California State University, Chico  
Department of Religious Studies  

RELS 482-01, Religious Studies Seminar, Fall 2014  

Much Ado About Nothing: Mysticism in Cross-Cultural Perspective  

Instructor: Daniel Veidlinger  
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Email: dveidlinger@csuchico.edu  
Office hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:30 and Wednesdays 12:00 – 2:00  
Class days/time: Wednesdays 6-8:50 PM  
Classroom: THMA 210  
Prerequisites:  

Course Usage of Blackboard Vista  

Copies of the course syllabus and major assignments may be found on Vista. You are responsible for regularly checking the online resources, which is accessed through the portal at http://portal.csuchico.edu.  

Course Description and Goals  

Mysticism is an important aspect of many religions that manifests in a variety of forms both across religions and within a given tradition. There is no one “proper” definition of the mystical way, which can range from magical or otherwise mysterious practices to the highest peaks of abstract philosophizing. For the purposes of this course, we will focus on mysticism as the idea that there is a divine ground of all being from which everything arises and that the individual can directly experience a state of union or other relationship with this force. This concept is found in religions around the world which often have not had any communication with each other until modern times.
We will examine philosophical, psychological and sociological approaches to the question of whether there is or even could be an ineffable phenomenon called “the mystic experience.” We will look at how this kind of experience becomes institutionalized in some religions, such as through monasticism, and will examine the response of the normative religious traditions within Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Taoism to this mode of being religious. We will use both secondary sources as well as primary texts penned by mystics from different religions throughout the ages.

**Course Content Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Name several major mystical writers in each of the main religious traditions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam
2. Name several major scholars of religion and outline their approaches to mysticism
3. Understand the sometimes difficult relationship between the mystical and normative traditions in the main religions of the world
4. Think critically about the role played by language in the shaping of both personal experience and the way it is expressed to others
5. Understand how personal religious experience has informed people’s religious views

**Required Texts/Readings**

The following texts are available at the AS Bookstore in the BMU:


There will also be a few selected readings that I will post electronically on the course website.

**Classroom Protocol**

This is a seminar course so active participation is crucial. You will be expected to have done all the readings for that session before class begins. Please arrive on time with cellphones off and with the books that we will be discussing that day. Please ask any questions that you have because the more discussion we have in class, the better the experience will be.
respectful of other students in the class. We will have a 10 minute break in the middle of each class.

**Dropping and Adding**

You are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. found [http://www.csuchico.edu/catalog/](http://www.csuchico.edu/catalog/). You should be aware of the new deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

**Assignments and Grading Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Class Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Six two-page reports worth 5% each that summarize the readings for that session. You may choose which six sessions to report on, but please say something about each reading assigned for that session.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Each student will be required to prepare an in-class presentation on the readings for one session to which you will be assigned at the beginning of the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>In-class mid-term exam written in a Blue Exam Book on October 29th.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Final paper on a topic that you choose in consultation with the professor. The paper should be at least 15 pages long with a proper bibliography and notes. Two Page outline Due November 19. Full Paper Due Dec 10.</td>
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The final Grade calculations are as follows:

- **A** > 92%
- A- 90 – 92 %
- B+ 87 – 89 %
- B 83 – 86 %
- B- 80 - 82 %
- C+ 77 – 79 %
- C 73 – 76 %
- C- 70 – 72 %
- D+ 65 – 69 %
- D 60 - 64 %
- F < 60 %

**University Policies and Campus Resources**

**Academic integrity**

Students are expected to be familiar with the University’s Academic Integrity Policy. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at California State

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University, Chico, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity and other resources related to student conduct can be found at: http://www.csuchico.edu/sjd/sja.shtml. The policy for the Religious Studies Department is posted on the Vista site for this course.

NOTE: IF YOU CHEAT ON AN EXAM OR PLAGIARIZE ON A PAPER YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DSS Office (Disability Support Services) to establish a record of their disability.

Special accommodations for exams require ample notice to the testing office and must be submitted to the instructor well in advance of the exam date.

Student Computing

Computer labs for student use are available http://www.csuchico.edu/stcp located on the 1st floor of the Merriam Library Rm 116 and 450, Tehama Hall Rm.131 and the BMU Rm 301.

Student Services

Student services are designed to assist students in the development of their full academic potential and to motivate them to become self-directed learners. Students can find support for services such as skills assessment, individual or group tutorials, subject advising, learning assistance, summer academic preparation and basic skills development. Student services information can be found at: http://www.csuchico.edu/5.-studentservices.html.

University Writing Center

The CSU, Chico writing center is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the University Writing Center. Our writing specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. The Writing Center information can be found online at http://www.csuchico.edu/uwc.

Student Learning Center

The mission of the Student Learning Center (SLC) is to provide services that will assist CSU, Chico students to become independent learners. The SLC prepares and supports students in their college course work by offering a variety of programs and resources to meet student needs. The SLC facilitates the academic transition and retention of students from high schools and community colleges by providing study strategy information, content subject tutoring, and supplemental instruction. The SLC is online at http://www.csuchico.edu/slc/.

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## RELS 482-01 Course Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</th>
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| 1    | Aug 27 | Topic: What is Mysticism?  
Reading: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism) |
| 2    | Sept 3 | Readings: Underhill Part I Chapter 1 – “The Point of Departure”  
Underhill Part I Chapter 3 - “Mysticism and Psychology”  
| 3    | Sept 10| Topic: What are the various forms of Mysticism?  
Readings:  William James “Mysticism” (available on the BB Learn course website)  
Underhill, Chapter 4 – “The Characteristics of Mysticism” |
| 4    | Sept 17| Topic: Pantheism, Monism, Dualism  
Readings:  Stace Chapter 4 [Online: [http://www.cruzetech.info/wudhi/mysticism/ws/wts-mp%20-%204.htm](http://www.cruzetech.info/wudhi/mysticism/ws/wts-mp%20-%204.htm)] |
| 5    | Sept 24| Topic : Mystical Strains within Buddhism.  
Readings:  Harvey, “Buddhism: The Way of Clarity”  
(Griffiths, “Pure Consciousness in Indian Buddhism” in Forman p. 71)  
Stace “Hinayana Buddhist Mysticism”[Online on Learn]  
Smart, “The Purification of Consciousness and the Negative Path.”  
In Katz, p.117. |
| 6    | Oct. 1 | Topic: Is there an experience that is common to most mystics? How is that experience assimilated into religious traditions?  
Readings: Paper “The Mystic Experience” (entire book) |
| 7    | Oct. 8 | Topic: How does Mysticism fit into traditional religion? A number of scholars hold that it can only be understood within its particular religious context.  
<p>| 8    | Oct 15 | Topic: Scholarly responses to Katz &amp; co. claiming that there is an independent experience that is adapted into particular religions. |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dec 3</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING BREAK NO CLASSES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dec 10</td>
<td>Topic: Modern Mysticism and Technology. Do scientific advances such as the Internet and Brain Imaging promote or subvert Mysticism? Readings: Techgnosis, Newberg and D’Aquili [ online].</td>
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