

Phil/Soc of Religion {305}
Fall, 2001

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Course Description and Overview:

I have created this course to introduce the student to some of the seminal issues in the academic study of religion, drawing upon the perspectives of the social sciences and philosophy. Some of the topics I intend to focus on in class lecture include:

- *the nature of peak or mystical experiences (whether in church or in the surf)
- *the utilization of various substances to enhance mystical experiences (from incense to entheogenic plants and chemicals)
- *the relationship between faith and reason, science and religion
- *the existence of Deities; evil; magic; and death
- *the plurality of religious and non-religious beliefs
- *the possibility (or desirability) of there being a single true or superior religion
- *philosophical reflections on the Christian God
- *sociological and philosophical reflection on the existence of a chosen people
- *where have all the goddesses gone
- *pluralism and sacred texts and religious traditions

This course will draw heavily upon the rich cross cultural and historical experiences of religion, as well as different understandings of the same religion.

Required Texts:

- *Michael Peterson, et al., *Reason and Religious Belief*
- *M. Csikszentmihalyi, *FLOW: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*
- *Additional articles will be placed on library reserve throughout the semester. I encourage students to make their own copies of these readings as soon as they are assigned.

Organization of Course and Requirements:

While this is primarily a lecture course, time will periodically be set aside for both group discussion and for questions.

As in all my courses, the most important requirement is attendance. Students who accumulate more than three unexcused absences will have their course grade lowered to an extent, which is completely up to the discretion of the instructor.

There will be approximately five essay exams throughout the semester; each exam will have equal weight and will generally be noncumulative (especially in terms of the readings).

Please note that students are never automatically entitled to makeup exams or extensions. It is always up to the discretion of the instructor to determine if and when such make ups/extensions are given (in what formats and with what penalties if applicable).

(TENTATIVE) SYLLABUS: TOPICS AND READINGS

WEEKS:	TOPICS/READINGS
I—II	Introduction to the nature and study of religion READ: Peterson, chapters 1 and 2 READ: Geertz article (several times)
III—V	The Social Sciences Encounter Religion: From functional anthropology to Durkheim and Eliade; Marx and Freud; (Maslow; Bellah; and Geertz) READ: Malinowski article READ: either article 10 or 11 READ: either article 7 or 8 READ: FLOW, chapters 1 and 2
VI—VIII	The Nature of Religious Experience READ: either article 9 or 12 READ: Peterson, chapters 8 and 9 READ: FLOW, chapters 3 and 4
IX—XIII	Seminal Issues in the Philosophy of Religion, taken from the following: *the existence of Deity *the nature of evil *language: can the Absolute be spoken about? *life after death; immortality; miracles and magic *religious diversity: beyond exclusivism and pluralism; salvation(s) from what? READ: to be assigned, but definitely: Articles 2 and 4; FLOW, chapters 5; 8 Select chapters from Peterson
Conclusion:	an overview of the nature of religion READ: to be assigned READ: FLOW, chapters 9 and 10