SOC 5970-301: Special Topics/Seminar – Religion and Society

Course Description:
The course will serve as an introduction to the major religions of the world, giving a sense of their histories, the societies of which they are part, and the institutions with which they interface, such as the economy, the polity, family and the law. Religious traditions considered include: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and indigenous traditions.

Class Dates, Location and Hours:
- Dates: April 19 – 25, 2020
- Location: Hangar 2, Room 202, Hickam AFB, Hawaii.
- Hours: Sunday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Monday - Friday 6:00-10:00 p.m.; Saturday 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
- Last day to enroll or drop without penalty: March 21, 2020

Site Director:
Email: aphickam@ou.edu. Phone: 808-449-6364 (DSN & Commercial).

Professor Contact Information:
- Course Professor: Thomas J. Burns, Ph.D.
- Mailing Address: OU Dept. of Sociology
  331 KH
  Norman, OK 73019
- Telephone Number: (405) 3251751
- E-mail Address: tburns@ou.edu
- Professor availability: The professor will be available via email to students before and after the class sessions. On-site office hours are half an hour before and after each class session, by appointment.

Textbook(s) and Instructional Materials:
Student materials are available at the OU Bookstore Website at https://ou.textbookx.com/institutional/index.php. There is no longer a physical bookstore, the store will remain, but textbooks will not be stocked. The website has book selling, renting, buying, returning, and order tracking capabilities. If you need help with an order, or if you have any questions contact the toll-free phone at 1-(855)-790-6637, agents are available from 9a – 5p (EST) Monday – Friday. For more information or questions about textbooks, feel free to contact apsyllabi@ou.edu. Text prices are available online:

1. Burns, T. J. (Ed.) (2011) Canonical texts: Selections from religious wisdom traditions. San Diego, CA: Cognella. ISBN 9781609270537. (please note that it is typically most efficient and cost-effective to order this Canonical Texts book directly from the publisher. To do that, go to the following website: https://store.cognella.com/80366-1-017 ) Note that the Canonical Texts book is also used in other courses, and is listed under SOC 3873, so if you see SOC 3873 on the website, you have the right book!)

3. Materials posted on the OU Canvas learning management system: Access Canvas at [https://canvas.ou.edu](https://canvas.ou.edu), enter your OU NetID and password, and select course to access material. If you require assistance with Canvas, please click on the Help icon. You can search the Canvas guides, chat with Canvas support, or contact OU IT (1-405-325-HELP).

**Course Objectives:**

The goals of the course are:

- To develop an understanding and appreciation of the major religions of the world
- To understand how religious institutions, develop historically
- To develop a sense of how social science can study religion
- To see how religious institutions are influenced by, and have an influence on, societies and the people in them.

**Some Notes on Preparation, Assignments, Grading and Due Dates:**

**Class Preparation and Participation:**

The course is designed to encourage class participation. Students who pay close attention to the lectures and who grasp the reading can have a reasonable expectation of doing well in the course. It is expected that with few exceptions (see the university website for bona fide reasons for missing), students will be in class each time, will have read the assigned material in advance, and be ready to discuss it. This will help you and will also, by extension, help to foster a highly positive learning environment, from which we all benefit.

**Exam:**

The Exam is a take-home and will be given out on the last day of class and due a week later. Exam material is taken directly from the readings, lectures and class discussions. There is a set of study guides that students in the past have found useful in helping to organize and focus on key ideas. If you know what is on the study guides, I have every confidence you will do well on the Exam; these flow from the lectures and the reading; and dovetail with the main currents of the class discussions.

**Course Paper:**

You will write a paper discussing one of the major topics (chosen from those that we cover in class or, with prior permission, another related topic). The target length is 16-20 pages (including title and abstract pages, and references, in 12 pt type, double-spaced, in ASA or APA format). There are numerous references generally available for virtually all of the areas we cover. As a target, you should plan on having about 20 references for your paper’s bibliography. It is permissible and expected that some of the references will include the material from the class, from both required and recommended lists. While it is OK to get a few references from the internet, most should be from books or scholarly papers. Each reference should, of course, be properly cited.

About Recommended Readings: In addition to the course texts, there are a number of articles uploaded on the course website, available for you to read and to download. Many times, students find themselves wishing to dig deeper into a topic. For virtually all of the topics, there are additional recommended readings uploaded on the class website (in addition to the required readings there). These are not listed on the syllabus (which has only the required readings) but they are there in Canvas for your edification and studying pleasure, so dig in when you get a chance! These are great when you start working on your class paper in particular. Also, students preparing for comprehensive exams find these resources on the class website most useful.

**Summary Table of Assignments, Grading and Due Dates:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>May 2, 2020</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Due Date</td>
<td>Percent of Grade</td>
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<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation, In-class Quizzes and Small Group Discussions &amp; Presentations</td>
<td>During class sessions</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>May 16, 2020</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notice:** Failure to meet assignment due dates could result in a grade of I (Incomplete) and may adversely impact tuition Assistance and/or Financial Aid.

**Course Outline, Topics and Required Readings**

1. **General Introduction and Orientation**
   - Go over the syllabus and discuss general ideas in the discipline
   - Read Smith Chapter 1 (pp. 8-15)

2. **Hinduism**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Hinduism (pp. 17-57)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Hinduism (pp. 1-26)

3. **Buddhism**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Buddhism (pp. 58-97)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Buddhism (pp. 27-57)

4. **Confucianism**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Confucianism (pp. 98-121)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Confucianism (pp. 59-82)

5. **Taoism**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Taoism (pp. 122-143)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Taoism (pp. 83-112)

6. **Judaism**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Judaism (pp. 178-203)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Judaism (pp. 113-140)

7. **Christianity**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Christianity (pp. 204-229)
   - Read Selection from Burns Volume on Christianity (pp. 141-166)

8. **Islam**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Islam (pp. 144-177)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Islam (pp. 167-192)

9. **Native Traditions**
   - Read Smith Chapter on Native Traditions (pp. 230-243)
   - Read from Burns Volume on Native Traditions (pp. 193-219)

10. **Course Conclusion and Wrap-up**
    - Read Smith Concluding Chapter (pp. 244-251)

**Orienting Ideas:**

Welcome to the course. I am committed to making your learning experience here a highly positive one. Enjoy your study of one of the world’s endlessly fascinating subjects—the study of the world’s religions and the societies of which they are part!

Some useful things to look for in seeking to understand a religion and the society(ies) of which it is part (note: these are also questions around which you may organize your final paper):

1. Major guiding beliefs and social practices
2. More specific theological beliefs
   - e.g. monotheistic/polytheistic/animistic, afterlife, approaches to God
3. Demographic characteristics
   Estimates of numbers of people and their distribution (e.g. age, sex ratio, urban/rural, developed/developing countries, geography and history of parts of the world where it is most predominant.

4. Orientation to the world
   inner-worldly/other-worldly, ascetic/mystical

5. Sacred objects and people
   e.g. Bible, Bhagavad Gita, Priests, Communion, Prasadam

6. Rituals and other practices
   Routinized action with others, promoting commonality of focus and perceptions) e.g. sacraments, dietary prescriptions, daily prayer, proselytization practices. How do these relate to key beliefs?

7. Interface with other societal institutions
   Promotion of social solidarity and other functions in economy, polity, family. How separate are the other major institutions (e.g polity) from religion?

8. Religion as an ethical guide to everyday life
   Given our discussion of religion and ethics, much as Max Weber has discussed a Protestant Ethic, what are some characteristics of the ethics of the religions we are studying (e.g. Confucian Ethic, or the Taoist Ethic?) What effects have these had on individuals and institutions in society?

9. Explication of Sacred Texts
   Based on your reading and discussion how would you explain the meaning in a passage from a tradition’s scripture?

10. Generally
    In general, when studying about a religion, to the extent possible, try to consider it from the standpoint of the people practicing that religion. In all cases, understanding is more important than judgment.

Methodologically, an important concept here is Max Weber’s idea of Verstehen. The point is to make the effort to understand others on their own terms, and to learn a great deal in the process.

In addition to any specifics about a religion, you should generally be able to give the central ideas of the religion in a few paragraphs. You should then be able to expand on those central ideas with meaningful detail.

Also, attend to the considerations in the study guides available on the class Canvas site about the specifics in a given religion. Class participation is important. Ideas that are stressed in lecture and discussion in class very often wind up on the test.

One sign of intellectual maturity is the ability to think about ideas in more than one way. In general, rather than memorizing lists of things from the books or lectures, try to integrate them into your thinking, come up with examples, and discuss them.
POLICIES AND NOTICES

Attendance/Grade Policy

Attendance and participation in interaction, individual assignments, group exercises, simulations, role playing, etc. are valuable aspects of any course because much of the learning comes from discussions in class with other students. It is expected that you attend all classes and be on time except for excused emergencies.

Excused absences are given for professor mandated activities or legally required activities such as emergencies or military assignments. It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required class work that may fall on religious holidays. Unavoidable personal emergencies, including (but not limited to) serious illness; delays in getting to class because of accidents, etc.; deaths and funerals, and hazardous road conditions will be excused.

If you are obtaining financial assistance (TA, STAP, FA, VA, Scholarship, etc.) to pay all or part of your tuition cost, you must follow your funding agency/institution’s policy regarding “I” (Incomplete) grades unless the timeline is longer than what the University policy allows then you must adhere to the University policy. Students who receive Financial Aid must resolve/complete any “I” (Incomplete) grades by the end of the term or he/she may be placed on “financial aid probation.” If the “I” grade is not resolved/completed by the end of the following term, the student’s Financial Aid may be suspended make the student ineligible for further Financial Aid.

Students are responsible for meeting the guidelines of Tuition Assistance and Veterans Assistance. See the education counselor at your local education center for a complete description of your TA or VA requirements.

Academic Integrity and Student Conduct

Academic integrity means honesty and responsibility in scholarship. Academic assignments exist to help students learn; grades exist to show how fully this goal is attained. Therefore all work and all grades should result from the student's own understanding and effort.

Academic misconduct is any act which improperly affects the evaluation of a student’s academic performance or achievement. Misconduct occurs when the student either knows or reasonably should know that the act constitutes misconduct. Academic misconduct includes: cheating and using unauthorized materials on examinations and other assignments; improper collaboration, submitting the same assignment for different classes (self-plagiarism); fabrication, forgery, alteration of documents, lying, etc…in order to obtain an academic advantage; assisting others in academic misconduct; attempting to commit academic misconduct; destruction of property, hacking, etc…; intimidation and interference with integrity process; and plagiarism. All students should review the Student’s Guide to Academic Integrity at http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. All students should review policies regarding student conduct at http://studentconduct.ou.edu/

Accommodation Statement

The University of Oklahoma is committed to making its activities as accessible as possible. For accommodations on the basis of disability, please contact your local OU Site Director.

Adjustment for Pregnancy/Childbirth-Related Issues

Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss. Generally, modifications will be made where medically necessary and similar in scope to accommodations based on temporary disability. Please see http://www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html.
Title IX Resources

For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24/7, counseling services, mutual no-contact orders, scheduling adjustments, and disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrator. Please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office at smo@ou.edu or (405) 325-2215 (8-5), or the Sexual Assault Response Team at (405) 615 -0013 (24/7) to report an incident. To learn more about Title IX, please visit the Institutional Equity Office’s website at http://www.ou.edu/content/eoo.html

Course Policies

Advanced Programs policy is to order books in paperback if available. Courses, dates, and professors are subject to change. Please check with your OU Site Director. Students should retain a copy of any assignments that are mailed to the professor for the course. Advanced Programs does not provide duplicating services or office supplies.

Any and all course materials, syllabus, lessons, lectures, etc. are the property of professor teaching the course and the Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma and are protected under applicable copyright.

For more information about Advanced Programs, visit our website at: http://www.goou.ou.edu/
INSTRUCTOR VITA

Thomas J. Burns, Ph.D.

Education
- 1990 Ph.D., University of Maryland, College Park
- (M.A. University of Delaware; B.S. University of Maryland, College Park)

Current Positions
- Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma, and active in the Religious Studies, Environmental Studies, and International and Area Studies programs.

Frequently Taught Advanced Programs Courses
- SOC 5970 Religion and Society
- SOC 5790 Environment and Society

Major Areas of Teaching and Research Interest
Dr. Burns’s research focuses on the outcomes, evolution and emergence of social institutions from a comparative and historical perspective, particularly as they pertain to issues of religion and the environment.

Representative Publications and Presentations

Representative Honors and Awards Received
- University of Utah, College of Behavioral and Social Science Superior Teaching Award
- University of Oklahoma, Good Teaching Award
- Society for Human Ecology, Gerald L. Young International Book Award
- Society for Human Ecology, Distinguished Leadership Award
- Book Review Editor, Human Ecology Review
- Editorial Board, Journal of World-Systems Research