

Comparative Religions
Course Syllabus and Expectations, Autumn 2015

Mr. Minervini
Email: minervinic@guilfordschools.org
Website: mrminervinicr.yolasite.com

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to study the major religious traditions of our world in an attempt to understand how we humans have tried to answer the big questions of life. We will look at each religion from a position of respect and open-mindedness. Within each religious tradition we will study both the “mainstream” and fundamentalist Sects. We will study each of these faiths in terms of current data, history, beliefs, practices, varying views, key texts and writings, creation, God/Gods, sin, salvation, and the afterlife.

Textbook:

Smith, Huston. *World Religion*

Other readings will take the form of articles available in class. It is critical to keep up with all readings.

Class Participation:

This is the most critical aspect of class. You will be expected to actively participate in all class discussions. Class discussion will be student-led whenever possible. All discussion and debate MUST be non-adversarial in nature – there is no winning and losing here, only an honest exploration of the topic at hand. As stated in the previous paragraph, class participation will count as a quarterly test grade. To earn full credit, you must not only be prepared for class, but you must participate in class activities in a productive way. If you are a naturally reserved person, I will certainly take that into consideration. In those cases, the key word is preparation.

Grading:

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the specified date (which will be written and posted). Any work turned in after that time will be considered late unless a student is absent or there are extenuating circumstances.

Students may make-up homework. For each day the home work is late, 20% of the total possible score will be deducted; example: an assignment worth 50 points and turned in one day late would result in the total possible points earned being 40. Homework may be turned in up to a maximum of four school days after the due date; after four school days assignments will not be accepted; again, barring extenuating circumstances.

Chapters and or Units will usually end with a culminating assignment/assessment. This may be, including but not limited to: a written or verbal test, group or individual project or essay/DBQ.

The following is a percentage breakdown of the grading structure with accompanying weights:

Formative Assessments 20%:

The goal of formative assessment is to *monitor student learning* to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning. More specifically, formative assessments:

- help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work
- help faculty recognize where students are struggling and address problems immediately

Examples of formative assessments include asking students to:

- draw a concept map in class to represent their understanding of a topic
- submit one or two sentences identifying the main point of a lecture
- turn in a research proposal for early feedback
- homework

Interim Assessments 35%:

Will assess same range of standards as Summative Assessment (SA) but given before SA; gives broad view of student progress and will give results on the same vertical scale as the SA

Examples of **interim assessments** include:

- draw a concept map in class to represent their understanding of a topic
- submit one or two sentences identifying the main point of a lecture
- turn in a research proposal for early feedback
- homework
- (proper) cell phone usage grade
- help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work
- help faculty recognize where students are struggling and address problems immediately
- a pre-midterm preparation exam
- a final project in the last stages of completion
- the rough draft of a paper

Summative Assessments 45%

The goal of summative assessment is to *evaluate student learning* at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark.

Examples of summative assessments include:

- a midterm exam
- a final project
- a culminating paper

Information from summative assessments can be used formatively when students or faculty use it to guide their efforts and activities in subsequent courses.

Outline:

Depending on time, we may study the following religions in this course (not necessarily in order):

1. Buddhism (Tibetan, Zen, and others time permitting)
2. Judaism (Reform, Orthodox, Conservative)
3. Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism, Evangelism, Fundamentalism)
4. Islam (Sunni, Shi'ite, Sufi, Nation of Islam)
5. Cults (People's Temple, FLDS, others)

We will also attempt to tackle some of the big questions ourselves:

What is God? Is there such a thing as God?

How must one live their life in order for it to be considered a "good" one?

What does it mean to be a good person?

What is the purpose of life?

Does life have meaning and if so, what is it?

Where did we come from?

What is good and evil?

Why, after eating Chinese food, are you hungry ten minutes later?

Is there such thing as good and evil?

What is happiness and how do we get there?

Is there an afterlife? If so, what is it?

Why does it feel so good when you rub your eyes?

Do humans have immortal souls?

If Con is the opposite of Pro, then shouldn't Congress be the opposite of Progress?

Are science and religion incompatible?

What is truth? Is there an objective truth, or is it subjective to the individual?

Class Expectations

1. Students are expected to be in class, on time, prepared with books, an organized notebook, pen/pencil, and willing to put forth effort in all we do in our class.
2. Students will be assigned homework when I feel it will benefit what we do in the classroom; on average two days per week (this does not include text reading which should be done on a daily basis). Assignments may include, but not be limited to the following: reading, quiz-test prep, journals, projects, written assignments (essays/response/opinion papers), research, debates, etc. Some will be scored (points earned) and others will be checked but not graded (credit given).
3. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the specified date (which will be written and posted). Any work turned in after that time will be considered late unless a student is absent or there are extenuating circumstances.

Students may make-up homework. For each day the home work is late, 20% of the total possible score will be deducted; example: an assignment worth 50 points and turned in one day late would result in the total possible points earned being 40. Homework may be turned in up to a maximum

of four school days after the due date; after four school days assignments will not be accepted; again, barring extenuating circumstances.

4. Extra help is available almost every afternoon after school. Any student wishing extra help should see me at some point during class to discuss the date, time and room number.

Rev. Sept. 2015