

Religious Studies 101W: EXPLORING RELIGION

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/wat100/carr/carr101.pdf>

Note home page is a pdf file and, so, needs Adobe Acrobat Reader.

All library and lab computers have Adobe Acrobat installed. Free Acrobat reader at:

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

Sections 1 (MWF 12-12:50) and 2 (MWF 1:00-1:50)
Spring 2002

Instructor: Amy Carr

Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3 pm, Thursday
10 am to 12 pm, Friday 2:15 – 3:15 pm

Also by appointment. Feel free to speak
with me about any aspect of the course or
about related issues.

Office: Morgan Hall, Room 412 (phone:
298-1309; home: 837-0527, before 10 pm)

Department Office: Morgan Hall, Room
456 (phone: 298-1057)

E-mail: AR-Carr@wiu.edu (note: not always
checked on weekends)

Purpose of the Course

This course has two main objectives. **First**, it introduces several religious traditions, questions, and themes. This course does not assume that you practice a particular religion; nor is it a course which will ask you to memorize lots of facts about different religions. But in studying what it means for human beings to be religious, you can learn to do the following:

- deepen a capacity to perceive religious texts, beliefs, and practices with both empathy and criticism;
- become familiar with the diverse interpretations of sacred texts;
- recognize and investigate religious sorts of questions;
- identify some of the cultural, political, and personal roles played by religion;
- begin to clarify your own ultimate values and convictions.

Second, the course will introduce the study of religion by fostering skills in reading comprehension, writing ability, critical analysis, and creatively integrative thinking—skills which are transferable to many other disciplines and vocational situations, and useful in helping you to become an independent, lifelong learner.

Note: This course COUNTS as a writing course (W)!

Course Texts

Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (New York: North Point Press, 1982).

Jamal J. Elias, *Islam* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999).

Lynn Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

Diane Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, Third Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000).

Additional readings will be found on the Web, as handouts, or on Electronic Reserves (ERes).

***Note: if you have trouble accessing Web readings, try using a library computer or ask a librarian for assistance.**

Writing Help

If you would like more assistance or feedback on your writing, don't hesitate to contact WIU's **Writing Center** in Simpkins Hall 341 (ph: 298-2815, or by email: MWCENTER@WIU.EDU). I am also available during office hours to talk one-on-one about your writing.

Course Requirements

Reading Summaries (15%)

Written summaries of the day's readings will be collected randomly at the beginning of class throughout the semester. Your best scores on 10 of these (each worth 1.5 points) will count towards your final grade; I will collect them at least 11-12 times.

The aim of this exercise is to encourage you to keep up with the readings, to develop your skills in reading comprehension and analysis, and to stimulate class discussion. Towards this end, each day there is an assigned reading, bring to class the following (preferably one copy for instructor, one for yourself):

a) a summary of the day's reading, *in your own words* (focus on the main points as you understood them, and anything else which catches your interest);

b) at least one sentence stating your reaction to the day's reading;

c) at least two questions about the reading. These can include factual questions (like, "I have no idea what Aitken means by the word 'mu'!"), but should also include at least *one interpretive question* which probes **specific** issues raised by the reading—a question for class discussion. You might raise questions which **compare** something in this text and something else we have considered in this or other courses; or questions which **evaluate** the rightness or usefulness of something in the reading; or questions which reflect a creative **response** to the reading.

You will receive full credit for each summary if it is complete (includes parts a, b, and c above), well-written (check for grammar and spelling), and really captures the main points and key subpoints. So do not agonize over them, but do use them as practice in developing your skills in reading comprehension; they are meant to help

facilitate a habit of close careful reading, and of trusting your own abilities to understand, analyze, and interrogate written forms of communication.

Late summaries will not be accepted. If you have a prior excused absence, turn them in before the class period you will miss (even if summaries are not collected that day). Summaries turned in the day after an unexcused or illness-related absence will generally not be accepted. But remember that these will be collected periodically, so only frequent absences are likely to affect your grade on the summaries.

Reflection Papers (35 %)

Four 2-3 page papers will be assigned, most based on the readings for class; no extra research is required. Each paper will be worth 10 points, and you will have an opportunity to revise the Genesis and the *Night* paper. Specific guidelines for each paper will be handed out separately; see the deadlines in the course outline below. All papers must be typed and double-spaced; see the grading rubric for papers for more details about my expectations for papers. *If you want to revise a paper, see me first during office hours; revised papers will not be accepted unless you first speak with me about your original version.* **Important note: Late papers will lose a half-point per weekday they are late; no papers will be accepted more than one week after the original deadline.**

Spiritual Autobiography	3 points
Paper on Genesis	12 points
Paper on <i>Night</i>	10 points
Paper on Zen Buddhism	10 points

Exams (40 %)

There will be three exams (essay questions) and one quiz (short-answer plus brief essay). The final exam will focus on themes from the end of the semester, but include one

question which gives you a chance to integrate your learning for the whole course. *Most* questions are distributed *before* the exams, and some exam questions are collectively developed *by* the class.

Exam on Islam	15 pts
(includes 3 points for a Web-based bibliographic research project)	
Exam on <i>Feminism and Christianity</i>	10 pts
Quiz on Buddhism	3 pts
Final exam	12 pts

Class Participation (10%)

Class participation includes showing up for class, contributing to class discussion, and engaging in any in-class written or group activities.

Note

If you believe you would learn better by completing a different set of assignments, please see me soon and then submit an alternative plan, in writing, by January 28. I will not accept alternative plans which only reduce the course workload. (Adapted from a syllabus note of Dan Buchanan, St. John's Univ.)

Attendance

- 1) Note that a substantial percentage of your grade (**25%!)** will depend on your presence for in-class and group exercises and on keeping up with the readings by turning in summaries. *Missing a lot of class will likely drop your grade by two to three letters!*
- 2) Because of #1 above, there is no official attendance policy; however, I will keep track of your attendance and factor it into the class participation part of your grade.
- 3) Consistent tardiness or leaving class early can affect your class participation grade.
- 4) If a disability or the effects of medication make it difficult for you to attend class some days, tell me *early in the semester* so that we can work out a way to accommodate your learning needs.

Honor Code

Discussion of course materials with your peers is highly encouraged, especially in preparation for exams. Learning always involves sharing ideas and developing them together. But beyond our collective learning, independent work is expected on all journals, class exercises (except group ones), exams, and papers. Plagiarizing, borrowing, or copying another's words or ideas, without proper acknowledgment, can earn an automatic F on an assignment or in this course.

Be sure to consult me if you are not sure about how or when to properly acknowledge the ideas and works of others. ***Read Hacker pp. 109-112 (especially p. 112) about plagiarism.***

Disabilities Policy

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act, academic accommodation will be made for any student who has a need and notifies me. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to inquire about such issues. You can also contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 for additional assistance.

Grading Scale

- A (90-100%) Excellent work
- B (80-89%) Good work
- C (70-79%) Average work; meets the course criteria adequately
- D (60-69%) Below average work; fulfills only partially the course criteria
- F (0-59%) Course work does not sufficiently fulfill the course criteria

Grading criteria for papers will be handed out separately. Remember that grades do not measure *you* or your potential abilities, but your mastery of skills in this particular course at this particular stage of your education!

COURSE OUTLINE

- Jan. 14 Introduction to course
Jan. 16 Introduction to definitions of religion and terminology in religious studies

I. Genesis 1-3: Jewish and Christian Myths about Beginnings

- Jan. 18 Origin of the World: Genesis 1:1-2:3 (handout version—bring to class!)
Also read one other myth about the world's origin from the following website,
and in your summary, compare it to the Genesis 1 account:
<http://alexm.here.ru/mirrors/www.enteract.com/jwalz/Eliade/create.html>
- Jan. 21 MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY: NO CLASS
Jan. 23 Origin of Human Men and Women: Genesis 2:4-2:25
Jan. 25 Origin of Evil and Suffering: Genesis 3
First paper: Spiritual Autobiography Due
Jan. 28 **In-Class Essay on Genesis 1-3** (bring Genesis handout!)

II. Introduction to Another Scripture-based Religion: Islam

- Jan. 30 The Qur'an: Sacred Muslim Text (read Elias, pp. 13-27)
Feb. 1 Muhammad—Founder of Islam, Prophet of Allah (Elias, pp. 28-43)
Feb. 4 Pillars of Faith and Pillars of Practice (Elias, pp. 61-73, 79-80)
Feb. 6 ASSESSMENT DAY: NO CLASS
Feb. 8 Speaker OR topic to be announced (no reading)
Revision of Genesis Paper Due
Feb. 11 Other Expressions of Islam: Philosophy, Theology, Law (Sharia), Mysticism
(Sufism), and Saint Veneration (Elias, pp. 44-60)
Feb. 13 Islam Faces Modernity (Elias, pp. 82-97)
Due: Question to explore through Web-based research
Feb. 15 Who Defines a Religious Tradition? (Elias, pp. 98-105, 108-109)
Feb. 18 The Meanings of Jihad (Elias, p. 73; see also handouts or other assigned readings)
Feb. 20 Women and Islam (Elias, pp. 105-108; see also additionally assigned readings)
Feb. 22 Group Development of Exam Questions
**Come to class with written report of what you have learned about Islam and
of possible exam questions** (both essay and short answer)
Feb. 24 Speaker OR topic to be announced
Web-based bibliographic research project due
Feb. 27 **Islam Exam**

III. An Interpretation of Christianity: Christianity through Feminist Eyes

- Mar. 1 Discuss feminism and its meanings (Japinga, pp. **73-80**)
Mar. 4 Introduction to Feminist Theology (Japinga, pp. 9-34)
Mar. 6 Feminist Perspectives on the Bible (Japinga, ch. 2, pp. 35-54)
Mar. 8 Language about God (Japinga, ch. 3, pp. 55-72)
Mar. 18 Christology (Japinga, ch. 5, pp. 93-106)
Mar. 20 Sin and Salvation (Japinga, ch. 6, pp. 107-126)
Mar. 22 Group Discussion of Exam Questions
Mar. 25 **Exam**

IV. Reflections on Evil: Jewish Testimony to the Holocaust

Mar. 27 Brief Introduction to Judaism (no reading—but begin *Night!*)

Mar. 29 Wiesel (pp. v-xi, 1-20)

Apr. 1 Wiesel (pp. 21-62)

Apr. 3 Wiesel (pp. 63-109)

***Note: Paper on *Night* due April 8**

V. The Difficult Simplicity of Everyday Spiritual Practice: Zen Buddhism

Apr. 5 Introduction to Buddhism (read “Basics of Buddhism” on ERes)

Apr. 8 Introduction to Buddhism continued; group preparation for quiz (no reading)

Paper on *Night* due

Apr. 10 **Quiz on basic Buddhist ideas** + Introduction to Zen

Apr. 12 Fundamentals of Zen Practice (Aitken, pp. 1-14; skim pp. 15-40)

Apr. 15 Emptiness and Delusions (Aitken, pp. 41-55); The Heart Sutra (pp. 110-111)

Apr. 17 Three Treasures/Jewels and the Ten Grave Precepts (Aitken, pp. 66-88)

Apr. 19 Koans (Aitken, pp. 95-109); Song of Zazen (pp. 112-113)

***Note: Paper on Zen due April 22**

VI. Some Margins and Boundaries in Religion

Apr. 22 1) Interpreting Religious Differences: Diana Eck’s Model of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism (no reading!)

Paper on Zen Buddhism due

Apr. 24 2) Defenses of Atheism: Bertrand Russell, “Why I Am Not a Christian” (pp. 1-5)

Apr. 26 “ ” “ ” (Russell, pp. 6-10)

Apr. 29 3) A Sense of Place as Sacred: Lakota Sioux Perspectives on the Land and the Loss—Yet Persistence—of Indigenous Worldviews (handout of Lame Deer’s autobiography, pages to be announced)

May 1 4) The Sun-Dance and the Crucifixion: Sacrifice as a Theme Across Religious Traditions (handout of Lame Deer’s autobiography, pages TBA)

May 3 Wrap-up session and preparation for the final

FINAL EXAM Section 1 (12:00 class): Mon., May 6, 1 pm
Section 2 (1:00 class): Wed., May 8, 1 pm