Last updated 1 July 2023

Academic Year 2023-24
Semester 2
HKU

BSTC 1003 Introduction to Religious Studies

(6 Credits)
(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Course Teacher:
G.A. Somaratne, PhD (Northwestern, USA)
Email: soma@hku.hk
Office: Room 4.08, 4/F, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus
Centre of Buddhist Studies

Class Day and Time: Thursday 4:30 pm – 6:20 pm
Class Venue: CPD-LG.01
Class Days: (1) Jan 18, (2) Jan 25
(3) Feb 1, (4) Feb 8, (5) Feb 22, (6) Feb 29
(7) Mar 14, (8) Mar 21, (9) Mar 28
(10) Apr 11, (11) Apr 18, (12) Apr 25

[No tutorial classes]

Course Description

In this course, students survey the academic study of religion through learning its subject matter, history, and interpretive frames to understand different ways people have thought, felt, and acted as religious devotees over the course of long histories of their religions and how scholars have enhanced our knowledge of religion and individual religious traditions through multiple methodological approaches. Students learn the subject matter by examining key beliefs, practices, and historical developments of selected world religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, and Shinto, and learn the history and interpretive frameworks of studying religion by surveying the antecedents of the religious studies discipline and critically assessing its theological, sociological, psychological, and phenomenological interpretive frames.

Coursework 100%

Course Objectives

- To enable students to be familiar with beliefs, practices, and historical developments of individual religious traditions
- To enable students to distinguish academic study of religion from religious study of religion
- To enable students to be familiar with varying academic approaches to the study of religion
- To enable students to critically assess significant contributions of different scholars to enhance our knowledge of religion
- To enable students to develop their research and academic writing skills

Course Outline

Class and Date	Topic	Learning activities
Class 1 18 January 2023	**Religion and Religious Studies** We will discuss the subject matter of religious studies and the features that separate religious studies from religious education and theology	Syllabus Lecture Q & A Class activity

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Class 2 25 January 2023	**Hinduism** We will discuss Hindu religious life, scriptures, and beliefs	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 3 1 February 2023	**Jainism** We will discuss the founder's life, Jain beliefs, ethics, community, sects, and contemporary Jains	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 4 8 February 2023	**Judaism** We will discuss the history of Jews, major branches, Jewish scriptures, and holy days	Lecture Q & A Class activity Quiz 1
Class 5 22 February 2023	**Christianity** We will discuss the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, early Christians, the four Gospels, and Christian denominations	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 6 29 February 2023	**Islam** We will discuss the meanings of Islam and Muslims, Islamic beliefs and five pillars, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, denominations, and the life of Prophet Muhammad	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 7 14 March 2023	**Sigmund Freud and religion** We will discuss Freud on totem and taboo, nature and culture, and how his psychoanalytic approach to religion makes him a functionalist reductionist	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 8 21 March 2023	**Durkheim and religion** We will discuss Durkheim's theory of religion by examining his views on religion and society, sacred and profane, and basic elements of religious life	Lecture Q & A Quiz 2
Class 9 28 March 2023	**History and Phenomenology of Religion** We will discuss comparative perspective, the premises of comparative religion, and religious language common to all religious traditions	Lecture Q & A Class activity
Class 10 11 April 2023	**Mircea Eliade's theory of religion** We will discuss Eliade's humanistic approach to the study of religion by examining his views on history and phenomenology, sacred and profane, symbol and myths, and history and sacred time	Lecture Q & A Class activity

Class 11 18 April 2023	**Insider-outsider problem in the study of religion** We will discuss the topic by examining empathetic approach, explanatory approach, methodological agnosticism, and the postmodernist reflexivity	Lecture Q & A Quiz 3
Class 12 25 April 2023	**Postmodernism and religion** We will discuss postmodernism and modernism, postmodernist characteristics, contemporary religious trends, and new forms of religiosity	Lecture Q & A Class activity

Teaching and Learning Activities

1. **Pre-class readings**
   These readings prepare students to understand specific topics discussed in the weekly classes and to be familiar with the scholars and their writings in the study of religion.
2. **Class Lectures**
   The class lectures equip students with a comprehensive knowledge of diverse religious beliefs and practices and the key academic categories, concepts, theories, and methods applied by scholars in the study of religion to explore religion.
3. **Class activities and Quizzes**
   The class activities and quizzes enable students to be familiar with the key terms and concepts while also developing teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
4. **The report and the essay** provide students opportunities to develop their research and writing skills while enhancing their knowledge of world religions and the diverse approaches to studying religion.

Assessment Types and Learning Outcomes

1. **Class participation** (class attendance and class activities) 15%
   Related to each class student undertakes an individual/group activity based on the weekly lecture, lecture notes, specific terminology, or an assigned reading.

   Student with his or her signature will mark the attendance sheet circulated in each class.

2. **Three Quizzes 15%**
   - Each quiz is based on two classes.
   - Quiz 1 (given in class 5, **February 8**) covering the lecture notes of classes 3 and 4
   - Quiz 2 (given in class 8, **March 21**) covering the lecture notes of classes 6 and 7
   - Quiz 3 (given in class 11, **April 18**) covering the lecture notes of classes 9 and 10

3. **Report on a religious community** (1200 words + 12 pictures, graphics, etc) 35%

   Students, working **individually or in a group of two or three,** compile a descriptive report on a particular religious community in a particular country or locality. The report can discuss more or less the religious community's history, location, population, place/s of worship, beliefs, practices, contemporary changes, challenges, etc. However, via these discussions, the

report should **inform both the tradition and the change** of the religious community.

Students are free to design their own topic of investigation. The topic could be broad or narrow.

- Example topics could be:
  - The Christians in the Kowloon Bay region,
  - Jewish community in India,
  - Muslims in New Zealand,
  - Sunni Muslims in Egypt
  - Catholics in Sri Lanka,
  - Theravāda Buddhists in Thailand,
  - Jain community in London.
- Submission date: **31 March 2024 (Sunday)**

Grading criteria: identifies and discusses relevant aspects, asks and addresses relevant questions; uses images/graphics etc effectively; analyses, synthesises, and applies knowledge clearly and effectively; reveals the report's structure/outline and purpose in its introduction, summarizes the report's main ideas in its conclusion; follows the conventions of academic writing; uses the language with less errors in grammar and vocabulary, with no typos.

In case of a group activity, the report should accompany an extra page informing who did what - how each group member contributed towards the production of the report.

	A+/A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D+/D
Addressing the relevant aspects and questions [25%]	Identifies and defines with clarity the topic and its key elements and their interrelation and justifies well their selection for the report. The report showcases with clarity the tradition and change of the religious community presented in the report	Identifies and defines with some clarity the topic and some of its key elements and their interrelation and justifies sufficiently their selection for the report. The report shows with some clarity the tradition and change of the religious community presented in the report	Identifies and defines with less clarity the topic and some of its key elements and their interrelation but does not justify their selection for the report. The report shows with less clarity the tradition and change of the religious community presented in the report	Identifies the topic and its some subsidiary aspects and their interrelation but does not define them and does not justify their selection for the report.
Use of images / graphics etc [20%]	Effectively use the images and graphics (12 images)	Well use of images and graphics. (10-11 images)	Inadequate use of images and graphics. (7-9images)	Inadequate use of images and graphics. (4-6 images)
Understanding, Analysis, Synthesis, and Application of Knowledge [25%]	Consistent insightful and critical engagement with the theme based on comprehensive understanding of relevant concepts and theories. The analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge is consistently clear and effective.	Frequent insightful and critical engagement with issues and themes. The analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge is generally clear and effective but occasional shortcomings in understanding of relevant concepts	Overall, some insightful and critical engagement with issues and themes. The analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge is mostly clear and effective but the report in parts reveals rather superficial understanding of relevant concepts and theories.	Occasional critical engagement with key issues and themes but in general rarely goes beyond reproduction of relevant concepts and theories, impaired in parts by considerable inaccuracies.

		and theories are evident.		
Structure / Organization [15%]	Introduction states clearly what the report is about. Conclusion clearly highlights key similarities and differences and author's overall assessment. Paragraphing is appropriate at all times, with each paragraph containing a central idea which is developed throughout the paragraph with supporting details.	Introduction states what the report is about. Conclusion highlights key similarities and differences and author's overall assessment. Paragraphing is appropriate, but some paragraphs lack supporting detail or contain unrelated details.	Introduction and conclusion are included and generally capture the essence of the topic and discussion. Evidence of ability to paragraph, but some paragraphs lack a central idea or supporting detail.	Introduction and conclusion are included but do not adequately capture the essence of the topic and discussion. Ability to construct a paragraph with a central idea and supporting details is evident at times but somewhat limited.
Mechanics [15%]	The language contains very few, if any, errors in grammar and vocabulary. If slips are present, the meaning is still clear. Conventions of academic writing (e.g., citation, references, footnotes, etc.) are followed meticulously. Strictly adhere to the word-limit (1200 words)	The language is generally accurate but contains some systematic errors in complex grammar and vocabulary. Conventions of academic writing (e.g., citation, references, footnotes, etc.) are followed apart from the occasional oversight. (Roughly adhere to the word- limit (100 words more or less)	The language is mostly accurate; and errors, when they occur, are more often in complex grammar and vocabulary. Errors are distracting but the overall meaning is still intelligible. Conventions of academic writing (e.g., citation, references, footnotes, etc.) are followed but at times inconsistencies and/or errors occur. (Does not adhere to the word-limit (200 words more or less)	The language is sufficient for arguments to be understood with effort. However, the language contains frequent errors in simple and complex grammar and vocabulary that are distracting. Conventions of academic writing (e.g., citation, references, footnotes, etc.) are followed but show many inconsistencies and/or errors. Does not adhere to the word-limit (300 words more or less)

4. **Review Essay on the Study of Religion** (1500 words) 35%.
   Topic: In this academic essay, students critically reviews EITHER a particular methodological approach to the study of religion OR a particular scholar's contribution to the study of religion OR a chapter in one of the following four books:
   Eric J. Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History*;
   Robert A. Segal's *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*.
   William Paden's *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*;
   Daniel Pal's *Ten Theories of Religion.*

   Example topics:

   - Max Muller's science of religion,
   - Durkheim's contribution to the study of religion,

- Phenomenological approach to the study of religion,
- Chapter 2 of Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History*.

Your critical review should show that you have accurately captured the key points related to your topic/scholar/chapter/approach and that you have taken a critical approach. You should point out how has the scholar/the book chapter/the approach contributed to our understanding of religion/an aspect of religion/a religious theme/a methodological approach to study religion. You could also review the scholar/book chapter/approach via or in comparison to a another scholar/scholars or approach/s too. Your discussion should refer to several sources (this applies also to those who review a chapter). You could express your own assessment or opinion too.

Grading criteria: identifies and discusses relevant aspects, asks and addresses relevant questions; examines the topic from all important perspectives; arguments fit together and build a compelling case; analyses, synthesises, and applies knowledge clearly and effectively; critically engages with issues and themes based on comprehensive understanding of relevant concepts and theories; reveals the essay's structure/outline and purpose in its introduction, summarizes the essay's main ideas in its conclusion; follows the conventions of academic writing; uses the language with less errors in grammar and vocabulary, with no typos.

Word-count: 1500 words (students who adhere to the exact word-count will be given full marks in this area; cover page, footnotes, and references/ bibliography are not counted)

Number of references: Minimum 5 and no maximum limit
Submission deadline: **28 April 2024**, before 11:59 p.m.

Your final Course Grade:
Please note that we will award assignment grades based on your meeting the requirements or required standards set by the course (that is what we consider that your assignment truly deserves). However, at the end of the course, if more than 35% students of the course were to receive A range grades as final course grades, in such occasion, we will apply a curve to limit the A range grades to 35% maximum. So working to your maximum ability is required to receive a higher grade in this course.

In addition, the course grading criteria consider the details given in the following two university documents:

1. **Faculty Grade Expectations:** http://arts.hku.hk/grade_expectations.pdf

2. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:
   - http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism

Reading List

- Archer, Peter (2014) *Religion 101 – From Allah to Zen Buddhism, An Exploration of the Key People, Practices, and Beliefs that have shaped the Religions of the World*. Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media.
- Paden, William E. 1992. *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pals, Daniel (2022) *Ten Theories of Religion*. Fourth edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780190935085

- Sharpe, Eric J. (1986) *Comparative Religion: A History*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.
- Segal, Robert A. (ed.) (2006) *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Smith, Huston (1991) *The World's Religions* – The revised & updated edition of The Religions of Man. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Toropov, Brandon & Buckles, Father Luke. 2002 (second edition). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to World Religions*. Indianapolis, IN: ALPHA A Pearson Education Company. [Judaism pp. 27-54; Christianity pp. 55-86; Islam pp. 87-110; Hinduism pp. 111-134]]

A Note:

- Please check the Course Moodle Page regularly for course updates, announcements, weekly lecture notes, readings materials, class activities, attendance marking, submission of assignments, grading criteria of assignments, feedback for your submitted assignments, and recordings of classes.