

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS  
University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

**Voyage: Spring 2015**  
**Discipline: Religious Studies**  
**RELG 1005-501 & 502: World Religions (Sections 1 & 2)**  
**Division: Lower**  
**Faculty Name: Hugh Flick**  
**Credit Hours: 3; Contact Hours: 38**

**Pre-requisites:** None

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In our global society, we interact daily with people from many different cultural backgrounds whose worldviews are shaped by a multiplicity of religious traditions. In order to communicate effectively with other people and to understand why people of different religious orientations act in certain ways, it is important that we are aware of their religious worldview. This course will explore the phenomenology of the world's major religious traditions through examination of their beliefs, sacred spaces, practices, life-cycle rituals, and festivals. Although we will discuss Christianity and Judaism, there will be an emphasis on the dominant religious traditions of the countries we will visit during the term. This is a course about questions and the variety of ways that humans have answered them.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students will gain familiarity with the answers that different cultures use to create religious world views. Students will study the core beliefs, texts, practices, festivals, life cycle rituals, and types of sacred spaces associated with different religions, especially those that are dominant in the countries visited during the term.

Students will learn the principles of interfaith dialogue.

Students will have the opportunity to observe and to record the practices and to observe and to describe sacred spaces of a variety of religious traditions.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

AUTHOR: Smith, Huston

TITLE: The World's Religions

PUBLISHER: Harper One

ISBN #: 0061660183

DATE/EDITION: 2009

AUTHOR: Van Voorst, Robert

TITLE: Anthology of World Scriptures

PUBLISHER: Wadsworth Publishing

ISBN #: 0495808792

DATE/EDITION: 2010/ 7<sup>th</sup> Edition

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE (“A” Class).**

**SECTION 1 MEETS 14:25-15:40**

**SECTION 2 MEETS 10:50-12:05**

Class 1, JANUARY 9 Introduction. What is Religion?

H. Smith, World Religions, “Point of Departure,” pp. 1-11.

F. Streng, “The Nature and Study of Religion” and “Four traditional Ways of Being Religious,” pp. 1-24 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

F. Streng, “Understanding Through Interreligious Dialogue,” pp. 235-249 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

K. Armstrong, “Wrestling with God and with Scripture,” pp. 1-6 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Class 2, JANUARY 11 Visiting Sacred Spaces: Pilgrimage

D. Eck, “Seeing the Sacred,” pp. 3-22 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

D. Eck, “Image, Temple and Pilgrimage” pp. 44-55 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Magida and Matlins. How to Be a Perfect Stranger Vol 1 pp. 52-69,156-171, 172-192 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Class 3, JANUARY 13 Religious Life: Celebration

V. Turner, “Religious Celebrations,” pp. 201-219 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Lewis, “The Firewalking Hindus of Singapore” in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Port: Hilo**

Class 4, JANUARY 16 Religious Life: Rites of Passage

V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage,” pp. 93-111 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

B. Myerhoff, “Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox,” pp. 109-135 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Class 5, JANUARY 18 Introduction to Buddhism

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, “Buddhism,” pp. 67-103.

H. Smith, World Religions, “Buddhism,” pp. 82-153

Class 6, JANUARY 22 Japanese Religious Traditions

G. Parrinder, “Japan,” pp. 353-383 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

H. B. Earhart, “Introduction to Japanese Religion” and “Persistent Themes in Japanese Religion,” pp. 1-8 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Class 7, JANUARY 24 Japanese Religious Traditions: Shinto

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, “Shinto,” pp. 184-195.

M. Molloy, “Shinto,” pp. 237-263 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Ports: Yokohama and Kobe**

**Section 1 Field Lab--Shrines of Kamakura**

**This field lab will take us to the shrine district of Kamakura to observe a variety of**

**Buddhist and Shinto shrines. Students will be able to see the inclusive nature of religious diversity in Japan. They will also be able to experience a form of multi-site pilgrimage in which Japanese pilgrims walk from shrine to shrine, often visiting holy sites of multiple religious traditions. Field Lab Paper due February 17.**

Class 8, FEBRUARY 1 Chinese Religious Traditions: Confucianism

H. Smith, World Religions, "Confucianism," pp. 154-195.

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Confucianism," pp. 143-169.

**Ports: Shanghai and Hong Kong**

Class 9, FEBRUARY 9 Chinese Religious Traditions: Taoism and Buddhism

H. Smith, World Religions, "Taoism," pp. 196-220.

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Taoism," pp. 171-183.

**Port: Ho Chi Minh City**

Class 10, FEBRUARY 17 Religious Life: Mysticism and Spiritual Discipline

F. Streng, "Personal Apprehension of a Holy Presence," pp. 25-42 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Port: Singapore**

**NOTE--We arrive in Singapore on the day of Chinese New Year.**

Class 11, FEBRUARY 22 Religious Traditions of India

D. Eck, "The Nature of the Hindu Image," pp. 23-43 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

D. Eck, "India's Tirthas: 'Crossings,'" pp. 323-344 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Port: Rangoon**

**Section 2 Field Lab—Pagodas of Rangoon**

**February 25**

**This field lab will take us to the major pagodas and shrines in Rangoon, Myanmar.**

**Students will observe the ritual activities of Buddhist tourists and pilgrims at the**

**Shwedagon Pagoda, the Sule Pagoda, the Chaukhtatgyi Paya, and the Ngahtatgyi Paya.**

**Field Lab Paper due March 16.**

Class 12, MARCH 2 Religious Traditions of India: Jainism, and Sikhism

G. Parrinder, "Jainism," pp. 241-249 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

G. Parrinder, "Sikhism," pp. 250-261 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Jainism," pp. 105-119.

R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Sikhism," pp. 120-141.

Class 13, MARCH 4 Religious Traditions of India: The Bhagavad Gita

H. Flick (trans), The Bhagavad Gita in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Port: Cochin**

Class 14, MARCH 12 Introduction to Islam  
H. Smith, World Religions, "Islam," pp. 221-257.

Class 15, MARCH 15 Midterm Examination

**Port: Port Louis**

Class 16, MARCH 17 Islamic Mysticism: Sufism  
R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Islam," pp. 297-337.

Class 17, MARCH 20 African Religious Traditions  
G. Parrinder, "Traditional Africa," pp. 60-68 in Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

Class 18, MARCH 23 Religious Traditions in South Africa and Namibia  
N. Smart, "Classical African Religions," pp. 297-311 Course Folder on Shipboard Web.

**Port: Cape Town**

Class 19, MARCH 31 Christianity  
H. Smith, World Religions, "Christianity," pp. 317-384.

**Port: Walvis Bay**

Class 20, APRIL 7 Christianity: Genesis  
R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Christianity," pp. 257-295.

Class 21, APRIL 9 Judaism  
H. Smith, World Religions, "Judaism," pp. 271-316.

Class 22, APRIL 12 Judaism  
R. Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, "Judaism," pp. 210-255.

Class 23, APRIL 15 Conclusion

Class 24, APRIL 17 Review  
\*\*All Field Assignment Journals due\*\*

**Port: Casablanca**

Class 25, APRIL 25 Final Exam

**FIELD LAB**

Field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Please do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field lab. Following

each Field Lab, students will write a 5 page paper describing the experience.

### **Section 1 Field Lab--Shrines of Kamakura**

**January 26**

**This field lab will take us to the shrine district of Kamakura to observe a variety of Buddhist and Shinto shrines. Students will be able to see the inclusive nature of religious diversity in Japan. They will also be able to experience a form of multi-site pilgrimage in which Japanese pilgrims walk from shrine to shrine, often visiting holy sites of multiple religious traditions. Field Lab Paper due February 17.**

### **Section 2 Field Lab—Pagodas of Rangoon**

**February 25**

**This field lab will take us to the major pagodas and shrines in Rangoon, Myanmar. Students will observe Buddhist tourists and pilgrims at the Shwedagon Pagoda, the Sule Pagoda, the Chaukhtatgyi Paya, and the Ngahtatgyi Paya. Field Lab Paper due March 16.**

### **FIELD WORK & FIELD ASSIGNMENT JOURNAL**

In this course, we have the opportunity to see other religions in action. Often the way that real people in real places really practice their religion is very different the way religious traditions are described in religious studies books, which are usually written by Westerners and speak in universals rather than specifics. Students are required to visit **three or more** religious sites (one of these will be the Field Lab) and keep a field journal of what you see.

Each journal entry should be 2-3 pages in length. State where you went, the date of your visit, what port it was, and what religious tradition the site is associated with. You should make field notes either during or immediately after your visit. When you adapt your notes to a journal, try to describe everything that you saw and did. Was there a festival or ritual ceremony taking place? What were people doing? How were they dressed? Were there women? Children? Did you talk to anyone? You are also encouraged to be reflective of your experience. How did it make you feel? Were you excited? Nervous? Shocked? Finally, how did your experience of this tradition compare to the description in your textbook? What was similar and what was different? At the end of the course, journal entries will be evaluated based on 1) Apparent effort in doing field work, 2) effective writing, 3) your ability to apply appropriate terms and concepts from readings and lectures to your own observations of religious practices and places of worship or reverence.

Before visiting religious sites on your own, it is highly recommended that you review *How to Be A Perfect Stranger* by Stuart Matlins and Arthur Magida, on reserve in the ship's library and in the course folder on the Shipboard web. Many religious sites will expect you to remove your shoes before entering. As a rule of thumb, do not wear shorts or any clothing that might be considered "sexy" or provocative when visiting a sacred site.

### **APPROPRIATE FIELD SITES FOR FIELD JOURNAL VISITS**

#### **YOKOHAMA**

1. Visit Kamakura where a number of important Buddhist and Shinto shrine are located.

2. Visit the Shomyo Temple and the Kanazawa-Bunko Museum. Pay special attention to the gardens, which are designed after the mandalas of Pure Land Buddhism.

## **KOBE**

1. Ikuta Jinja. This is believed to be one of the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan.
2. Nagata Jinja. This shrine is home to the kami Kotoshironush-no-Okami, who helps businesses to flourish.
3. The Hyogo Daibutsu (great Buddha). Located at the Nofuku temple, this is one of the largest Buddha's in Japan.

## **SHANGHAI**

\*\*The Chinese New Year will fall on February 19. See if you can spot any preparations underway.\*\*

1. **City God Temple. This temple was originally built to honor the local god, Jinshan. In the 1950s it was appropriated as a Taoist temple.**
2. Wen Miao, the greatest Confucian temple in Shanghai.
3. She Shan (Holy Mother of China) Cathedral. In 1863 Jesuit missionaries purchased an abandoned Buddhist monastery to create this Cathedral. It is now one of the largest Christian churches in East Asia.
4. Songjuan Mosque. Founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this is the oldest mosque in Shanghai.
5. Jade Buddha Temple. A traditional Chinese Buddhist temple that draws on both Zen and Pure Land traditions.

## **HONG KONG**

1. Wong Tai Sin Temple. This famous Taoist temple is known for its fortune telling. See if you can observe someone practicing fortune telling. This is done by burning incense and shaking a bamboo cylinder to receive a "fortune stick" that is interpreted by fortune-teller.
2. Man Mo Temple. This temple is sacred to both Buddhists and Taoists. Look for the statues of Guan Yu, the legendary general, and Wen-Chang, god of culture and literature.
3. Po Lin Monastery. This monastery contains many Buddhist relics and is also the location of the Tian Tan "Big Buddha" statue.

## **HO CHI MINH CITY**

\*\*February 19 is also the Vietnamese New Year, Tet. People will likely be returning to Ho Chi Minh City from visiting their families in the countryside. See if you can observe any lingering decorations or speak to Vietnamese about their holiday.\*\*

1. Giac Vien Pagoda. This is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in the city. It is dedicated to Kwan-Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion.
2. Visit the town of Tay Ninh, approximately 90km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City and see the Cao Dai temple. This is the “Holy See” of Cao Dai, a Vietnamese religion that combines Buddhism with Chinese and Western religions. The Cao Dai religion also reveres Thomas Jefferson as a saint! Tay Ninh is also near the Cu Chi tunnels, a popular tourist site.
3. Notre Dame Cathedral. Built in 1877, this is a French-style Cathedral made with bricks imported from Marseilles.
4. Nga Sau Church. This church is dedicated to the French saint Joan of Arc. Pay close attention to how Asian reverence for female divinities such as Kwan-Yin has rubbed off on this Catholic church.
5. Cholon Mosque. This is one of four major mosques in Ho Chi Minh City. It was built primarily for Indian immigrants.

## **SINGAPORE**

**\*\*We arrive in Singapore on the day of Chinese New Year.\*\***

1. Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple. This temple was built by Bengali laborers to honor the goddess Kali. Note the elaborate South Indian style of architecture.
2. Central Sikh Temple. Pay close attention to the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, and how it is treated by worshippers.
3. Sultan Mosque. This is one of the largest and most impressive religious structures in Singapore. The main prayer hall alone holds 5,000 people.
4. Thekcheng Choling. One of the only chances to see Tibetan Buddhist temple on this voyage. Thekcheng Choling offers free consulting in traditional Chinese medicine. See if you can observe a consultation.
5. Armenian Church. One of the only chances to see an Orthodox Church on this voyage. This is the oldest Christian Church in Singapore, built for a sizable community of Armenian immigrants.

## **RANGOON (Yangon)**

1. Shwedagon Pagoda. This is the biggest tourist attraction in the city. It's big, it's covered in gold, and Rudyard Kipling wrote about it. Locals claim the pagoda has stood for 2600 years although historians dispute this. When you visit try to look beyond the shiny exterior. This pagoda has four relics believed to have belonged to ancient Buddhas who lived before Siddhartha Gautama. The temple also has “planetary posts” where visitors can make offerings depending on their horoscope. Finally, the temple has become a site for political protest.

There is a lot going on here. Be a good anthropologist and see what you can pick up.

2. Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue. This is the only synagogue in all of Myanmar. The synagogue was built at the end of the nineteenth century when British colonialism brought Jews from Baghdad and Cochi to Myanmar. Today there are only a handful of Jews living in Myanmar, but the synagogue represents an interesting moment in the history of global Judaism.

3. Kyai Hti Yo Pagoda (Golden Rock). This site is about 160km outside of Rangoon. It is an enormous, precariously balanced rock covered in gold. It is said that anyone who sees it will immediately convert to Buddhism. In December/January this is the site of important Buddhist rituals. You can either hike 11km from the base camp or take a car to within a mile of the summit.

4. Kaba Aye Pagoda. This site is 11km north of Yangon. It features a large cave which is a replica of the cave in India where the first Buddhist council was convened. This should be very different from the larger and busier pagodas of the city.

## **COCHIN**

1. Paradesi Synagogue. This synagogue was originally built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the so-called Malabar Jews or Cochin Jews. While visiting the synagogue, explore the neighboring area known as “Jew town” where several other synagogues are currently in use.

2. St. Francis Church. This Church was built by the Portuguese in 1503. This church is the original burial site of Vasco de Gama.

3. Cheraman Juma Masjid. This is claimed to be the oldest mosque in India. There are many miraculous stories associated with mosques and locals of many faiths visit here. Young children are often brought here for a special ceremony signaling that they are ready to begin learning to read. There is also a mysterious lamp here said to be a thousand years old which Hindus bring offerings of oil. This is an interesting chance to observe a very open Muslim center.

4. Ernakulam Shiva Temple. This temple is dedicated to Shiva and according to legend, was built by the hero Arjuna. Surrounding the main temple are shrines to Rama, Hanuman, and other deities. Try to observe the priests offering their daily puja offerings. This temple also has an active schedule of “temple arts” including classical dance, theater, and musical concerts.

5. Chottanikkara Temple. This is a temple to Devi, the great goddess. The goddess is worshipped in three different forms at different times of the day. The temple maintains a daily schedule of pooja offerings, which begin at 4 am and end at 8:45pm. People suffering from mental illnesses are also brought to this temple for healing.

## **PORT LOUIS**

1. St. Croix Church and Pere Laval’s Shrine. Father Pere Jacques-Desire Laval was sent to



Mauritius as a missionary and is deeply beloved by the people. Every year pilgrims flock to this site on the anniversary of his death. Many believe the shrine has healing powers.

2. The Jummah Mosque. This mosque has been expanded several times, primarily by artisans from India. It also contains a madrassah

3. Seek out several Chinese pagodas and Tamil Hindu temples in Port Louis.

### **CAPE TOWN**

1. Tour Bo-Kaap, Cape Town's Muslim neighborhood. Many Muslims are descended from slaves brought here by the Dutch from North Africa, Malaysia, and India. While you are there, visit the Bo-Kaap museum.

2. South African Jewish Museum. This museum was opened in 2000 by Nelson Mandela. It links to the oldest synagogue in South Africa.

3. St. George's Cathedral. This Anglican Cathedral is over a century old. The archbishop Desmond Tutu regularly held services here before his retirement.

### **TEMA (ACCRA)**

1. Take an overnight trip to the Larabanga Mosque in Larabanga. This is a Sudanese style mosque and is uniquely African.

2. The Hindu Monastery of Africa. This temple was created by Sindhi refugees who fled to Ghana after the partition of India in 1947.

3. Mormon Temple. This temple was dedicated in 2004 as an African base for Mormon missionaries.

World religions is a category used in the study of religion to demarcate the five—and in some cases six—largest and most internationally widespread religious movements. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism are always included in the list, being known as the "Big Five". Some scholars also include another religion, such as Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, or the Bahá'í Faith, in the category. These are often juxtaposed against other categories, such as "indigenous religions" and "new religious movements". Zoroastrianism is perhaps the world's oldest monotheistic religion, founded by the Persian prophet Zoroaster. It is first recorded in the 500s BCE, but many historians believe it was founded as early as the 900s BCE. Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion of the vast Achaemenid Empire of Persia, and it continued to play an important part in the region until the ascent of Islam in the 700s CE. Many credit Zoroastrianism with affecting the development of other major religions. China is the country with the world's largest 'atheist/agnostic' population (grey) as well as worshippers of 'other' religions (yellow). The Americas are (mostly) solidly Christian. But the map—based on figures from the World Religion Database (behind a paywall)—also allows for some more detailed observations. Yes, the United States is majority Christian, but the atheist/agnostic share of its population alone is bigger than the total population of most other countries, in the Americas and elsewhere.