

Eastern Illinois University  
New Course Proposal  
RLS 1290G, Introduction to Religious Studies, Honors

1. Course description

- (a) Course number: RLS 1290G
- (b) Title: Introduction to Religious Studies, Honors
- (c) Term(s) to be offered: On demand
- (d) Meeting times and Credit: 3-0-3
- (e) Short Title: IntroRelStudies
- (f) Course Description: Introduction to world religions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Students will examine various ways of understanding world religions and gain an appreciation for the nature and variety of religious experience. Students cannot receive credit for both RLS 1290G and HIS 1590G.
- (g) Prerequisites: Admission to the University Honors College
- (h) Initial term of course offering: Fall 2006

2. Student Learning Objectives and Evaluation

- (a) Learning Objectives and Relationship to Goals of General Education  
This course will further two components of Eastern's general education mission: responsible citizenship in a global society and skills in critical thinking and reflection.

Responsible citizenship in a global society demands the ability to communicate and work with people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. These diverse cultural backgrounds are shaped directly and indirectly by religious customs, beliefs, rituals, myths, and practices. Responsible citizenship also includes a critical appreciation for the place of religious experience and institutions in shaping public debate and policy in the contemporary world.

Critical and reflective thinking helps students become "more mindful of the relationships among self, society, and the environment. Such preparation is vital as society becomes more complex, interdependent, and reflective of diversity." This course encourages students to become more aware of religious diversity both between and within various religious traditions. It provides an introduction to the various approaches scholars have developed to study religious traditions critically and reflectively.

Learning objectives are

1. Students will apply interpretive categories in religious studies to understand, analyze, and interpret major religious traditions in the contemporary world.  
[General Education Goal – critical and reflective thinking]

2. Students will explain and evaluate the influence of religion and religious experience in shaping society and culture. [General Education Goal – responsible citizenship in a global society]
3. Students will describe and evaluate the diversity and pluralism within the major religious traditions of the world

(b) Sample Assessment

Students will prepare eight essays that require integrating the assigned readings [25%]; a mid-term examination [30%]; and a final paper that has been revised [45%].

OBJECTIVES	Essays 25%	Mid-Term Examination 30%	Final Paper 45%
Apply interpretive categories of discipline of religious studies	X	X	X
Explain and evaluate influence of religion in shaping society and culture	X	X	X
Describe and evaluate diversity and pluralism within major world religions		X	X

(c) For technology-delivered and nontraditional-delivered course  
Not applicable.

(d) For courses numbered 4750-4999  
Not applicable.

(e) Writing-Active, Writing-Intensive, or Writing-Centered

This is a writing intensive course. Several writing assignments are spread over the course of the semester and serve the purpose of both strengthening writing skills and deepening understanding of course material. Writing will constitute no less than 35% of the final course grade and at least one assignment will be revised by the student after it has been read and commented on by the instructor.

3. Outline of the Course

(a) Specify units of time for each major topic

Each week consists of three 50- or two 75-minute class periods.

Sample Course Outline:

Weeks One and Two

Foundations for Religious Studies

Early attempts to explain religion: Frazer and Tylor

The hermeneutics of suspicion: Marx, Freud, and Durkheim

Religion reconsidered: Eliade, Geertz, and Turner

Approaches to the scientific study of religion

Weeks Three and Four

Overview of interpretive categories and their use in religious studies

Ritual

Symbol

Myth

Sacred time and space

Sacred writings

Deity and cosmogony

Spiritual practice and spiritual experience

Suffering, the problem of evil, and theodicy

Week Five

Oral and Indigenous Religions

Week Six

The Hindu Tradition

Week Seven

The Buddhist Tradition

Week Eight

Jainism and Sikhism

Week Nine

Taoism and Confucianism

Week Ten

Shintoism

Week Eleven

Judaism

Week Twelve

Christianity

Week Thirteen

Islam

#### Week Fourteen

Contemporary alternative or “new” religions

    Scientology

    Religions of the Yoruba Tradition: Santería, Voodoo, Candomblé

    Falun Gong

#### Week Fifteen

Modern influences on the development of religion

Re-Assessing religion

(b) For technology-delivered or other nontraditional delivered courses.  
Not applicable.

#### 4. Rationale

##### (a) Purpose and need

According to the statement on general education, “The humanities provide sources and methods for reflection upon human experience in its historical, literary, philosophical, and religious dimensions.” This course addresses the specifically religious dimension of human experience to which this statement refers. It provides students with tools and methods for analyzing and evaluating how religious phenomena are conceptualized and interpreted within human experience. These methods are comparative, and focus upon themes such as the structure of religious experience, concepts of the divine, and the structure of religious symbol-systems. The humanities are also characterized by the interpretation and critical analysis of written texts as the basis of instruction. This course will seek to understand religious traditions by examining their sacred texts and to engage in their interpretation and critical analysis. It will introduce students to methods of critical analysis and interpretation that have been developed to examine religious texts.

The humanities also provide “students with the foundations and methods necessary for a critical understanding of languages, cultures, and traditions, including those that are different from their own.” Because religious belief and practice are closely intertwined with human culture, this course will further the humanities’ goal of helping students develop a critical understanding of culture in all its aspects. It will examine the diversity and pluralism both within and between different religious traditions. An appreciation for such diversity and pluralism contributes to a more critical understanding of their own culture and tradition as well as of those that are foreign or unfamiliar to them.

##### (b) Justification of level

A 1000-level course is appropriate for an introductory course. This course assumes no prior knowledge of the topic.

##### (c) Similarity to existing courses

This course is similar to HIS 1590G.

(d) Impact on program

This course could be used as an approved elective. It will not be required for a major or minor.

5. Implementation

(a) Faculty members to whom the course may be assigned

Aylesworth, Hawkins, Otto

(b) Additional costs to students

Not applicable.

(c) Sample text and supplementary materials

Molloy, M. (2005). Experiencing the world's religions: Tradition, challenge, and change, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Columbus OH: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Pals, D. (1996). Seven theories of religion. New York: Oxford University Press.

6. Community College Transfer

A community college course may be judged equivalent to this course, according to the standards of the IAI.

7. Date approved by the department or school \_\_10/10/05\_\_

8. Date approved by the college curriculum committee\_\_10/26/05\_\_

9. Date approved by CAA\_\_12/1/05\_\_

10. Date approved by the University Honors Council\_\_\_\_\_