

NOVA COLLEGE-WIDE COURSE CONTENT SUMMARY REL 100 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION (3 CR.)

Course Description

Explores the idea of religion (as a general category), how to study religion in an academic context, and common elements across most religions such as beliefs, practices, values, community, spiritual experience, symbolism, and narrative. Lecture 3 hours. Total 3 hours per week.

General Course Purpose

REL 100 introduces the student to the general terminology, the recurring themes, and issues common to the religious outlook. Students examine basic ideas common to all religions and look carefully at the religious experience itself from a variety of perspectives.

Course Prerequisites/Corequisites

None.

Course Objectives

Upon completing the course, the student will be able to:

Civic Engagement; Cultural and Social Understanding

- Respectfully engage with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Appreciate the value of religious diversity in the world and in the local community.

Critical Thinking

- Compare and contrast a variety of religions with regard to elements common to most religions.
- Analyze religion as an ever-changing aspect and product of human culture which evolves over time.
- Analyze and engage with challenging questions and topics that religions address.

Professional Readiness

- Positively interact and cooperate with others in a mutually supportive environment (work, school, community).
- Be a model of tolerance and respect for others.

What is Religion?

- Discuss the origin of, and assess the efficacy of, the concept of 'religion'.
- Analyze definitions of religion.
- Identify the common features or dimensions of any religion.

Overview of Major Religions of the World

- Identify the major religions of the world in terms of when and where they developed, who founded them, demographics (size) and geography (spread).
- Distinguish between ethnic and natural vs. universal and voluntary religion, theistic vs non-theistic religion, and eastern vs western religions, etc.

Theories of Religion

- Identify classic thinkers and their theories of religion.
- Discuss and evaluate a variety of theories regarding the origin and nature of religion in human history (why it is, what it is).

The Academic Study of Religion

- Identify, apply, analyze, and/or evaluate the different methods and approaches to the study of religion (e.g. psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, theological, historical, phenomenological, etc.).
- Apply these theories in the analysis of a variety of religions.
- Discuss religion from the objective perspective of an outsider.

The Idea of the Sacred (sacred places, objects, experience)

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as theophany, hierophany, the holy, sacred, spirituality, etc.
- Identify a variety of kinds of sacred experience.

Beliefs about a 'Higher Power'

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as theism, atheism, pantheism, monotheism, monism, dualism, polytheism, agnosticism, ultimate reality, etc.

Existential Questions about Life and the Afterlife

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as heaven, hell, reincarnation, karma, sin, theodicy, etc.
- Discuss the problem of human existence as identified by various religions.

Ways of Salvation (spiritual paths)

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as devotion, mysticism, faith, disciplined action, meditation, etc.
- Compare and contrast the different ways that different religions attempt to solve the problem of human existence.

Ethics and Values

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as precepts, natural law, religious law, divine command, deontology, teleology, virtue ethics, etc.
- Discuss how different religions address a variety of moral issues.

Ritual and Practices

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as ritual, rites of passage, sacrament, sacrifice, calendar (or periodic) ritual, etc.
- Distinguish among and explain the different kinds of ritual.
- Identify rituals from a variety of religions and properly classify them according to type.
- Discuss theories of religious sacrifice.

Scripture and Sacred Texts

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as revelation, canon, scripture, closed, open, etc.
- Name a variety of sacred texts and identify the religions associated with each.
- Interpret scripture in a variety of ways.

Symbolism, story and myth

- Define and use relevant religious terminology, such as myth, metaphor, parable, symbol, representational, presentational, signs, etc.
- Discuss the role and characteristics of myth and other kinds of stories within a religious context.

Sacred Community

- Distinguish among different kinds of religious institutions and the terms used to identify them: voluntary vs. natural or ethnic, cult, sect, denomination, monasticism, etc.
- Distinguish among and identify different kinds of sacred people: prophets, sages, saviors, clergy, monastics, shamans, etc.
- Discuss how religious institutions evolve and change over time.

Major Topics to be Included

What is Religion?

Overview of Major Religions of the World

Theories of Religion

The Academic Study of Religion

The Idea of the Sacred (sacred places, objects, experience)

Existential Questions about Life and the Afterlife

Ways of Salvation (spiritual paths)

Ethics and Values

Ritual and Practices

Scripture and Sacred Texts

Symbolism, Story and Myth

Sacred Community