood," and the compounds "chairman," "clergyman," etc.) as a **generic** term and to use **inclusive** terms to designate both individuals and groups. [This applies to humans only and not to deity.]

Consistent with this policy, the pronoun "he" is not regarded as generic. Sound policy is to use appropriate pronouns when the antecedent is known. Recommended as a guide to good inclusive language style for both editor and author is the MLA Handbook.

Quotations are, of course, to represent the original exactly. Translations are to reflect, as precisely as possible, the translators understanding of the original text with regard to gender.

Course Outline:

WED	1/13	Introduction to the course/syllabus
FRI	1/15	Theoretical Considerations, READ: handouts
MON	1/18	NO CLASS, MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
WED	1/20	Tradition Overview: Christianity, READ: handout
FRI	1/22	READ: Brasher 1-29
MON	1/25	READ: Brasher 30-57
WED	1/27	READ: Brasher 58-90 [topics due, discuss formal proposals]
FRI	1/29	READ: Brasher 91-124
MON	2/1	READ: Brasher 125-164
WED	2/3	READ: Brasher 165-196
FRI	2/5	Tradition Overview: Judaism, Assignment TBA (student led)
MON	2/8	READ: Kaufman 1-35
WED	2/10	Formal Proposals Due, present to class and discuss
FRI	2/12	READ: Kaufman 36-85
MON	2/15	READ: Kaufman 86-112
WED	2/17	Bring sample questionnaire to class; workshop on interviewing
FRI	2/19	READ: Kaufman 113-130
MON	2/22	READ: Kaufman 131-168
WED	2/24	Tradition Overview: Islam, Assignment TBA (student led)
FRI	2/26	READ: Abu-Lughod 1-38
MON	3/1	READ: Abu-Lughod 39-77
WED	3/3	READ: Abu-Lughod 78-117
FRI	3/5	READ: Abu-Lughod 118-170
MON	3/8	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK
WED	3/10	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

FRI	3/12	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK
MON	3/15	READ: Abu-Lughod 171-207
WED	3/17	READ: Abu-Lughod 208-260
FRI	3/19	Mid-Term Exam
MON	3/22	Tradition Overview: Hinduism, Assignment TBA (student led)
WED	3/24	READ: Mitter 1-36
FRI	3/26	READ: Mitter 37-70
MON	3/29	READ: Mitter 71-98
WED	3/31	READ: Mitter 99-120
FRI	4/2	NO CLASS, GOOD FRIDAY
MON	4/5	READ Mitter 121-152 [progress reports in class]
WED	4/7	READ Mitter 153-180 [progress reports in class]
FRI	4/9	Tradition Overview: Buddhism, Assignment TBA (student led)
MON	4/12	TBA
WED	4/14	TBA
FRI	4/16	TBA
MON	4/19	TBA
WED	4/21	TBA
FRI	4/23	Presentations [term papers due]
MON	4/26	Presentations
WED	4/28	Presentations
FRI	4/30	In-class Final Exam

****Students taking this course for WS 400 Credit will write a more lengthy term paper, read an assigned feminist theory text, and meet with the instructor regularly. Any students to whom this applies should see the me to discuss these requirements.**