

Last updated 18 July 2022

Academic Year 2022-23
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:

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Class Day and Time: Thursday 4:30 pm – 6:20 pm

Class Venue: CYCC501

Class Days: (1) Jan 19
(2) Feb 2, (3) Feb 9, (4) Feb 16, (5) Feb 23
(6) Mar 2, (7) Mar 23, (8) Mar 30
(9) Apr 6, (10) Apr 13, (11) Apr 20, (12) Apr 27

[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 accessing 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 access 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 1: Religion and Religious studies

Class 2: Hinduism

Class 3: Jainism

Class 4: Judaism

Class 5: Christianity

Class 6: Islam

Class 7: Psychological approaches to studying religion

Class 8: Sociological approaches to studying religion

Class 9: Phenomenology of Religion

Class 10: Mircea Eliade's Theory of Religion

Class 11: Insider-outsider problem in the study of religion

Class 12: Postmodernism and religion

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%

In every class student undertakes an individual/group activity based on the weekly lecture, lecture notes or an assigned reading.

2. Three Quizzes 15%

- Each quiz is based on two classes.
- Quiz 1 (given in class 5, **February 23**) covering the compulsory readings/lecture notes of classes 3 and 4
- Quiz 2 (given in class 8, **March 30**) covering the compulsory readings/lecture notes of classes 6 and 7
- Quiz 3 (given in class 11, **April 20**) covering the compulsory readings/ lecture notes of classes 9 and 10

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

- Students, working **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: **March 31**
- **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.
- The report should accompany an extra page informing who did what - how each group member contributed towards the production of the report.

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 three books:
 - Eric J. Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History*;
 - 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*.
- **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.
- **Submission deadline:** 30 April 2023

In addition, the course grading criteria take into account 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.
- 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.