



Nazarene Theological Seminary

1700 E Meyer Blvd • Kansas City, MO 64131 • 816/268-5400

MSS 540 — RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD – Block, Semester I, 2011-2012

Essential Information

Please refer to the following resources for information essential for the successful completion of courses and degree programs at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Links to these resources are available in the Essential Information section at <http://support.nts.edu>

- NTS Mission Statement & Purpose and Degree Objectives
- Tips for online learning success
- NTS library services
- NTS textbook information
- Online technical requirements and Moodle support information
- NTS Student Handbook including statements on quality of work, plagiarism, and academic probation
- *Handbook for Inclusive Language*

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Mondays, 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and Thursdays, 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., or by appointment

Catalog Description

"A survey of the major "living religions" of the world through systematic study of their founders (for those religions that have a single founder, or identifiable historical founders), sacred writings, chief teachings and practices, and historical development. Also addresses theological issues of the relation of Christianity and other religions. Includes class visits to places of worship of several non-Christian religions and conversation with adherents of those faiths" (*NTS Academic Catalog, 2010-2011, p. 88*).

Course Narrative & Rationale

"Religion" appears to be a fundamental constituent element in virtually all human cultures in all times and in all places. In today's world, travel, widespread emigration and immigration, new communication technologies,

and many other developments bring persons from different religious traditions into unprecedented degrees of contact. Understanding the religious systems that inform, inspire, and guide the lives of other persons with whom we meet, live and work is essential to our understanding of these persons (and vice versa) and our ability to live together in the world.

This course provides opportunity for those preparing to be Christian "religious leaders" to become acquainted with the major non-Christian forms of "religion" in the world today. Students are introduced to the major teachings and practices of the various religions, and to the sacred writings and/or traditions which are authoritative for them. Several sacred texts will be read in their entirety and carefully discussed in class. The course also provides opportunity to visit places of worship of several non-Christian religions and a chance to have conversation with representatives of several different faiths. This enables students to move beyond the study of religion simply from books and texts to seeing a religious tradition actually embodied in real people.

The course also begins with attention to some of the major ways in which "religion" is understood and studied in scholarly, academic settings today. Throughout the course attention is given to discerning the similarities and differences between Christianity and the religions examined in the class. The course concludes with consideration of some of the critical theological issues that arise from the careful study of non-Christian religions from a Christian perspective.

Degree Objectives

This course directly addresses concerns raised in the NTS catalog under the heading "A Global Perspective" (p. 15). It also addresses concerns articulated in the goals and objectives of all degree programs that students develop broad understanding of the cultural contexts in which Christian ministry takes place in our world today. Among these are:

A. M.Div

6. The investigation of human society, thought and culture in order to articulate clear and coherent views of the context of the mission of the Church, and to develop an understanding of the Church as the community of faith with a passion for the gospel engaging in mission to different cultures.

B. MACE

3. Discern the various developmental and cultural forces that influence people's lives in their growth along the life course, and design appropriate ministry strategies that form persons into ongoing faithful disciples.

6. Exhibit a capacity for growth in the context of ministry through research and leadership; demonstrating a spirit of integrity, openness, cooperation, and care in ministry.

C. MAICS

2. Graduates will demonstrate the *integration of theological convictions and cultural sensitivity in order to foster individual and social transformation.*

4. Graduates will *articulate, communicate, and contextualize the essential affirmations of the Christian faith in a cross-cultural setting.*

D. MATS

(General Academic Track)

1. Students will develop *a comprehensive knowledge of the major theological disciplines and their interrelationships.*

2. Students will *demonstrate the ability to use the theological disciplines to reflect on and engage the world as informed, thinking, Christian persons.*

(Research Track)

1. Students will *gain specialized knowledge in designated theological disciplines as a basis for further graduate studies.*

Course Outcomes

Conscientious investment of oneself in the learning activities of the course should enable students to:

- 1) Gain basic familiarity with the chief methods and assumptions of the discipline of "Comparative Religions," the "Academic Study of Religion," etc. (*demonstrated* through examinations, critical reflection essays, term research project, and class discussion)
- 2) Acquire a broad knowledge of the main elements of the world's major religious traditions (*demonstrated* through examinations, critical reflection essays, term research project, participation in class "field experiences," and class discussion)
- 3) Understand and appreciate these traditions as systems of meaning and action which guide the lives of large numbers of the world's people, and which help to shape the cultures in which these persons live (*demonstrated* by critical reflection essays, term research project, participation in class "field experiences," and class discussion)
- 4) Gain awareness of the important similarities and differences between the various world religions and Christianity (*demonstrated* through examinations, critical reflection essays, term research project, and class discussion)
- 5) Begin to think theologically about "religion" and the "religions" (*demonstrated* through examinations, critical reflection essays, term research project, and class discussion)
- 6) Develop a growing ability to relate to persons who practice the major non-Christian religions in an informed, respectful, and redemptive fashion (*demonstrated* mainly through critical reflection essays, term research project, and participation in class "field experiences")

Required Texts & Course Materials

1. **RETHINKING RELIGION: A CONCISE INTRODUCTION**, Will Deming.
2. **THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS**, Huston Smith.
3. **FOUR VIEWS ON SALVATION IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD**, Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, editors.

4. ***DHAMMAPADA: THE PATH OF PERFECTION***, Juan Mascaro, translator and editor.
5. ***THE UPANISHADS***, Eknath Easwaran, translator.
6. ***NIGHT***, Elie Wiesel.

Course Assignments & Requirements

1. Attend class sessions regularly and demonstrate familiarity with assigned reading through informed, consistent participation in class discussion and other learning activities. (Outcomes 1-6)
2. Complete all assigned reading and submit a **written critical reflection essay** of approximately 1,000 – 1,250 words in length on the following four books:

A. ***THE UPANISHADS***, Eknath Easwaran, translator (**DUE OCT. 6**)

B. ***DHAMMAPADA: THE PATH OF PERFECTION***, Juan Mascaro, translator and editor (**DUE OCT. 27**)

C. ***NIGHT***, Elie Wiesel (**DUE DEC. 1**)

D. ***FOUR VIEWS OF SALVATION IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD***, Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, editors (**DUE DEC. 15**)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAYS (Outcomes 1-6)

For each of the above books a critical reflection essay of approximately 1,000-1,250 words in length is to be submitted on or before the day designated for class discussion of the material (see dates above and in the "Course Calendar" below).

The reports on *THE UPANISHADS*, *DHAMMAPADA*, and *NIGHT* should mainly address four questions: 1) what does the text actually *say* about the matters it addresses?; 2) what does the text *reveal to me* about this religious tradition?; 3) how does this text and the tradition it represents *relate* to Christianity (similarities, differences, etc.)?; 4) how does reading this text *contribute to* (change/confirm/challenge, etc.) the way I view this religious tradition, and the subject of religion in general?

The report on *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World* should engage, carefully interact with, and critically evaluate the major ideas presented in that book.

NO READING REPORT IS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNED READING IN HUSTON SMITH OR IN *RETHINKING RELIGION* BY WILL DEMING

(although students are expected to be prepared to **discuss** the material in *Rethinking Religion* in class as indicated on the "Course Calendar" below).

3. Reasonable mastery of all assigned material – to be evaluated by the instructor through reading reports, class discussion, and **written examinations. There are two (2) written exams.** These are both objective and essay in form. They cover the major teachings, practices, and facts about the development of the various religions, and other significant topics addressed in class, as well as give students an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the relationship (comparison and contrast) of different traditions. **These exams will be administered on NTS MOODLE. Exam #1 will be available for completion during the week of October 27- November 3; Exam #2 will be available for completion during the week of December 11-17.** (Outcomes 1,2,4,5)

4. A term research project, which is to be broadly a "conversation" between one of the religious traditions examined in the course and Christianity. The particular form this takes may vary: the subject matter may be quite general or very specific (.e.g., "Hinduism and Christianity Compared," or "The Status of Women in Three Major Religions," etc.); the project may be written, utilize audio or video technology, or combine several media technologies; the format may be an interview with an individual, a discussion between several persons, a report on research, etc. This can be as creative as you care to make it, but it must be work of substance, providing evidence of careful research, reflection, and preparation. Each project, whatever form it takes, is to be accompanied by a **bibliography** of sources which have informed the work. Projects submitted for this course in recent years have included such things as: a recorded collection of original songs exploring aspects of the relation of various religions; an original short story about a Hindu who converts to Christianity; a humorous piece about several goldfish representing the worldviews of several major religions about to be "flushed" out of this life; an original play portraying the major differences between Buddhism and Christianity, etc. as well as numerous excellent conventional research papers. M.A. in Intercultural Studies students may want to use this opportunity to address issues related to Christian evangelization in cultures shaped by a major non-Christian religious tradition. All projects are due **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17.** (Outcomes 1-6)

5. Participation in **at least four (4) "field experiences"** – visits to sites in the Kansas City area significantly connected with non-Christian religions, or dialogues with persons who practice a major non-Christian faith. A schedule of planned trips/dialogues is made available the first week of the semester. For each visit a brief one-page reaction paper is to be submitted to the instructor within one week of the experience. (Outcomes 2,3,6)

Distribution of Student Learning Hours

	Hours
Face-to-face Class Sessions	39
Online Participation in forums, groups, etc.	0
Reading	60
Writing	16
Other Assignments and Learning Activities	28
Exams & Quizzes	9
TOTAL	152

Method for Submitting Assignments

Reading reports, visit reaction papers, and written term research projects should be submitted to the course site on **NTS MOODLE**. There is a clearly-marked link for each of the class assignments where completed work may be posted, and accessed and evaluated by the instructor. **All critical reflection essays are due no later than 8:30 a.m. of the day on which these are due. Any other written assignments are due no later than 11:55 p.m. of the day on which these are due.**

Form and Style Expectations

There is no mandatory "style sheet" for this class. Students are, however, expected to use one of the standard style manuals and to follow it *consistently*. The most current Turabian style manual is always an excellent choice.

Inclusive Language

NTS is committed to the equality of women and men. Recognizing that people have often used the English language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women, NTS urges students, faculty, and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussions, and in their writings. All written work presented to meet course requirements must use gender inclusive language.

Policy Regarding Late Work & Missed Exams

All critical reflection essays are to be submitted no later than 8:30 a.m. of the day they are due. A written term research project is to be submitted no later than 11:55 p.m. of the day it is due. Late work is reduced ½ letter grade for every three days (or portion thereof) overdue. **Missed examinations may only be made up if arrangements are made with the professor *in advance*, and for an extremely serious reason or reasons.**

Course Grading

It is expected that all written work will evidence graduate level writing skills and this will be taken into account in grading. In addition, all students are expected to be familiar with the *NTS Handbook for Inclusive Language* (available from the Dean's Office) and to follow its guidelines in the preparation of written work.

For any written assignment the following criteria are employed in evaluation and grading: **1) "A" quality work** – is superior in every way – writing is clear, essentially without errors in grammar, syntax, word usage, spelling, etc. – content evidences careful reflection, insight, and originality; **2) "B" quality work** – is above average – writing is generally clear, with few errors of grammar, syntax, spelling, word usage, etc. – content evidences careful preparation and meets the expectations of the assignment; **3) "C" quality work** – average – writing is adequate, but may have errors – content is adequate, meets the minimum expectations of the assignment, but lacks insight and originality; **4) "D" quality work** -- below average – writing is poor, marred with frequent errors – content evidences lack of insight or lack of understanding of assigned materials; **5) "F" quality work** – failure to do satisfactory work – work evidences haste, lack of careful preparation, lack of basic understanding of the assigned material or of the purpose of the assignment.

In determining the final grade for the course:

1. The two written exams together count 30% of the final grade.
2. The four reading reports combined count 30% of the final grade.
3. The term project count 25% of the final grade.
4. The field trip reaction papers and general class participation count 15% of the final grade.

In accordance with the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NTS is committed to providing students with disabilities the opportunity to participate and benefit from its programs and activities. Accordingly NTS will make reasonable modifications to its programs and activities to accommodate otherwise qualified students with disabilities, unless such modifications would impose an undue burden on the operation of the particular program or activity or would fundamentally alter the nature or purpose of the program or activity. Students needing accommodations should contact the Office of the Registrar. They also should contact the instructor no later than the end of the first class session to discuss learning needs and adaptive strategies that have been beneficial for the student in the past.

Class Attendance

If you must be absent because of extenuating circumstances, please contact the professor as soon as possible to discuss the situation. **Students that miss more than 20% of class sessions may have their grade in the course significantly reduced. If a student is absent four or more**

weeks of the semester, the professor may automatically fail the student.

Daily attendance records must be reported for those obtaining V.A. and Department of Education benefits. Students must make the professor aware if their attendance must be recorded.

COURSE CALENDAR

Date	Topic	Assignment
Sept. 8-15	I. The Study of Religion: Some Reflections and Foundations	Text, 1-11, Deming, 1-23, 87-137
Sept. 15	II. Ancient and "Primitive" Religions	Text, 365-83 Deming, 75-83
Sept. 22-Oct. 6	III. Indian Religion A. Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism	Text, 12-81; Deming, 23-36 <i>Upanishads</i>
Thurs., Oct. 6 – Discussion; Reading Report #1 due		
Oct. 6-27	B. Buddhism	Text, 82-153; <i>Dhammapada</i>
October 17-21	READING AND RESEARCH (NO CLASSES)	
Thurs., Oct. 27 – Discussion; Reading Report #2 due		
Oct. 27-Nov. 3	IV. Chinese Religion A. Taoism B. Confucianism	Text, 154-220
Nov. 10-Dec. 8	V. "Abrahamic Religions" A. Judaism	Text, 271-315; Deming, 50-57 <i>Night</i>
THURSDAY, NOV. 17	TERM RESEARCH PROJECTS DUE	

Thursday, Nov. 24

U.S THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)

Thurs., Dec. 1 – Discussion; Reading Report #3 due

B. Islam

Text, 221-68
Deming, 67-74

Dec. 15

VI. Course Wrap-Up

*FOUR VIEWS
OF
SALVATION
IN A
PLURALISTIC
WORLD*

Thurs., Dec. 15 – Discussion; Reading Report #4 due