1-1-2005

MW 708 Introduction to World Religions

Terry C. Muck
I. COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this course, students study the origin, history, and basic tenets of each of the major religious traditions of the world--Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Students learn basic religious study skills, and engage in research projects in one or more of these religions.

II. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

III. ASSIGNMENTS
1. Class attendance, participation, quiz
2. Five written exercises (10 percent each)
3. Read the texts
4. Two exams (25 percent each)

IV. CLASS SCHEDULE
Feb. 8- What is religion? Why study religion? Noss, Chap. 1. Muck, Chap. 1

Feb. 10 - Three Views of Religion (Exercise #1 - A Three View Visit - Due March 3)
The Religious Studies Attitude; Quiz; Muck, Chaps. 2, 3

Feb. 15 - Hinduism: History
Noss, Chap. 3

Feb. 17 - Hinduism: Beliefs
Noss, Chap. 4

Feb. 22 - Buddhism: History
Noss, Chap. 6

Feb. 24 - Buddhism: Beliefs
Noss, Chap. 7

March 1 - Determining a Religious Studies Event
Muck, Chap. 4 (Exercise #2 - Isolate An Event - Due March 31)
March 3 - Sikhism
    Noss, Chap. 8

March 8 - Taoism
    Noss, Chap. 9

March 10 - Confucianism
    Noss, Chap. 10

March 15 - EXAM #1

March 17 - How To Talk To Someone About Religion
    Muck, Chap. 5 (Exercise #3 - Interview - Due April 21)

March 22, 24  Spring Break

March 29 - Roots of Western Religions: A Different View
    Noss, Chap. 2; Muck, Chap. 6

March 31 - Zoroastrianism  EXERCISE #2 DUE
    Noss, Chap. 12

April 5,7,12,14 - Independent Study: Writing Religious Summaries

April 19 - How to Compare and Contrast Religions
    Muck, Chap. 7 (Exercise #4 - Compare/Contrast - Due May 3)

April 21 - Judaism: History  EXERCISE #3 DUE
    Noss, Chap. 13

April 26 - Judaism: Beliefs and Practices
    Noss, Chap. 14

April 28 - Islam: History
    Noss, Chap. 17

May 3 - Islam: Beliefs  EXERCISE #4 DUE
    Noss, Chap. 18

May 5 - The Question of Truth
    Muck, Chap. 8

RELIGIOUS SUMMARIES DUE

May 10 - EXAM #2
V. EXERCISES

Exercise #1 - A Three View Visit. Write three, one page (typewritten, double spaced) descriptions of a religious service you have attended recently. One of the descriptions should be from the insider’s stance, one from a reporter’s stance, and one from a specialist’s stance (for the latter, choose the viewpoint of the psychologist, the sociologist, or the philosopher). See Muck, Mysterious Beyond, pp. 31-43. Due March 3.

Exercise #2 - Isolate a Religious Event. Choose a religious subject of interest to you. Using the library, write a description of the time period of the subject (its beginnings and history, and what time period your study focuses on), the context of the subject (the role it played or plays in its culture), and the function and importance of the subject in its particular religious system. Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. See Muck, Mysterious Beyond, pp. 59-69. Due March 31.

Exercise #3 - Interview. Interview a classmate or friend about a religious topic. Plan on a twenty minute interview, and then write up the results in a five page paper. Include in the paper a statement of the interview time, location, and subject, and a description both physical and biographical of the interviewee. End with a transcript or summary of the interview itself, in question and answer format.

The topic of the interview could be one of many different things. Consider the following set of questions, based on issues raised in James McClendon’s book, Biography As Theology (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990), as one possibility:

What are your main spiritual and theological images? (For example, if the subject is a Christian, you might ask her or him to consider Jesus: Is your mental image of Jesus on the cross? In Gethsemane? Preaching? etc.

How do these key images apply to your life?

How do your images apply to your religious community’s life?

What parts of your religious tradition are most important to your spiritual life? Give examples.

What parts of your tradition are not so important to your spiritual life? Example?

Feel free to try some different approach to the interview.

See Muck, Mysterious Beyond, pp. 71-81. Due April 21.

Exercise #4 - Compare and Contrast. Do a religious studies comparison along the lines described in Muck, Mysterious Beyond, pp. 97-109. Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. Due May 3.
VI. COURSE OBJECTIVES
1. Students will be able to write 300 word summaries of each of the eight religions studied during the semester, demonstrating knowledge of the history, core beliefs, and practices of each religious tradition.
2. Students will be able to do field research into a religion’s worship practice and behavior.
3. Students will be able to interview people about their religious beliefs.
4. Students will be able to compare and contrast discrete elements of religious belief systems other than their own.

VII. INDEPENDENT STUDY
During the first two weeks of April students will write 300 word summaries of each of the six religious traditions studied to this point in the course: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism. In addition they will write 300 word summaries of Judaism and Islam. Finally, after writing all eight summaries they will write a similar, 300 word summary of Christianity. All nine summaries are due on May 5.