

IPS 403-001
Spiritual Paths in World Religions
Fall, 2008 – 25 E. Pearson, Rm. 301

Instructor: Heidi Russell, Ph.D., Lewis Towers, # 630B

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:30-11:30 and Thursdays, 6:00-6:45pm

Class Meets: Thursdays, 7:00-9:30pm, August 25 – December 5

Required Texts:

- Eck, Diana. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. NY: HarperCollins, 2002. pbk.
- Halevi, Yossi. *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*. NY: HarperCollins, 2002. pbk.
- Sharma, Arvind, editor. *Our Religions*. Harper Collins, 1994. pbk
- Teasdale, Wayne. *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*. CA: New World Library, 2001. pbk.

Course Description: Greater knowledge and understanding of religious and spiritual traditions is an absolute necessity today. Recent international events, the cybernetic age, and worldwide immigration patterns as well as the frequency of interfaith marriages and the popularity of interfaith prayer services contribute to a developing new context for church ministers and service professionals. This course, in addition to presenting the origins, histories, beliefs, scriptures, and rituals of the world's religions, focuses on enhancing spirituality and renewing religious identity in the contemporary world. Resources available to parish ministers, hospital chaplains, religious educators and social service professionals will be highlighted as part of this course.

Instructor's Expectations/Course Requirements/Grading Standards:

- **CLASS ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION:** It is very important that students connect with the course on a regular basis by attending class weekly at the Water Tower Campus. Not participating in the course on a regular basis will create problems for students wanting to complete the course successfully. If you need to absent yourself due serious illness or other very important reasons, you need to call the instructor's voice-mail (312/915-7476) prior to the class you miss and provide her with an explanation. Unexcused absences and lack of participation in class discussions can seriously affect your final grade. Each week students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in depth, bringing notes and questions for their own use in the class discussions. All students are expected to be actively involved in class discussions. Student participation is worth **30 points** each toward final grade.
- **REFLECTION PAPER:** Choose one of the religions we have studied (or you can choose one we have not covered with pre-approval of professor), and address what you believe it offers to the world. In other words, explain how you think this religion can make the world a better place. In doing so, you can focus on one specific problem you think the religion addresses, eg., promoting peace in the world, addressing the problem of suffering, ending poverty, etc. or a goal (personal, spiritual, or global) that it promotes. You must explain how you think it approaches the problem/goal and ways it could do so to an even greater extent. If you see shortcomings within the religion, aspects that might hinder it from reaching this goal, address those as well. Also explain why you chose the religion you

chose instead of a different religion. What is it in the religion that draws you personally? Do you think that it has the power to draw others as well, either as believers or admirers (those who might choose some aspect of the religion to appropriate for themselves, but are not believers in the theological system behind that aspect)? The paper should be 1000-1500 words (roughly 3-5 pgs. double spaced). **10 pts.**

- **VISIT AND INTERVIEW:** The most important part of learning about other religious traditions is interaction and dialogue.
 1. To that purpose, each student is asked to visit and experience a religious tradition different from his/her own and write a reflection about that experience. The reflection should be 1000-15000 words. **10 pts.**
 2. In addition, each student must find an individual that practices a different faith from one's own and interview that person about his/her experience of that tradition. For some good ideas on interviewing people about religion, check out NPR's *Speaking of Faith* at <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/>. The person you interview need not be from the same religious tradition that you visit. The interview may be written or submitted as an audio and/or video recording. **10 pts.**
- **BOOK REVIEWS:** Each student will be asked to write a book review on *Mystic Heart* and on *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*. These book reviews should include your own reaction to the text as well as ways in which you believe the text would lend itself to your current or future ministry. **20 pts.** (10 pts. each)
- **FINAL PROJECT:** Your final project will be a presentation you might be asked to give at your church/place of ministry, etc. (e.g., a Theology-on-Tap) on the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Obviously this topic is vast, so you will have to choose one aspect on which to focus (e.g., common spiritual practices, historical aspects, a theological concept, social justice, etc. – be creative!). Presentation should be 45 min. long with time for questions/discussion at the end and will be given on the last day of class. Alternatively, students can do the presentation at their place of ministry and submit a recording of the live presentation. All students are also asked to hand in a written outline or copy of the presentation. **15 pts.**

Grading Grid:

94-100 = A	92-93 = A-	90-91 = B+	87-89 = B	85-86 = B-
83-84 = C+	81-82 = C	80 = C-	Below 80 = F	

Plagiarism, Cheating, Academic Dishonesty: Students are hereby advised of the strong sanctions against plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism will result in an automatic "F" in the course and possible expulsion from IPS. *If you have any questions about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials, you should consult the instructor.* Proper citation procedures are provided in all standard writing manuals. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see the instructor.

Calendar/Reading Assignments:

- 8/28 Introduction/Religious Literacy/Interspirituality
- 9/4 Indigenous Religions/Zoroastrianism
View *On Wings of Fire* in class
Eck, Ch. 1 & 2 (note that these chapters address next week's subject, Religious Diversity in America)
- 9/11 Religious Diversity in American
Christopher Hitchens, "Religion Kills," *God is Not Great*, 15-36; on e-reserve.
Eck, Ch. 6 & 7
"Toward a Global Ethic" by the World Parliament of Religions
<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/includes/FCKcontent/File/TowardsAGlobalEthic.pdf>
- 9/18 Hinduism
Sharma, Ch. 1
Eck, Ch. 3
- 9/25 Hinduism ***Mystic Heart Book Review Due***
Have read *Mystic Heart*
- 10/2 Jainism
"Pushing the Boundaries of Personal Ethics: The Practice of Jaina Vows," *Ethics in World Religions*, 196-216; on e-reserve.
- 10/9 Buddhism – Theravada **Interview Due**
Sharma, Ch. 2
- 10/16 Buddhism – Mahayana **Reflection on visit due**
Eck, Ch. 4
- 10/23 Confucianism
Sharma, Ch. 3
- 10/30 Taoism/Zen Buddhism **Reflection Paper Due**
Sharma, Ch.4
- 11/6 Judaism
Sharma, Ch.5
- 11/13 Islam ***At the Entrance Book Review***
Sharma, Ch. 7
Have read *At the Entrance* and posted book review.

11/20 Islam
Eck, Ch. 5

12/4 Christianity/LDS/Jehovah's Witness
Presentations on Judaism/Christianity/Islam

Presentations Due