

Introduction to Religious Studies

Barat College RS-292
Monday, Wednesday; 11:30-12:50

Instructor:
Jim L. Papandrea, Ph.D.
office hours by appointment

Course Description

Who am I? Why am I here? Is this life all there is? The study of religion is the study of humanity's search for the divine, and for meaning in life and death. This course will focus on the struggle of people throughout history to understand that which is beyond themselves. Using mainly a historical and literary approach, the course will survey the basic elements common to most of the world's religions, and the methods used in the study of religious expression. Religious artistic expression and contemporary critical methodologies will also be explored.

Course Requirements

Each class meeting will consist mainly of lecture and discussion, and questions and discussion are encouraged at all times. It is expected that all positions and opinions will be respected, and no sincere question will be excluded from our exploration. Reading assignments are to be done before each class meeting. Late assignments will be reduced in grade by one part of one letter for each class meeting that the assignment is late, unless previous arrangements are made with the instructor. In the case of emergencies, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Late final exams will not be accepted, except in extreme cases, and then only at the instructor's discretion. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course.

Class participation: Attendance, reading preparation, and class discussion will effect the course grade, especially in the case of a borderline final grade.

Exams: There will be two 5-7 page take-home exams: a mid-term exam and a final exam. (All papers for this course must be double-spaced.) The exams will focus on synthesizing material from the reading and lectures, specifically the main themes rather than the minor details of the various religious faiths. Each exam will count for 40% of the course grade.

CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Response Paper: Write a 5-7 page response to one of the chapters in the book *The Sacred Quest*. Note that you are not required to agree with the authors' conclusions, but you must work to understand them so that you can evaluate them based on your own understanding of biblical faith. This is not simply a book report, the paper must make use of your own thoughts as well as class discussions, and give reasons for agreement or disagreement with the claims of the book. Also, you must read the whole book, so that you can understand the concepts thoroughly. Students are encouraged to do additional research. Grades will be based, not on the students' opinions per se, but on how well each student has thought through the issues, and how well he or she has related the issues in the text to the concept of religious faith. The response paper will count for 20% of the course grade.

OR

Research Paper: Write a 5-7 page research paper on any religion of your choice other than your own, using the methods of study surveyed in the class. Again, this is not just a book report on the historical records or sacred writings of a particular religion. This paper should show an understanding of the issues and methodologies involved in studying religious faith. You may believe or disbelieve the claims of the religion in question, however your personal faith is not sufficient as a method of research. The point is not to prove or disprove the validity of a particular religion, but to understand it as much as possible. Grades will not be based on the students' faith (or lack thereof), but on evidence of understanding the faith of another religious group. Each student will briefly share the findings of his/her research with the class. The research paper and presentation will count for 20% of the course grade.

Required Reading

The Sacred Quest by Cunningham, et al.
Various Handouts

Course Schedule

Week 1

Introduction to the course

The Sacred Quest Introduction

Are humans created in God's image, or is God created in human image?

Week 2

The Sacred Quest Chapter 1

The Question of Faith

Week 3

The Sacred Quest Chapter 2

The Question of the existence of God

Week 4

The Sacred Quest Chapter 3

The Question of the miraculous - does God intervene in human history?

Holy Scriptures - the word of God or the words of humans?

Week 5

The Sacred Quest Chapter 4

Critical Methodologies of Religious Studies

The Question of Revelation

Week 6 *Hand out Midterm Exam Question*

The Sacred Quest Chapter 5

The Question of Worship and Devotion toward the Divine

Week 7 *Midterm Exam Due*

The Sacred Quest Chapter 6
The Question of Personal Faith and Corporate Religion
When religion goes beyond the social to the experiential

Week 8

Heresy and Schism in Christian History

Week 9 *Interpretation Paper Due*

The Sacred Quest Chapter 7
The Question of Sin

Week 10

The Questions of Divine Providence and Human Free Will
The Relationship of Election and Conversion / Commitment
(Does God choose the believer, or does the believer choose God?)

Week 11

The Sacred Quest Chapter 8
The Relationship of Faith and Ethical Values
The Question of Religious Vocation - the evidence of faith in everyday life

Week 12

The Sacred Quest Chapter 9
The Question of Salvation and Eternal Life

Week 13 (*Response/Research Papers Due*)

The Question of Salvation and Eternal Life, Continued
Can faith, once found, be lost?

Week 14

Into the New Millennium - a Post-Christian World?
Is Christianese still spoken here?

Week 15 *Hand out Final Exam Question*

Concluding Thoughts

Week 16 - No Class Exam Week

Final Exam Due