



EXTENDED CAMPUS

COLLEGE of PROFESSIONAL
and CONTINUING STUDIES

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:

April 19 – May 4, 2020

Last day to enroll or drop without penalty: March 21, 2020

Site Director:

This is a three-credit hour online course. Please see your local Site Director or email our online site coordinator at aponline@ou.edu.

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!)
2. Smith, H. (1995) *The illustrated world's religions: A guide to our wisdom traditions*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. ISBN 9780060674403

3. Materials posted on the OU Canvas learning management system: Access Canvas at <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).

Recommended Books

{Note: These following books are recommended only—they are not required. You may find them interesting and useful, but you can do fine in the course without them.}

This course requires the ability to communicate both verbally and in writing. If you feel like you could use some direction in writing, you will probably find the following recommended text helpful:

Schmidt, Judy H., et al. 2002. *Six Steps to Effective Writing in Sociology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The following is a recommended (but not required) text. It touches on many of the ideas we will be covering in the class, coming at it from a bit of a different angle:

Kurtz, Lester R. 2012. *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in a Sociological Perspective*, 3e. Los Angeles: Sage.

The following text has a wide selection of much shorter readings. Any of the editions from the 3rd on is fine:

Fieser, James, and John Powers. 2008. *Scriptures of the World's Religions*, 3e. New York: McGraw- Hill.

Also, at times during the semester, there will be other materials given that are not necessarily in a text, but that are important nevertheless. These materials will either be on the class website at canvas.ou.edu or may be handed out in class.

OU Email

All official correspondence from instructors will be sent only to students' ou.edu address.

Online Orientation:

The College of Arts and Sciences offers an online orientation for students who are enrolled in online or blended courses. The purpose of the orientation is to ensure that students are well prepared both technically and practically to take online courses. The orientation can be found on their website at:

<http://www.ou.edu/content/cas/online/student-online-orientation.html>

The College of Arts and Sciences Online and Academic Technology Services office is here to assist you with any questions, problems, or concerns you may have. For assistance visit their website at

<http://www.ou.edu/content/cas/online/student-information.html> or contact them by telephone at: (405) 325-5854 or email: casonline@ou.edu

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.

Course Outline:

Major Religious Traditions Considered in the Course.

The course will be organized around a discussion of history and social practices associated with major religious traditions from around the world. There are multiple online lectures for each of the topics, so pull them up as you work your way through the material, learn and enjoy! The segments of the course, along with the reading for each are:

1. General Introduction and Orientation
 - a. Go over the syllabus and discuss general ideas in the discipline
 - b. Read Smith Chapter 1
 - c. Also, read Chapter 1 of Drs Burns & Boyd's book (available on class CANVAS site. Click on the section under Content that says "Chapter from Thomas J Burns & Tom W Boyd's World Religions Text")
2. Hinduism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Hinduism
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Hinduism
3. Buddhism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Buddhism
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Buddhism
4. Confucianism/Religions of China
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Confucianism
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Confucianism
5. Taoism/Religions of China
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Taoism
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Taoism
 - c. **Midterm Exam**
6. Judaism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Judaism
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Judaism
7. Christianity
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Christianity
 - b. Read Selection from Burns Volume on Christianity
8. Islam
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Islam
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Islam
9. Native Traditions
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Native Traditions
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Native Traditions
10. Course Conclusion and Wrap-up
 - a. Read Chapter from Burns & Boyd book (available on class Canvas site)
 - b. **Final Exam**

Assignments, Grading, and Due Dates:

There are three grading components to the course: Exams (50%); Mini- Essay Discussion Posts (20%); and a Post-Seminar Final Paper (30%).

A more detailed discussion of each follows, but in a nutshell here in bold, is the structure. Please read this carefully and understand the following schedule. It is designed so that you can succeed, as long as you adhere closely to it and follow the reading and lecture scheduled as outlined.

Relevant Course Milestones & Deadlines for the Course Are:

First Half Assignments: Discussion Posts 1-5 should be **completed by Apr 26** (11:59 p.m. U.S. Central Time). The Midterm Exam should be completed during the Midterm Exam Window, which **opens on Apr 26** (at 12:01 a.m. U.S. Central Time) and **closes May 10** (11:59 p.m. CT).

Second Half Assignments: Discussion Posts 6-10 should be **completed by May 4** (11:59 p.m.

U.S. Central Time). The Final Exam should be completed during the Final Exam Window, which **opens on May 4** (at 12:01 a.m. CT) and **closes May 18** (11:59 p.m. CT).

Paper (Post-Seminar): **Due by May 25** (11:59 p.m. U.S. Central Time)

Exams (50%):

We will have two exams—a Midterm (25%) and a Final (25%). The window for the Midterm and the Final Exams are 2 full weeks (with some overlap, which students in the past have found helpful), and you can take as much time as you need during the respective open windows. If you feel you need the entire time you may have it, as long as you make absolutely sure to turn in the exam by the deadline (11:59 pm of the last day of the respective window). Once the window opens, you can go in and get access to the exam. It would be a good idea for you to download the questions, so you have them available for the entire time you take the exam. Please be clear about which questions you are answering (and state that clearly). There is plenty of time in both exam windows, so short of an all-out emergency, there should be no excuse for not finishing comfortably in time.

The **Midterm Exam** will cover the material for the first half: (Introduction, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Religions of China). The essays tend to balance “big picture” sorts of questions, with some important detail. It is important to give a sense of how those tie together.

While the **Final Exam** will build on what we learned in the first half of the course, it focuses on the material from the second half of the course (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Native Traditions, and Overall Lessons). Its format will also be essay, structured precisely as was the midterm.

In the past, students who have done the reading and thought it through, and who pay close attention to lectures, and thought them through, tend to get a great deal out of the class, and to do high quality work on the exams in the process!

In addition, there are study guides for what we cover in the course. In doing your studying and preparation, students typically find those to be good guides in helping you organize the material going into the exam.

Mini-Essay Discussion Posts (20%):

The other 20% of the grade is a function of online participation; for that, you will make at least 10 posts, each worth 2% of the grade, for a total of 20%. The online posts and discussions are a key component of the course, and therefore of your grade.

For each section, you will attach an article or a video clip of something from the news, that touches in some significant way on the religion we are covering in class. You can find articles or video clips from anywhere you want, typically from an internet or library search (and there are literally thousands of examples out there—it is pretty hard to miss on this aspect of the course!).

You will write a post about it, describing it and attaching a clip (preferable) or URL web link (if attaching it does not work). Your post should also tie it to some aspect of what we talked about in lecture or the readings.

Not to worry--there are literally hundreds, if not thousands of examples to be found readily on the internet or your local library or newsstand, of articles or news items about any of the religious traditions covered in the course. Part of this exercise is to get you used to being an educated news reader. Part of that process is to be able to connect what you are reading to what you are learning in your formal education, to do it readily and in a depth that goes beyond a mere surface reading. There is more detail given later in the syllabus.

You will make a post a mini-essay to our class's CANVAS discussion board for each of the articles you read. In those posts, you should give the members of the class a sense of something you learned in the article, and your thoughts about how it is relevant to the reading in the books or in lecture. The mini-essay should give a sense of something you learned from the article and the related text material. It is also good (not required, but a good idea) to sometimes include in your writing a response to something written by your classmates on the board. You may, for example, find that you read an article that relates to something posted by another student, or you may find you got something different out of the reading.

Either is fine, as long as you articulate your position and support it with something from the article itself and from the text material and do so in a mutually uplifting and respectful way.

Assuming your mini-essay post is of the requisite length and complexity (which in this case means about the length of 2-3 paragraphs, 6-8 sentences each), shares something from the reading with your classmates, and has been reasonably thought out, you will receive full credit. If it does not say something that is relevant to what we are covering, appears to be "tossed off," or is gratuitously offensive, it will receive a zero. For something basically in the ballpark but falling short, you may receive partial credit.

You should be able to get full credit in this section of the course, assuming you take it seriously and make the postings in a reasonable fashion.

Basically, you will average one post for a reading to accompany each of the religions we discuss in the lectures. For your 5th (toward the midterm) and your 10th and final post, the assignment is a little different, but one I hope you will enjoy and find a great stimulus to your own study. For the 5th post, write a brief (also 2-3 paragraphs of 6-8 sentences each) mini-essay telling us any one or two take-away lessons from the first half of the class—basically through Eastern Religions. There are no wrong answers here (assuming you write it in good faith and give it some thought). Tell us what one or two of the ideas of the class to which you have given some thought, and how they might be things you will remember and perhaps use as a tool in your own social analysis, once the class is over.

The 10th Mini Post will be something like the 5th but will focus on the second half of the course (anything from Judaism on...), or something from the course in general.

There are literally thousands of examples...For **examples**, you can look on the class Canvas site consider the *Other Items of Interest* module under the Modules tab. In there, you can find the kind of article you will be looking for. Click, for example on the *National Geographic* article about the *Dalit* or "Untouchable" under-caste. It would be *the kind of* article you could use for Hinduism (the article itself would not be eligible for you to use, because one of the major points of the exercise is for you to find an article on your own).

That would be the kind of article you would attach to your discussion board post under Hinduism. You will talk about the main points of the article in one paragraph, tie it to something we covered in the class (in this case, the situation of the Untouchables, the overall caste system and their relation to it, and a few of the more sociological processes that bear on how it has unfolded over time; in this case, the phenomenon of cultural lag, where cultural norms and beliefs may take years or decades or even centuries to catch up to changes in material conditions such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, or that merely changing a law without changing the cultural conditions underlying it can be associated with widespread social dislocation. Welcome to the world of comparative religions as filtered through the lenses of a sociologist! Stick with it, embrace it, and you will get more out of this course than you may have thought possible. It is a wonderful learning experience (dare I use the word *fun* in the syllabus—but there you go!).

The posts on our class's CANVAS discussion board will, I hope, allow us to use the medium of our computers to full advantage, giving us an online parallel to class participation. While only ten posts are absolutely required, I do hope that people will interact above and beyond that via the postings, so that it becomes an interesting discussion board rather than a dry place to simply dump assignments.

Post Seminar Assignment -- Final Paper (30%):

A brief paper (12-15 pages) on one of the religious traditions covered in the course, is required. A number of guidelines are below here in the syllabus, under Useful Things to Look For.

Due date is May 25, 2020.

The class paper accounts for 30% of the grade. You will write a paper (in standard American Sociological Association format, a handbook for which is posted on our class site) discussing one of the major world's religions covered in the *Canonical Texts* Reader. The target length is 12-15 pages, typed, double-spaced.

While there is some flexibility here, I have included some guidelines in this syllabus for the study of religions in general, and for how they are situated within their respective societies. These guidelines are also quite useful in terms of organizing your thinking for when you write your paper. There are numerous references generally available for virtually all of the major world's religions. As a target, you should plan on having about 16-20 references for your paper's bibliography. Each reference should be properly cited. You can write your course paper on any of the traditions covered during the semester.

Grading:

This is a letter-graded course: A, B, C, D, or F.

Assignment	Percent of Course Grade
Posts to the Discussion Board (10 total; turned in as two groups of 5)	20%
Exams (there are 2 exams @ 25% each)	50%
Post Seminar Assignment (Final Paper)	30%

The following course grades and their associated course averages are:

- A: 90% and over
- B: 80 – 89.9%
- C: 70 – 79.9%
- D: 60 – 69.9%
- F: 59.9% and below

There is plenty of time to complete the material and take the exams and make the postings, but only if you are prepared; if the time seems “rushed” to you, take it as a sign that more preparation time might be called for on future the Final Exam. So, do yourself a favor – plan to be prepared, take a deep breath, and enjoy demonstrating a command of your newly acquired knowledge!

Some Useful Things to Look For:

In seeking to understand a religion and the societ(ies) of which it is part (note: these are many of the questions we have in mind as we cover the respective religions. Also, this can serve as an outline for your final class paper):

1. 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.
2. Key beliefs
e.g. monotheistic/polytheistic/animistic, afterlife, approaches to God
3. Orientation to the world
inner-worldly/other-worldly, ascetic/mystical
4. Sacred objects and people
e.g. Bible, *Bhagavad Gita*, Priests, Communion, *Prasadam*
5. Rituals and other practices
e.g. dietary proscriptions, daily prayer, proselytization practices. How do these relate to key beliefs?
e.g. sacraments, (routinized action with others, promoting commonality of focus and perceptions and facilitating social solidarity)

6. Interface with other societal institutions

Promotion of social solidarity and other functions in, for example, economy, polity, and family. How separate are the other major institutions and social structures (e.g. class and status stratification systems) from religion?

7. 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 Taoist Ethic?) What effects have these had on individuals and institutions in society?

8. Explication of Sacred Texts

Based on your reading and discussion how would you explain the meaning in a passage from a tradition's scripture? What are some of the different levels of meaning, from the personal to the organizational, to the most macro level? What are some of the metaphors in play? Is there extended metaphor, or allegory? If so, what are some of the larger ideas? What can we make of mythos and logos based readings? How can they inform one another? How does the society influence how a scripture is read and interpreted, and how does that reading in turn feed back to the society itself?

9. 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*.

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 syllabus about the specifics in a given religion. 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.

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.

Policy for Late Work:

Please contact the professor regarding policy for late work. Generally speaking, except in cases of bona fide emergencies and truly extenuating circumstances, late work is strongly discouraged.

Attendance Policy:

In addition to interaction via Canvas and email contact, students are required to contact the instructor via email or telephone **before** the beginning of the course term for an initial briefing. Although physical class meetings are not part of this course, participation in all interactive, learning activities is required. Student assignments and student/instructor communications will be conducted via Canvas, although students may contact the instructor via telephone, postal mail, email, or fax as needed

Incomplete Grade Policy:

A grade of "I" is not automatically assigned, but rather must be requested by the student by submitting to the instructor a "Petition for and Work to Remove an Incompleted Grade" form. An "I" can never be used in lieu of an "F" nor can an "I" be assigned because of excessive failure to participate in class activities.

Technical Support Information:

If you experience technical problems, contact Information Technology by visiting their website at: <http://webapps.ou.edu/it/> or contacting them by telephone at: (405) 325-HELP (4357)

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 making 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

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

- Burns, T.J., and B.S. Caniglia. 2017. *Environmental Sociology: The Ecology of Late Modernity*, 2e. Norman, OK & Breckenridge, CO: Mercury Academic.
- Burns, T.J., and T.K. Rudel. 2015. Metatheorizing Structural Human Ecology at the Dawn of the Third Millennium. *Human Ecology Review*, 22(1):13-33.
- Burns, T.J. (ed.). 2012. *Canonical Texts: Selections from Religious Wisdom Traditions*. San Diego: Cognella;
- Burns, T.J. 2012. What Is Old and What Is New? Considering World-Systems in the 21st Century and Beyond. In C. Chase-Dunn and S. Babones (eds.), *Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*. London: Routledge;
- Burns, T.J. 2012. Marine Pollution. In G. Ritzer (ed.), *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*. London: Blackwell;
- Burns, T.J. 2009. Culture and the Natural Environment. In A. Begossi and P.F. Lopes (eds.), *Current Trends in Human Ecology*, Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars;
- Burns, T.J., E.L. Kick, and B.L. Davis. 2006. A Quantitative, Cross-National Study of Deforestation in the Late 20th Century: A Case of Recursive Exploitation. In A.K. Jorgenson and E.L. Kick (eds.), *Globalization and the Environment*, Leiden: Brill;
- Burns, T.J., and T. LeMoyne. 2001. How Environmental Movements Can Be More Effective: Prioritizing Environmental Themes in Political Discourse. *Human Ecology Review*, 8(1):26-38.

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*
- Representative Professional Affiliations: Society for Human Ecology, American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems