INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Elon University - Spring 2005

Professor Rebecca Todd Peters
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and by appointment
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Religious Studies 101 B
Alamance 207
T-TH – 2:10 – 3:50

COURSE PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES:
Religious beliefs and practices form a core part of the identity and culture of many of the world’s people. In order to understand how and why people behave in the ways that they do, it is often beneficial to take a look at how their religious beliefs impact their identity, their ethical practice, and their decision-making. What you will be learning in this class is a set of skills that will help you engage and interact in the world as an informed global citizen. Students will be challenged to take a critical look at the world in which we live with an eye toward examining how different belief systems impact the way that people understand, live in, and respond to the world around them.

The purpose of this course is to teach students a deeper appreciation of the role that religion plays in human behavior, social conflict, and community interaction. We will focus on developing a vocabulary for understanding religious ideas and belief systems and we will examine case studies with an eye toward analyzing how different religious communities understand, assess, and respond to social conflict. Throughout the semester we will focus on two tasks - examining how different religious traditions and communities help individuals in their decision-making process and evaluating how different religious communities respond to society’s problems. Student engagement in service learning situations that deal with the social problems of poverty, homelessness, race, immigration, and violence will provide an opportunity for engaged learning in a practical setting.

Course Goals:
*to gain self-awareness of the way in which our understanding, experience, and interpretation of reality is shaped by our social location
*to gain understanding of how the social construction of reality establishes a diversity of communal perspectives
*to know and articulate why religion matters and how religious worldviews shape people
*to gain appreciation of the role that religion plays in human behavior, social conflict, and community interaction

By the end of this semester you should:
*possess a set of intellectual tools that will assist you in understanding how religious belief systems operate (1, 2)*
*be able to analyze ways in which different theological concepts work together to create a worldview (3, 4, 5)*
*be able to identify different ways in which religious ideas/belief systems impact ethical decision-making (3, 4)*
*be able to utilize your theological toolkit for assessing some of the root causes of social problems (6)*

COURSE MATERIALS:
available at bookstore:
Covington, Dennis, Salvation on Sand Mountain
Livingston, James C., Anatomy of the Sacred

one of the following:
Kozol, Jonathan. Amazing Grace
Kozol, Jonathan. Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America

*refers to categories corresponding to Bloom’s taxonomy which we will discuss during the third class period
**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**
In this course I ask you to think and learn in new and challenging ways. You are required to participate in a service learning placement and to focus on connecting what we are learning in class with what you are doing in your service placement. This approach to learning is known as “engaged learning.” I am not interested in you learning “facts” so that you can regurgitate them for me on an exam. I am interested in teaching you how to think critically about religion, about our society, and about what it means to be human. You will demonstrate your developing capacity for critical thinking primarily through your writing assignments for this course. We will use a writing portfolio in this course as the primary means of evaluation.

1) participation/attendance (150 points)
This is a discussion based course. In order for this model to work effectively, everyone must come to class prepared to discuss the articles, chapters, or case-studies that are assigned for that day. Reading is not “optional” for this course, if you are not able to demonstrate that you have read and engaged the material, you will not pass this course. At the same time, I respect that students learn in different ways and participate in class in a variety of ways. Active listening, asking questions and contributing to the conversation are all important ways in which students participate in the academic classroom. I make every effort to create different kinds of spaces and formats for students to participate (small groups, drama, writing, simulations, etc.) At the same time, it is your responsibility to share your voice, perspectives, and questions with the rest of the class – this is what it means to be a learning community. I encourage you to find ways in which you are comfortable doing so or to talk with me about new ways we might structure our conversations to facilitate your participation. Your attendance is an essential part of creating a productive learning environment. You are permitted three absences during the course of a semester. You will lose 10 points for each absence after three, if you miss 8 classes or more (that is four weeks of class) you will fail the course.

2) writing portfolio (500 points)
This course is writing intensive and you will be expected to complete frequent writing assignments for this course. These assignments should be completed before you come to class on the day that they are assigned. That means that the readings/assignments found for February 3 are to be completed by the time class begins on February 3. These materials provide our discussion material for the day and it is essential that students come to class prepared to participate in class discussions and exercises.

You will find specific instructions for each writing assignment posted on Blackboard at the conclusion of every class period. You will be given either ‘credit” or “no credit” based on your successful completion of the assignment. You will also be given written feedback on these assignments. My comments are the best way for me to communicate with you about your writing, reflection, and progress in the course. You should keep all graded work that is returned to you as you will be required to turn it in as part of your portfolio. You will be required to choose four pieces of your work that you wish to revise and resubmit as part of your portfolio to be graded for the course. Each of these four essays is worth 125 points. Your portfolio will be submitted twice during the semester, each time with two revised essays - March 15 (mid-term) and May 10. A detailed description of the writing portfolio will be distributed the first week of class.

3) service learning (350 points)
One way that student learning can be reinforced is through the practical application of ideas in a concrete setting. This course utilizes the model of service learning as a way to assist students in taking abstract, theoretical concepts and applying them in a practical, engaged way. Each student will be placed in a particular site placement for the duration of the semester. These placements will be made the second week of class and you are expected to start your service immediately. This placement will be your research laboratory for the semester. You will be expected to put the theological concepts we are learning and discussing in dialogue with the social problems that you encounter. These problems include poverty, racial discrimination, immigration, welfare, homelessness, and illiteracy among others. Every student will be placed in an organization where you will be expected to participate on a weekly basis. This placement is part of your “homework” for this class. You will be expected to log two hours of service each week at your placement for a total of 25 hours. Begin thinking immediately about which site interests you, as the placements will be made on Tuesday, February 3. Both the classroom and the site placement are meant to be complementary experiences that will aid in our learning together about religious studies this semester.

A 3-4 page paper discussing your initial impressions/experiences of your site placement is due on Feb. 24. (100 points)

A 4-5 page paper reflecting on your issue book and your placement is due on March 31. (100 points)

A 5-6 page paper analyzing the topics of oppression and justice as they relate to your placement is due May 3. (150 points)
STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:
Learning is not a passive experience, but an interactive one that requires effort on your part as a student. This classroom will function as a cooperative learning environment.

To this end, each student should:

Attend class regularly - If you miss class, you are responsible for checking with classmates to find out what you missed. The professor will not update you on the content of the class period.

Complete your own work - Elon has an honor code which is taken very seriously by this professor. If you have even the slightest question about what is appropriate collaborative work, ASK THE PROFESSOR! Failure to do so could permanently affect your academic future.

Turn in assignments on time, at the beginning of the class period when it is due - There are no exceptions, lateness will be penalized - see grading policy.

Actively participate in class – As a course focused on participatory learning it is essential for all students to contribute to the variety of classroom discussions and activities that occur throughout the semester.

Elon Academic Honor Code:
Elon students are expected to:
* refrain from cheating, including plagiarism.
* refrain from lying.
* express opinions with civility and with consideration for the opinions of others.
* respect shared intellectual property and resources.
* promote the importance of the honor code in all their interactions for the benefit of the learning community.

COURSE BUSINESS
Contact with Professor:
I enjoy meeting you during my office hours and even at other times. Feel free to talk about the course, questions you have, issues/points you do not quite understand, and anything else that is important to you. I am also very responsive to email and will make every effort to respond to your messages within 24 hours.

Blackboard:
The Blackboard site for this course is an extensive resource that will aid you in your preparation and study for this course. Each day, after class, you will be able to access a daily review sheet that includes course objectives, vocabulary words, teaching exercises from that day’s class, assignments, and handouts. The Blackboard site is also an important way for you to keep up to date on your readings and assignments. It is your responsibility to check the Blackboard site on a regular basis.

Writing papers:
Good writing skills are critical to receiving an outstanding grade in this class. While I will am not a writing professor, I will take off on grammatical and spelling mistakes that I notice. Clarity of thought, good organization and presentation of ideas, original thinking, and creativity will be required to receive an A on any formal writing assignment. I am also happy to read drafts of papers as long as I see them at least 24 hours before they are due, or to discuss your writing problems with you on an individual basis. You may also want to consider visiting the Writing Center to work on any of these areas. All papers should be turned in with your social security number identifying you rather than your name.

Writing Center Location - Belk Library, First Floor
Hours - Mondays-Thursdays, 3:30-5:30; 7:00-11:00 PM/Sunday, 7:00-11:00 PM
Grading policy:
Unless you have made a prior agreement with me, I will take off one grade level (A becomes a A-) for each day an assignment is late. Papers with an undue number of errors of punctuation, spelling, or grammar will be penalized one full letter grade (A becomes a B). **Written work will be evaluated in terms of your depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, clarity of writing, and ability to address issues raised in the class and in readings on the topic at hand.** Grades given reflect the following criteria of judgment:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, and writing style; demonstrate creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, and writing style; demonstrate creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B: Good to Very Good, thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B: Good to Very Good, thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>B: Good to Very Good, thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C: Satisfactory, meet minimum requirements of assignment but not much more</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C: Satisfactory, meet minimum requirements of assignment but not much more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C: Satisfactory, meet minimum requirements of assignment but not much more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
<td>D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 60</td>
<td>F: Failure to meet minimum requirements</td>
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COURSE OUTLINE

What is religion/religious studies?

Feb. 1 – intro to course
intro to course, syllabus, discussion of class norms and expectations

Feb. 3 – what is religion?
Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 1

Is anyone or something there?

Feb. 8 – sacred and the holy
Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 2

Feb. 10 – cosmogony
Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 8

Feb. 15 – deity
Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 7

Feb. 17 – how do people relate to the divine?
“Shona Women and the Mutupo Principle” – Tumani Nyajeka (on reserve)

Feb. 22 – religion as a way of ordering the world
The Religion Factor, ch. 5 (on reserve)

What shapes who we are?

Feb. 24 – living our lives in relation to others
“Service: Learning by Helping” – Anthony Weston (on reserve)
service learning paper #1 due

March 1 – who am I? who are we?
Religion: A Search for Meaning, ch. 1 (on reserve)

March 3 - exploring privilege
Mary Hobgood – “An Ethical Agenda for Elites” (on reserve)

What does it mean to be human?

March 8 - theological anthropology
Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 9

March 10 - exploring the relationship between the self and the sacred
The Religion Factor, ch. 6 (on reserve)
March 15 – exploring the relationship between the self and the sacred
   The Religion Factor, ch. 4 (on reserve)
   writing portfolio due – midterm assessment

March 17 - religion and gender
   The Religion Factor, ch. 10 (on reserve)

March 21- 25 – spring break

March 29 - examining epistemology
   Religion: A Search for Meaning, ch. 7 (on reserve)

March 31 - theodicy
   Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 10
   service learning paper #2 due

April 5 – Assessment Day (no class)

April 7 – soteriology
   Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 12

April 12 – case study
   Salvation on Sand Mountain, p. 1-110

April 14 – case study
   Salvation on Sand Mountain, p. 110 – 240

How do we live in relation to others?

April 19 – ethics: patterns of moral action
   Anatomy of the Sacred, ch. 11

April 21 – ethics: personal responsibility
   Religion: A Search for Meaning, ch. 5 (on reserve)

April 26 – what do we mean by justice
   Religion: A Search for Meaning, ch. 6 (on reserve)

April 28 – justice and charity
   readings (on reserve)

May 3 — pluralism
   The Religion Factor, Conclusion (on reserve)
   service learning paper #3 due

May 5 – reflections on service learning

May 10 – reflections on religion
   Final writing portfolio due