

## **Religious Studies 332: World Religions and Global Issues Spring 2007**

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Office hrs: M 3-5, W 2-4 and by appt.

Sections 70/72 TTh 2-3:15 MLIB 027B; Section 2 TTh 11-12:15 Butte 329

### **Course content and goals:**

This course is designed to introduce a number of important religious traditions of the world, and to address three major global issues: the environment; justice and human rights, and violence and social conflict. The focus throughout is on the ethical questions raised by these global issues, and on the perspectives on human life and meaning that the religious traditions bring to bear on them. Some of the aims of this course are the following:

1. to help you to become more reflective, better informed, to understand more fully significant contemporary issues,
2. to increase your ability to participate in the human community of ideas and practices, to think constructively in making a contribution to that community,
3. to increase your capacities for thought, feeling, and imagination, and the skills that put these into practice—oral and written communication, critical thinking, problem solving.

In addition, students should gain from this class these specific things:

1. an introduction to major world religions, in particular to their conceptions of human value, social life, and the natural world.
2. an increased understanding of important global issues and the challenges they pose to our common future,
3. an appreciation of the distinctive insights the religious traditions may offer to the task of responsibly and effectively facing these global problems, and
4. a sensitivity to intercultural and ethnic relations in the United States as a context for local engagement with global issues.

### **General Education Upper Division Thematic:**

RS 332 is the foundational course in the nine unit Global Issues upper division thematic component of the general education program. Students enter theme study after completing at least 45 semester units, and all of their Core GE requirements. RS 332 is grounded in the humanities and fine arts area but is designed to integrate material from the natural and social sciences as well. It aims to contribute to the traditional role of the university in developing broadly educated people well-prepared for the challenges of civic, personal, and professional life. As a UDT course, this study aims in particular to cultivate the ability to address global issues from a variety of perspectives, in particular those arising from humanities and social sciences. Such a study will seek to address both the value assumptions that underlie these approaches, and the practical challenges involved in seeking to integrate them.

### **General Education cultural diversity status:**

RS 332 satisfies the GE ethnic requirement in its focus on intercultural relations and the cultural experience of a number of important minority communities in the United States.

### **Course requirements and student responsibilities**

**1. Attendance:** On campus students will be expected to attend all classes and roll will be taken. More than three unexcused absences will result in reduction of your grade.

**2. Students with certified disabilities:** Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. If you have a documented disability that may require particular accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for coordination and support. DSS is located in University Center building, behind Kendall Hall. The DSS phone number is 898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 898-4411. Visit the DSS website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>

**3. Adding and Dropping:** Add the course online during the first two weeks, or through submitting a Change of Program form [COP] with faculty signature to MLIB 180 during the third and fourth weeks. Dropping the course follows the same pattern; remember that after the fourth week, you will need a “serious and compelling reason” [see university catalogue p. 152] and signatures of the instructor, department chair, and dean, to drop a class. You are responsible for these steps; you will not be automatically dropped for not attending.

**4. Academic honesty:** Consult with me if you have any questions about acceptable practices in regard to academic integrity. Page 47 in the university catalogue reviews some of the common instances where observing academic honesty is required. The fundamental principle is that you do not misrepresent authorship in the work that you submit, nor do you offer your work to another to do so. Always follow good practice in crediting sources and submitting work. Take this responsibility seriously; the consequences of disregarding it are significant both personally and academically. The consequence of blatant plagiarism [as distinguished from honest errors in proper forms of attribution, for example] will be an F in the course, and a report will be provided to Student Judicial Affairs for further action. The weight of this consequence reflects the commitment of our department to actively maintain practices of integrity in our courses. Please see the department policy and tutorial at <http://www.csuchico.edu/rs/resources.html>

**5. Course work, papers, and tests:**

There are two essays, two tests, and one group work activity required. Each of these is worth 20% of the grade. Below are brief descriptions and dates due:

1. Environment essay: Select one of the three collective traditions [Abrahamic, Asian, Indigenous] and explore its relationship to the environmental issue in the following ways: a—propose reasons why you would characterize the tradition as anthropocentric, biocentric, or theocentric, b- describe one value or perspective the tradition can contribute to solving the environmental challenges ahead, and c- suggest one aspect of the religious perspective that might stand in the way of the new directions that need to be taken. [3-5 pages, due February 15 in class.]

2. Human rights and global economy essay: Construct a position paper in which you offer a proposal for solving the problem of global poverty. Rely on one of the essays in Knitter to root that proposal in one of the six religious traditions whose perspectives are discussed in the chapters assigned. Your proposal should be based on the religious tradition as it is reviewed in that essay, and it should be both specific and practical. [3-5 pages, due March 27 in class.]

3. Mid term test: an objective test on the list of terms provided in the study guide on the world religions. [on-line students mid-term will be essay form]

4. Final exam: an essay exam on the issues explored in the final section of the course: war and social conflict in the world religions, and specifically in Sri Lanka and the Middle East.

5. Group work: [see supplementary section at the end of the syllabus]

a- on-campus students: participation in a group presentation on the Middle East or Sri Lanka; advocacy and negotiation will be part of the classroom process. Each student will submit a one-page outline of their own contribution, listing at least three sources consulted. This is a brief document but should contain some detail nevertheless.

b. on-line students: Discussion groups will be formed in the first two weeks of the term. Discussion group members will submit weekly responses to set questions, beginning week three. Groups will organize themselves such that each student will be responsible once during the term for an essay summary and personal comment on one of the weekly discussions [3-4 pages].

In addition to these requirements, there are two other participation requirements which are not graded, but are necessary for satisfactory completion of the course. Inadequate completion of these will result in a reduction of grade: [see supplementary section at the end of the syllabus]

a. attendance: [More than two unexcused absences will reduce the grade]

b. cultural events: attendance at four cultural events, with a single paragraph write-up of each submitted during the final week [Your writeup will thus total 2 pages or so].

### **6. Additional student responsibilities:**

1. Students with cell phones will please turn them off during the class session to avoid disturbance of the class.
2. Please be sure to arrange your travel plans to permit attendance of all class sessions; do not plan early departures before holidays.
3. If you find you have a final exam conflict, or you have 3 exams scheduled for the same day, please see me to discuss a rescheduling of your final.
4. A civil and mutually respectful learning community is the responsibility of all of us; please give your full attention to the class session and participate in discussion with a willingness to listen to and appreciate diverse perspectives and personalities.

### **Resources:** [first four available at the campus bookstore]

1. Smith, The World's Religions
2. Knitter, Subverting Greed
3. Smith-Christopher, Subverting Hatred
4. Thompson, Justice and Peace
5. Electronic reserve readings as listed in lectures and readings calendar

### **A note on the readings:**

Expect to spend 2-4 hours preparing for each of our two weekly meetings. If this is more than you are able to commit to this class, you should reconsider your enrollment in it, or consult with me about your situation. This is an honest forewarning that this course must be given its due as you schedule your time and commitments. I will be doing my

best to present the material clearly, but without effort on your part, the range and diversity of material will be difficult for you to integrate-- that is, you'll be lost.

Stay up with your reading—the lectures will assume you are familiar with the assigned readings and video clips. Some assigned readings are on electronic reserve. Electronic reserve documents are available for downloading and printing at the CSUC library: From the CSUC homepage, select library, then reserve materials, then electronic reserve, then electronic reserves and course materials [at this window you can choose to download adobe acrobat if you don't have it on your computer], then search for RS 332—typing it into the Eres Quicksearch box is an easy route. You will need a course access code: for spring 2007, this is VHXY5. Use a library computer if you need to.

### **Grading:**

All submitted work will receive a percentage mark; these marks when weighted according to the schedule above will translate into final letter grades according to the following scheme:

93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-

and so on, to the mark of 60, which is the lowest passing grade.

### **Course lectures and readings:**

Week one [Jan. 22-26]

1. Introduction to the course  
Thoughts on course themes, issues, and structure
2. World religions/global issues: some perspectives  
[single page reflection paper brought to class, topic TBA]

### **Section one: World religions and the environment**

Week two [Jan. 29-Feb. 2]

3. Introduction to global issue #1: the environment  
[Rockefeller, Spirit and Nature, pp. 141-147; 155-171 ER ]
4. Abrahamic religions and the environment  
[Pedersen, pp. 262-70 in Twiss and Grelle, Explorations in Global Ethics, ER]

Week three [Feb. 5-9]

5. Asian religions and the environment  
[Kinsley, Ecology and Religion, pp 64-67; 68-74 ER]
6. Indigenous traditions and the environment  
[Shenandoah, pp. 17-23 in Rockefeller, Spirit and Nature, ER; and JE Brown, The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian pp. 33-40 ER]

Week four [Feb. 12-16]

7. Contemporary environmental issue: global warming

[L. Brown, Plan B, chapters 4 and 9 ER, and Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 80-90]

8. Panel discussion: religious and secular responses to global warming

[Essay #1 due in class]

### **Section two: World Religions, human rights, and the global economy**

Week five [Feb. 19-23]

9. Introduction to human rights and the global economy

[Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 29-37; also, explore the following web site:

[www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)]

10. Abrahamic religions: some relevant themes

[Review the following sections of the Smith chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, pp. 317-335; 271-293; 221-235; 246-257 ]

Week six [Feb. 26-Mar. 2]

11. Abrahamic religions and the global economy I

[For this and the following lecture, review chapters 5,6, and 7 in Knitter, Subverting Greed]

12. Abrahamic religions and the global economy II

[Readings as above]

Week seven [Mar. 5-9]

13. Asian religions: some relevant themes

[Review the following sections of the Smith chapters on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism: pp. 12-22; 50-59; 82-103; 154-177 ]

14. Asian religions and the global economy I

[For this and the following lecture, review chapters 2,3,and 4 of Knitter, Subverting Greed]

Week eight [Mar. 12-16]

15. Asian religions and the global economy II

[Readings as above]

16. Contemporary issue in the global economy: poverty

[Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 38-55]

### **Spring Break March 19-23**

Week nine [Mar. 26-30]

17. Panel discussion: religious and secular responses to poverty

[Essay #2 due in class]

18. Mid term test

### **Section three: World religions, social conflict, and the problem of war**

Week ten [Ap. 2-6]

19. Introduction to social conflict and the problem of war

[Thompson, Justice and Peace pp. 138-147; J. Hersey, Hiroshima, ch. One ER; C. Hedges, War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning, pp. 20-24; 39-42 ER]

20. Christianity, war and peace

[National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, pp. 20-26; Smith-Christopher, Subverting Hatred, pp. 141-160 ]

Week eleven: [Ap. 9-13]

21. Case Study I: Global issues in Sri Lanka, orientation and overview

[Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 132-138; M.Young, "Sri Lanka's Long War," foreignpolicy-infocus.org and ER]

22. Hinduism and the problem of violence

[Smith-Christopher pp. 67-84: Shastri and Shastri, *Ahimsa and the Unity of All Things: A Hindu View of Nonviolence*]

Week twelve: [Ap. 16-20]

23. Buddhism and the problem of violence

[Smith-Christopher pp. 25-47: Queen, *The Peace Wheel: Nonviolent Activism in the Buddhist Tradition*]

24. Sri Lanka Group presentations

Week thirteen: [Ap. 23-27]

25. Sri Lanka discussions

26. Case Study II: Global issues in the Middle East, orientation and overview

[Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 121-126; Shipler, "Arab and Jew," ER, Gerner, "History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," ER]

Week fourteen [Ap. 30-May 4]

27. Judaism and the problem of violence

[Smith-Christopher pp. 115-139: Milgrom, "*Let Your Love for Me Vanquish your Hatred for Him*": *Nonviolence and Modern Judaism*]

28. Islam and the problem of violence

[Smith-Christopher pp. 95-113: Harris, *Nonviolence in Islam: The Alternative Community Tradition*]

Week fifteen [May 7-11] [*cultural events due this week*]

29. Middle East Group presentations and discussion: Global issues in the Middle East

[Individual research]

[*Cultural events write-up due*]

30. Middle East discussions: world religions, justice and peace

[Thompson, Justice and Peace, pp. 175-185]

**Finals week:** Week of May 14-18.

*Final exam hours: Section 2 Thursday, 10-12 p.m. Section 70 Thursday 12-2, in the classrooms.*

**Supplements to syllabus:**

## **I. Group work supplement:**

Your work in this course will involve participation in a group activity or project, as described below:

**1. on-campus students:** An important feature of this course is the focus, in our discussion of world religions and global issues, on two case studies. In the final section of the course, we will address two conflict areas in which religion and global issues interact: the conflict in Sri Lanka and the conflict in the Middle East. Each student will join a group which will research and present to the class, aspects of one of these conflicts. Students will be organized in groups of about six; each group will study one side of one of the conflicts. Each student will take responsibility for an aspect of the presentation; the following are important dimensions to be covered:

- a. a brief history of the conflict
- b. reference to religious elements of the conflict
- c. human rights and social justice issues
- d. the role of violence and its alternatives
- e. recent history of efforts to resolve the conflict, and difficulties encountered
- f. a proposal for a solution to the conflict

The presentation should be 20-25 minutes long, include oral contributions from all group members, and should include a single page outline on an overhead or computer to offer guidance for the class. Each group member will prepare a single sheet describing their contributions to the group's work, referring to at least three sources consulted in your work.

In approaching your research, rely on the library data bases, the web sites suggested below, and on your general research skills to turn up additional useful information. You will find that each of these conflicts involves certain common elements: an ethnic/religious minority wanting autonomy; the use of violence and human rights violations; religions that serve both to intensify and to moderate the conflict; a burdensome colonial heritage and a complex history, efforts by international mediators, involvement of world powers and regional neighbors, related environmental issues, tensions of poverty and wealth, and so on. You are encouraged to connect your work with the previous study in this and other courses: You may find Thompson's background discussions useful, and your study of the four religions involved here should contribute in substantial ways.

General Library resources: consult the reference librarian on use of search systems: consider Academic Search, Ethnic News Watch, Lexis Nexis Academic and PAIS. Among reference resources, consider: Atlas of World's Religions, Handbook of the Modern World: Asia and the Pacific; Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East, Political Handbook of the World, Europa World Year Book.

### **Some Web sites for Sri Lanka dispute:**

[www.infolanka.com/org](http://www.infolanka.com/org)

General coverage of ethnic conflict and human rights issues in Sri Lanka in particular in the last decade.

[www.eelam.com](http://www.eelam.com)

The tamil tigers/LTTE homepage. News, accent on the freedom struggle, media sources, analysis

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/world/south\\_asia](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/world/south_asia)

[www.tamilnet.com](http://www.tamilnet.com)

[www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/briefs/vol5/](http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/briefs/vol5/)

<http://hrw.org/reports/world/srilanka>

[www.priu.gov.lk](http://www.priu.gov.lk) the government of sri lanka home. See the human rights section

[www.uthr.org](http://www.uthr.org) site of the university teachers for human rights in Jaffna

[www.spur.asn.au](http://www.spur.asn.au)

[www.bee.lk](http://www.bee.lk)

[www.sarvodaya.org](http://www.sarvodaya.org)

<http://nvpf.org/np/english/srilanka/slpintro.asp.html>

### **Some Web sites for Middle East dispute:**

[www.fmep.org](http://www.fmep.org)

[www.middleeastnews.com](http://www.middleeastnews.com)

[www.faithandvalues.com/church](http://www.faithandvalues.com/church)

[www.merip.org](http://www.merip.org)

[www.lawsociety.org](http://www.lawsociety.org) see Palestinian section: human rights and environment

[www.israel.org/mfa/home.asp](http://www.israel.org/mfa/home.asp) Israeli foreign affairs site; see peace process link

[www.hejleh.com/countries/palestine.html](http://www.hejleh.com/countries/palestine.html) various Palestinian links

[www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org) churches for Middle East peace

[www.mideastfacts.com](http://www.mideastfacts.com) site sympathetic to Palestinian position

[www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org) site on environmental problems

[www.electronicintifada.org](http://www.electronicintifada.org)

see also Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sites.

## **2. on-line students:**

The group work component for on-line students will be satisfied by regular participation in a discussion group, which uses the Bulletin Board feature of the WebCT system. You will join a group of 6-8 other students and contribute your reflections on a particular question [which I will post on Tuesday] at some time during each week, at the latest by midnight Friday. You will have the opportunity to read what other students in your group have written, and respond to their views. You may visit the Bulletin Board more than once, of course, as the discussion develops, but your minimum requirement is a single visitation and comment. One member of your group will consider the submitted comments over the weekend and develop a short essay reviewing and reflecting on the discussion, to be turned in to me by Tuesday the following week. This will be a

rotating responsibility, and your group will organize its own calendar of this responsibility.

This essay [3-4 pages in length] should:

- a- list the students who contributed to the online discussion,
- b- briefly review the range of views expressed, and then
- c- articulate the response and position of the writer to the question and the views expressed.

Participation in this bulletin board project satisfies the group project section of the course; your regular weekly contributions and your review essay are the components. Be careful not to overlook this responsibility; each week's contribution will be evaluated and credited to this portion of the course grade.

Discussion groups will be set up in the first two weeks of the course, and the discussions will begin in week three. Your group will have as its first task the setting of the schedule of respondents: each of you will take one week during the term to write the summary essay. I will pose the discussion question on Tuesday of each week, and post it on WebCT in the "lessons and materials" section.

## **II. General participation supplement:**

The class participation credit in this course will be satisfied by the following :

1. attendance in class, and
  2. attendance at 4 cultural events
- a. Class attendance: attendance is required for full participation in the course, not only for the material that is presented in lecture and discussion, but to be a contributing member of the process of exploration and critical discussion that is the core of the course. If you are absent more than two times, your grade will be reduced accordingly. Speak to me in advance, if possible, if an unavoidable conflict arises, to receive an excused absence. If the excuse is satisfactory, you can write a brief summary [two pages] of the reading for the date missed, to satisfy the attendance requirement.
- b. Cultural events: Cultural events are an extension of the classroom experience into the larger university. Find opportunities to attend lectures, concerts, art exhibits, and so on that connect in some way to the broad questions that are the concern of this course. Check out the CSUC homepage for a calendar of campus events, and watch bulletin boards for flyers advertising lecture series. If you see a good prospect, announce it in class so that other students are aware of it. Invite a classmate to attend with you to add a social dimension. Enjoy yourself. Make some brief notes after the event, and at the end of the semester hand in a paragraph on each of your events, noting the subject and what

connection you saw between the event and the course. This should constitute only two pages total for the four events.

You may, for one of your four, view a film or video—PBS offers some of interest, with related web sites. You may also satisfy one of these by attending a religious event or service in a tradition you are unfamiliar with [i.e. attending your own church service doesn't count]. Here are some general suggestions for this course requirement:

1. Check out the events and calendars link on the CSUC website for what's scheduled for campus. This is a good resource for lectures, art exhibits, films, and so on.
2. Forum series sponsored by anthropology [ usually Thursday's 4 p.m.] and International Studies [ usually Tuesdays at 4 p.m.] often have subjects related to our course. CAPE, the center for applied professional ethics, offers forum discussions on contemporary issues.
3. PBS web site often lists programs and additional background information on relevant topics: [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).
4. Films you might rent and watch—preferably with other students for discussion—include The Mission, Cry the Beloved Country, Gandhi, Black Robe, Black Orpheus, Romero, the Apostle, An Inconvenient Truth. University film series offers many remarkable films.
5. Local religious communities include Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and others—see me if you need some information.