University of South Carolina
Carolina Core

RELIGION 205
MORALITY, ETHICS, AND RELIGION

BULLETIN INFORMATION
RELG 205 – Morality, Ethics, and Religion (3 credit hrs)
Course Description:
Values and ethics as developed, contested, and transmitted through a variety of religious practices.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW
This course offers a critical approach to discourse that associates religion with the development of values, ethics, and social responsibility. In the first part of the course, we take a broad look at some of the main issues related to an academic study of religion, with special attention to: the benefits and costs of equating religious practice with moral/ethical practice, the way that religion can function to authorize and legitimate certain ethical norms, and the implications or deviating from norms associated with divine or otherwise supernatural origins. In the second part of the course, we will examine specific kinds of religious practices (intellectual, ritual, emotional, and coercive) through which ideas about values and ethics are developed, prioritized, contested, adapted, and transmitted. Finally, in the third part of the course we will consider various ways to answer questions about the extent to which religion might or might not be necessary for moral and ethical development.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES
Upon successful completion of RELG 205, students will be able to:
1. Discuss the sources or origins of values and ethics as transmitted through various religious configurations;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the different ways that religious practice shapes human attitudes toward values, ethics, and social responsibility;
3. Explain how religious values impact personal decision-making, self-identity, and individual well-being;
4. Analyze the influence of religious values upon community ethics and decision-making in contemporary society.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS
1. Jacques Berlinerblau. *How to be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (Mariner Books, 2013)
2. H. H. Dalai Lama. *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2011)
3. Craig Martin. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Equinox, 2012)
4. Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?"* (Advance Publishing Company, 1898) – free eBook, available through Google Books

5.   ** In addition to the above-listed textbooks, students will read selected chapters (available as PDF files on Blackboard) from the following books:

6.   Bruce Lincoln. *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11th*, 2nd edition (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

7.   Martin A. Nowak and Sarah Coakley, eds. *Evolution, Games, and God: The Principle of Cooperation* (Harvard University Press, 2013)

8.   Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics* (Columbia University Press, 2006)

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS

1. **Quizzes**: At the beginning of each class meeting, students will be given five to ten minutes to write short answers (one or two paragraphs) to questions about the reading. The quizzes will be open-book and aim to evaluate the students' comprehension of the reading as well as their ability to think critically about its content. The quiz questions will be addressed in that day's lecture and in-class discussion. Quizzes may only be made up in cases of an excused absence (see Attendance Policy as described below).

2. **Short Papers**: Throughout the semester, students will write and submit three short (3-4 page) papers, one paper for each of the three parts of the course. The papers should address a particular case study related to that section of the course, and may be drawn either from the assigned readings or from a historical or current event (to be approved ahead of time by the professor). The papers will be evaluated in terms of clarity, attention to detail, and ability to assess and reflect upon the underlying assumptions and possible consequences of the case. Further details will be distributed and discussed in class.

3. **Research Project/Presentation**: Working in small groups, students will identify a topic of interest related to the course. Upon approval by the professor, students will research the topic and prepare a brief written report (3-4 pages) and oral presentation (10 minutes). Reports and presentations will be evaluated in terms of clarity, precision, and ability to assess different strategies of ethical decision-making and problem solving. Further details will be distributed and discussed in class.

4. **Final Exam**: A comprehensive in-class written exam covering the assigned readings *as well as* material delivered in class (lectures, films, plenary/team discussions, and so forth). The exam aims to evaluate students' ability to identify and explain how values and ethical norms are transmitted through religious formations, how religion can function to lend authority and authenticity to social norms, and the personal and social implications of revising, adapting, or contesting these norms.

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

Week 1:   Course Introduction; Studying Religion

Part One: Social Practice as "Religious" Practice
Week 2:   Classification, Structure, and Habitus

Week 3:   Legitimation, Authority, and Authenticity

Week 4:   Case Study: "What Would Jesus Do?"
            PAPER #1 DUE AT THE END OF Week 4

Part Two: Value-Laden Practices as Means of Transmission
Week 5:   Purity of Body and Soul

Week 6:   Sacrifice & Ritual Movement

Week 7:   Sexual Behavior & Family Life

Week 8:   Sacred Texts & the Interpretation of Scripture

Week 9:   Persuasion & Emotional Appeal

Week 10: Coercion & Violence
            PAPER #2 DUE AT THE END OF WEEK 10

Part Three: Is Religion Necessary?
Week 11: Perspective #1, Evolutionary Biology

Week 12: Perspective #2, Secularism

Week 13: Perspective #3, A World Ethic
            PAPER #3 DUE AT THE END OF WEEK 13

Week 14: Course Wrap-Up and Presentation of Student Research Projects