

Comparative Religions: Eastern Traditions, REL 250 / HUM 250
Religions of East Asia and Oceania

Spring 2012 Popplewell 201
Sect. 01: MWF 10:00am – 10:50am
Sect. 02: MWF 12:00noon – 12:50pm
Office hours: MWF 11am – 12noon
 MWF 1pm – 2pm

Dr. David Kratz Mathies
History, Philosophy, & Geography Dept.
Office: Popplewell 115F
Phone: 816-271-4579
E-mail: <dmathies@missouriwestern.edu>

Course Description:

This course will survey and explore some of the major and minor religious traditions of the world—focusing this semester on the region consisting of East Asia (primarily China and Japan), Indonesia, and Oceania (particularly Australia). The course schedule is roughly divided into three major parts as follows: After a brief introduction to religion and religious studies, the first unit will look at the indigenous traditions of Indonesia and Oceania, as well as Shinto and Chinese popular religion. The second unit will deal with the classical Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Daoism. The final unit will consider East Asian Buddhism, giving some introduction to the origins and core beliefs, before continuing to cover the variety of forms called Mahayana (and also Vajrayana) Buddhism. The course will conclude with some consideration of the various theoretical approaches to religious pluralism.

Primary General Studies Goal:

Gain a greater awareness of the present by understanding other cultures and times.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with methods and terminology of the comparative study of religions.
2. Become familiar with some of the major and minor religious traditions of the world.
3. Engage other religious worldviews with both empathetic imagination and critical evaluation, encountering the religiously other beyond simplistic ideologies as human persons.
4. Consider various theoretical models for understanding religious pluralism.

Requirements and Evaluation:

Students are responsible for the information presented in *all* course material—reading assignments, videos, *and* lecture. Class lectures will highlight and explain, but also expand on and supplement the reading. Neither the lecture nor the reading is a substitute for the other. Students are therefore expected to come to class having read the assigned materials and ready to discuss them as part of the learning process. Outlining or note-taking is strongly encouraged as one way to prepare for class discussion. The professor reserves the right to give any number of unannounced reading quizzes, which may constitute a maximum of 1/4 of the attendance and participation portion of your grade.

In addition to class attendance (including at least three films from this semester's Religion Film Series), students will be responsible for one written assignment, one class presentation, three unit exams, and one (cumulative) final exam. Study guides will be posted electronically for each exam in a timely manner for student preparation. Use of these guides will be expected and tests graded accordingly, so students should take care to prepare the required terms, concepts, and/or essay questions in advance. All four exams will be approximately 50 minutes in length; the third unit exam will be given as the first half of the final examination period. To receive credit for viewing Film Series choices, students must either attend a scheduled showing of the film or make their own arrangements to view the film *within one week of the scheduled presentation*.

As noted above, each student will be responsible for a 6-8 minute researched, in-class presentation chosen from the presentation schedule incorporated into the course assignment schedule below. (Choices should be made as soon as possible and registered with the professor on a first-come/first-served basis. No more than three topics will normally be presented per day.) The presentation should add to the assigned course material by relating information that is *not already in the assigned readings*. Presenters then need to submit only *legible* presentation notes (no note cards), a full printout of all powerpoint materials, and a bibliography of sources. Note that the bibliography (which must be typed) is a significant portion of the assignment and must include at least one non-internet, non-assigned-course-text source. Internet sources are otherwise allowed, but students are cautioned to take care in the use of internet sources. Students are encouraged to begin their research as early as possible so that they can take advantage of what the library has and still have time to use interlibrary loan as necessary. Unless otherwise negotiated (under only exceptional circumstances), presentations must be made during the class in which they are scheduled—and all materials are likewise due that day and late if received at any later date. **In both oral and written form, all material must be presented in the student's own words unless clearly noted (both orally and in writing) and marked as a quotation!** Students will not be allowed to present unless they submit 1) a printout of their powerpoint, 2) a copy of all notes used in the presentation, 3) a separate bibliography, and 4) a signed statement concerning plagiarism (see below).

The written assignment for the course will be a book report (4-5 pages), choosing from the Chinese folk novel *Seven Taoist Masters*, Kherdian's retelling of *Monkey: A Journey to the West*, and Basho's collection of 'travel sketches' published as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. (Please note that students will select, read, and report on only ONE of these three optional texts.) In each case, give a brief synopsis of the story, followed by an explanation of the significance of the work for the religious tradition, as well as your own account of what you learned about the tradition from your reading. Please make a clear distinction between significance for the tradition and your personal learning. Bear in mind that not all of these texts would be considered necessarily central to the tradition and make note of where and how your chosen work might fit in the larger tradition. You should consult some source for this—for example, the introductory material included in the book (if any). Be sure to cite all texts referenced with page numbers and include a full bibliography for any sources used apart from the course texts. This paper must be sent by the deadline, via e-mail, as an attachment in MSWord, AppleWorks, rtf, or pdf (the last must be accompanied by full text embedded in the body of an e-mail message). The main text of the paper must be at least 1300 words—typically the equivalent of 4 full pages in standard form (i.e., double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point

or equivalent, with 1 inch margins on all sides.) Prior to submitting their book reports, students must sign and submit a copy of the statement concerning plagiarism.

Please be aware that grading is not simply an assessment of mistakes (what you got wrong), but involves as well the quality (and even the quantity) of the work done. For essays and papers, this may involve effectiveness of writing, evidence of thoughtful preparation as exemplified by both the quantity and quality of details or supporting examples (including research where relevant), and creativity—as well as demonstrated mastery of the relevant course material. (Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments must involve engagement with—and explicit reference to—the assigned reading materials; omission of this requirement will be graded accordingly.) Along these lines, a ‘B’ represents not merely work that has adequately completed the assignment or answered the essay question on a test, but work that is also above average in quality; an ‘A’ correspondingly represents work that is *outstanding* in comparison with the overall class.

E-mailed paper submissions will be confirmed with an e-mail reply from the professor. It is the student’s responsibility to enquire about the status of the submission if you have not received a confirmation within 24 hours of submission. Late papers will be deducted 1/3 letter grade per day, including weekends and holidays. Except in the case of emergencies, requests for excused lateness submissions must be made in writing and in advance, and specifying the reason for the request. **Unless otherwise specified, absolutely no papers will be accepted after the final exam period.**

Opportunities for Contributions to your Class Participation Grade:

Every day in class presents opportunities for students to improve their grade by asking or answering questions and otherwise contributing to class discussion; occasional reading quizzes offer further opportunity to add to class participation grade. Here is a list of 3 additional opportunities:

1) Attend any of the designated films or other relevant events outside of class. See the schedule for the semester’s Religion Film Series appended to the bottom of the syllabus below the course schedule. (A minimum of three are required, beyond which points are earned towards class participation.) To receive credit for viewing Film Series choices, students must either attend a scheduled showing of the film or make their own arrangements to view the film *within one week of the scheduled presentation*.

2) Visit or attend a religious center (church, synagogue, temple, etc.) from outside of your personal tradition and write a report on your visit (*fuller assignment description available when requested*).

3) Interview someone from a religious tradition outside of your own and write an interview report (*fuller assignment description available when requested*).

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend class regularly and participate actively. For the purposes of grading, students are allowed three class absences (either ‘excused’ or ‘unexcused’), but beyond those three, every *unexcused* absence will result in a 1/3 letter reduction of your attendance and participation grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. Students who arrive for class after attendance has been taken are responsible for coming to the instructor after class to make sure their presence is noted. Such students will be marked late (3 latenesses = 1 absence). Except in the case of emergencies, requests for excused absences must

be made in writing, in advance, and specifying each date to be excused, with appropriate documentation.

Please note as well that attendance is a minimal requirement for the attendance and participation grade. Students are invited to ask questions or add appropriate comments at any time and active participation in class discussion is strongly encouraged: Perfect attendance without ever (or only seldom) speaking in class will receive a grade of 'C' for the attendance and participation component of the final grade.

Departmental Make-up Exam Policy:

Students who, under exceptional circumstances, are granted permission to make-up exams must do so during time-periods designated by the Department of History, Philosophy and Geography. One make-up period will be scheduled during the last full week of classes prior to the date when mid-term grades are due; a second make-up date will be scheduled during the last full week of classes. The professor is, however, under no obligation to allow a 'make-up' if a student cannot provide written documentation demonstrating why they could not attend class.

If a student misses the final exam, he or she will receive a '0' for that exam *or* a course grade of 'Incomplete' (I), at the discretion of the professor. *No exceptions may be made to this policy without the approval of the chairperson of the department.*

Academic Dishonesty:

Please note that there is no assignment for which it is acceptable to submit someone else's words as your own work! All assignments must be completed in your own words, with direct quotations clearly marked (either quotation marks or offset/indentation for longer quotes) and proper credit given for any use of sources (parentheticals, footnotes, or endnotes).

Taking a substantial portion of a source—anything longer than a phrase—and substituting a word here or there is *not* paraphrasing. If you need to rely that much on a text, make sure you quote it and mark it.

Also make sure that *every time* you make use of someone else's ideas or information, *even if* you do not directly quote from the text, you cite your source with appropriate academic referencing (e.g. MLA, APA, or Chicago style). If you are not sure, please consult an appropriate style guide or the professor—please note, however, that page numbers in citations are *obligatory* (where relevant and provided in the source material) rather than optional, regardless of style guide specifications.

Any assignment submitted that involves direct quotation without proper identification (as explained above) will receive a zero (rather than an 'F'). At the discretion of the professor, such fraudulent assignments may be documented and submitted to the Provost's Office for further action, according to university policy. For specific details of the university's Academic Honesty Policy and for information on the student due process procedure, please see Western's *Student Handbook*, available online at <<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>>.

All students will be required to print out, sign, and submit a statement of understanding concerning this policy in connection with specific assignments for the course. Please see the appropriate form in the course WebCT (and at the bottom of this syllabus).

Students with Disabilities:

If you have been diagnosed with a disability or if you suspect that you may have a disability that has never been diagnosed and would like to find out what services may be

available, please visit the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Eder Hall, room 203N or visit the ODS website at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/ds/> as soon as possible. This syllabus, as well as all other printed or electronic materials, can be made available in alternative/accessible formats if requested with sufficient prior notice. Missouri Western is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Other Important University Policies:

Students should refer to the university *Student Handbook* for details on the policy for the grade appeal process and the guidelines for classroom behaviour, both available at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>.

Requirements and Final Grade Calculation:

Attendance and active class participation 2/8 (25%)
Class presentation 1/8 (12.5%)
Book report 1/8
Section exams (3 each at 1/8) total 3/8 (37.5%)
Final examination (cumulative) 1/8

Books and Materials:

Required Texts:

Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. Routledge, 2009. ISBN: 9780415434065.
Trainor, Kevin, ed. *Buddhism: The Illustrated Guide*. Oxford, 2004. ISBN: 9780195173987.
de Bary, *Sources of East Asian Tradition*, Vol 1. Columbia UP, 2008. ISBN: 9780231143059.
Reader, *The Simple Guide to Shinto*. Kuperard, 2008. ISBN: 9781857334333.

Book Report Options:

Basho, Matsuo. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Penguin, 1966. ISBN: 9780140441857.
Kherdian, David. *Monkey: A Journey to the West*. Shambhala, 2005. ISBN: 9781590302583.
Wong, Eva. *Seven Taoist Masters: A Folk Novel of China*. New Ed. Shambhala, 2004. ISBN: 9781590301760.

Other materials:

Several videos will be shown in class throughout the semester. Students are responsible for the material in those videos whether they are present that day or not.

Statement of Understanding Regarding Plagiarism in Assignments

(Name)

I have read the syllabus for the course and

I understand that all course assignments (both class presentations and papers) must be in my own words or with quotations clearly marked.

I understand that these are NOT examples of my own words:

rearranging whole phrases so that they appear in different order in the sentences and paragraphs of my source

taking source sentences and replacing some of the words with synonyms.

I understand that my options for making use of sources are:

restating the ideas in my own words—the way I would explain it to someone else, using words and phrases that I would use—and then marking it with a reference citation

using the direct quote (clearly marked with either quotation marks or indentation for a longer block quote) and then marking it with a reference citation.

I understand it is my responsibility to clearly mark quotes and submit all other work in my own words—with both ideas and quotes clearly cited with appropriate references—and that failure to do this will result in my work receiving a grade of 0.

(Signed)

(Date)