

Course Title:

Religion and Society

Course Number:

SOC 5970-490

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.

Course Dates:

September 1 - October 31, 2017

Last day to enroll or drop without penalty: August 3, 2017

Professor Contact Information:

Course Professor: Thomas J. Burns, Ph.D.

Mailing Address: OU Dept. of Sociology

331 KH

Norman, OK 73019

Telephone Number: (405) 325-1751

E-mail Address: tburns@ou.edu

Professor availability: The professor will be available via e-mail to students and by appointment.

Textbook(s) and Instructional Materials:

Student materials are available at the OU Follett Bookstore located at 1185 Asp Avenue; Norman, OK, and can be ordered online, by phone, by email, or by fax. Ordering online at <http://www.bkstr.com/oklahomastore/home> is strongly recommended – students can track the status of their order within 48 hours. If an order has not been shipped within three days, students can contact the Follett textbook manager by phone (405) 325-3511, (800) 522-0772 (toll-free) or email 0831mgr@fhg.follett.com. Phone orders (ask for the textbook manager and identify yourself as an Advanced Programs student) can be placed 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday; 10 a.m. to 4p.m. on Saturday (CST). Summer hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (CST). Fax orders can be placed 24 hours a day at (405) 325-7770. Text prices are available online.

1. Burns, T. J. (Ed.) (2011). *Canonical texts: Selections from religious wisdom traditions*. San Diego, CA: Cognella. ISBN 9781609270537.
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 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.

Note: Follett is the Advanced Programs contractual textbook provider. Should text changes become necessary after publication of the course syllabus, Advanced Programs will facilitate text returns/refunds only for texts purchased through Follett.

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; and
- to see how religious institutions are influenced by, and have an influence on, societies and the people in them.

Course Outline:

1. General Introduction and Orientation
 - a. Go over the syllabus and discuss general ideas in the discipline
 - b. Read Smith Chapter 1 (pp. 8-15)
2. Hinduism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Hinduism (pp. 17-57)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Hinduism (pp. 1-26)
3. Buddhism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Buddhism (pp. 58-97)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Buddhism (pp. 27-57)
4. Confucianism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Confucianism (pp. 98-121)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Confucianism (pp. 59-82)
5. Taoism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Taoism (pp. 122-143)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Taoism (pp. 83-112)
6. Judaism
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Judaism (pp. 178-203)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Judaism (pp. 113-140)
7. Christianity
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Christianity (pp. 204-229)
 - b. Read Selection from Burns Volume on Christianity (pp. 141-166)
8. Islam
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Islam (pp. 144-177)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Islam (pp. 167-192)
9. Native Traditions
 - a. Read Smith Chapter on Native Traditions (pp. 230-243)
 - b. Read from Burns Volume on Native Traditions (pp. 193-219)
10. Course Conclusion and Wrap-up
 - a. Read Smith Concluding Chapter (pp. 244-251)

Assignments and Grading:

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!

The course is designed so that students who pay close attention to the course materials and who grasp the reading can have a reasonable expectation of doing well.

Class Format:

Online (Canvas site, including access to Powerpoint notes, audio lectures, and study guides will remain accessible to students through the time your final paper is due on Nov 20)

Class Due Dates (all windows close at 11:59 p.m. central time on each of the respective due dates):

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Exam 1: Sept 19 | Covers Introduction, Hinduism and Buddhism |
| Exam 2: Oct 3 | Covers the Religions of China (Confucianism and Taoism) |

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|---------------------|--|
| Exam 3: Oct 17 | Covers Judaism and Christianity |
| Exam 4: Oct 31 | Covers Islam and Native Traditions and Conclusion |
| Final Paper: Nov 20 | Your Choice of Topic from One of the Religions Covered |

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. Demographic characteristics
 - a. 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
 - a. e.g. monotheistic/polytheistic/animistic, afterlife, approaches to God
3. Orientation to the world
 - a. Inner-worldly/other-worldly, ascetic/mystical
4. Sacred objects and people
 - a. e.g. Bible, Bhagavad Gita, Priests, Communion, Prasadam
5. Rituals and other practices
 - a. 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?
6. Interface with other societal institutions
 - a. Promotion of social solidarity and other functions in economy, polity, family. How separate are the other major institutions (e.g polity) from religion?
7. Religion as an ethical guide to everyday life
 - a. 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?
8. Explication of Sacred Texts
 - a. Based on your reading and discussion how would you explain the meaning in a passage from a tradition's scripture?
9. Generally
 - a. 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.
 - b. Methodologically, an important concept here is Max Weber's idea of *Verstehen*.
 - c. 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.
 - d. 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 (understanding this is an online class, still, it is important to hear and take notes on all the lectures. Also, please feel free to put questions into the class dropbox for discussion!). Ideas that are stressed in lecture and discussion in class very often wind up on the test.
 - e. 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.

Exams:

There are four exams, each worth 15% of the grade. They are in essay format, and follow the lectures and reading closely. Also, there are study guides for each exam posted here on Canvas that will help you prepare.

Each exam has three parts. You will choose one question from each part. The exam lasts 75 minutes (self-timed, once you log into the exam part of Canvas and download your exam), but you will actually have 90 minutes, in order to cover any time for downloading or slow connection, etc. It is set up so you can type your answer right into the Canvas site, and it will save your work. Once you start, you will need to stay with it for the entire time, much as you would if you were taking it in class.

The exams are open-book and open-note. I have designed them so that, while they will make you reach, they are also designed so that students who do the reading and pay close attention to the lectures should have the reasonable expectation of doing well.

For each of the three parts, you will have some choice (you will choose from among 2 or 3 questions for each part). For each exam, we will be covering two traditions. The first part will be on one of the traditions (Hinduism in the case of exam 1), and the second part will be on the other of the traditions (Buddhism in the case of exam 1). The third part typically asks you to choose a question that is of the compare and contrast or more integrative variety (e.g. compare and contrast Hinduism and Buddhism in terms of their views on the caste system, rituals or gender roles, for example).

Post Seminar Assignment (Final Paper):

A brief paper (approximately 15 pages) on one of the religious traditions covered in the course, is required. A number of guidelines are here on page 3 in the syllabus. **Final Paper due date is November 20.** Unless specifically receiving permission in advance, late work is not acceptable.

The class paper accounts for 40% 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 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 12-15 references for your paper's bibliography. While it is OK to get a few of those from the internet, most should be from books or scholarly papers. 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 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Exams (there are 4 exams @ 15% each) | 60% |
| Post Seminar Assignment (Final Paper) | 40% |

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 Policies:

Particularly in a class such as this, in which we seek to understand a diverse array of religious institutions and practices, each member of the class has a responsibility to maintain decorum and a right to expect that of other class members.

Academic Integrity is taken seriously by Dr. Burns and by the University of Oklahoma. Please see the Official OU website containing the most current University Policies and information regarding Academic Integrity, which are given in detail at the following web address: (http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html).

I might mention here as well that the University of Oklahoma has transitioned from D2L to Canvas. If you are not familiar with it, please do make sure to take the Canvas tutorial online, which is short and instructive. There

are sub-topics available as well from the main Canvas site, to help if you get stuck on something in particular. The introduction is here:

<https://community.canvaslms.com/videos/1124-canvas-overview-students>

They will get you past most of the initial difficulties. If you still have Canvas problems, there is a 24-hour helpline (which I need to consult myself on occasion). The number is 405.325.HELP; once there, follow the selections for Canvas.

Getting Started in Canvas:

Go to your browser (e.g. Google Chrome) and type Canvas.ou.edu and log in with your ID and Password. Then, go to the Home Page for the course (Soc 5970). Then go to the Modules tab.

Under Modules, you will see the first header for the Syllabus. You can click on that and download the syllabus any time you need to (although you already now have a copy). Just under that is an entry that says: “Welcome Video – Click on This First” Go ahead and click on that and you will hear me go through the syllabus and the overview of the course.

Then, the First of the actual lectures start under the Lectures Tab. Click on the first lecture, which is “Introductory Lecture on World Religions and Outline of Important Ideas” Then, once you have finished that, you can go to the next lecture on Hinduism, etc.

In this way, you can go through all of the lectures for the whole course at your own pace. Each of the tests are scheduled about every two weeks, with a little bit of leeway for you at the very beginning to get used to things.

When you get ready to take each of the exams, you click on the exam and take it. It is a 75 minute exam, but you have a little leeway, so you may take up to 90 minutes, to cover any slowness in downloading or uploading time.

If you have problems, feel free to email me, but I am pretty sure that once you get rolling, you will think it goes pretty smoothly. Enjoy the process, and soak in the learning

Policy for Late Work:

Please contact the professor regarding his/her policy for late work

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).

Instructor Vita

Thomas J. Burns, Ph.D.

Education

1990 Ph.D., University of Maryland

Current Positions

Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma, and active in the Religious Studies and Environmental 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: 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 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