

## COLLEGE RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

**Course:** Journey Through Religion  
**Instructor:** Joel J. Heim, Ph.D.  
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**Course Description:** In this course you learn to study religion using academic methods. You will discover what makes a phenomenon a “religion.” You will find out that religions all share common characteristics such as ritual, belief, and morality and then you will learn to recognize and analyze those characteristics in various world religions. In addition, you will be introduced to the world’s religious traditions which will make you better prepared to interact with the diverse peoples of our global world. You will practice that skill in the course by encountering the life stories of followers of various religious traditions. In sum, you will learn how to understand religious traditions both from the perspective of adherents and of constructive and conscientious outsiders.

**Course Goal:** To introduce students to the variety of the world’s religious traditions through a careful study of the major components of religion and to teach students how to understand religious traditions both from the perspective of an adherent and the perspective of a constructive and conscientious critic.

**Course Objectives:** At the conclusion of this course, students should be able:

1. To identify definitions and key characteristics of religion recognized by scholars in the field of religious studies.  
--This will be assessed in the exams, in class discussions and in the analytic journal.
2. To identify the characteristics of religion in religious autobiographies.  
--This will be assessed throughout the semester in all exams, the analytic journal, and the class discussions.
3. To analyze religious autobiographies from various religious traditions using the characteristics of religion.  
--This will be assessed throughout the semester in all exams, the class discussions, and the analytic journal
4. To respond to a variety of religious traditions both with empathic understanding (from an adherents point of view) and critical understanding (from the view point of a constructive and conscientious critic).  
--This will be assessed throughout the semester in all exams, the class discussions, and the analytic journal
5. To identify the central teachings, events, and ideas of the world’s central religious traditions.  
--This will be assessed primarily in the exams
6. To reflect on how their own experiences with religion are similar to and/or different from the experiences of those in the autobiographies.  
--This will be assessed primarily in the analytic journal entries.



### Academic Skills Development:

1. Students' critical thinking skills will be honed through the in-depth analysis of religious autobiographies. Because the selected autobiographies are from a variety of cultures and religions, emphasis is placed both on empathic understanding (the ability to understand the world from another person's point of view) and on critical understanding (the ability to offer valid and discerning judgments about another person's point of view).
2. Students' ability to understand contemporary relevance is improved through the course. The course is designed to help students see that religion does play a significant role in the world. The course's activities will help students to better understand both themselves and the course content.

### Texts:

Neihardt, John G. and Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. New York: Morrow, 1932. The Premier Edition. State University of New York Press, 2008.  
Comstock, Gary L. *Religious Autobiographies*. Second Edition. Cengage Learning, 2003.

### Course Requirements:

Midterm Exam 1  
Midterm Exam 2  
Analytic Journal  
Discussion Participation  
Final Exam

**Short Description of Course Requirements:** Detailed descriptions of those marked with a ■ will be handed out and gone over in class. When completing these assignments do not rely solely on the information below since essential details are missing.

■ **Exams:** The two midterm exams and the final exam will cover the material in the assigned readings, class lectures and discussions. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions, short answer identifications and essays. To help focus your study, review sheets will be distributed.

■ **Analytic Journal:** Instead of a research paper, you will keep an analytic journal which will provide both you with a written account of your encounters with the various expressions and characteristics of religion. Throughout the semester the analytic journal assignments require you to analyze and reflect on material related to the course. Assignments throughout the semester will vary considerably and will include not only critical analysis and response to the assigned readings, but also responses to materials in print and electronic forms that you find.

■ **Discussion Participation:** The course utilizes both discussion and content sessions to reach its objectives and students are expected to participate contributing to discussions.

## Course Calendar—Journey Through Religion

Assignments are to be completed before or in preparation for class

| Module  | Chapter | Topic  | Assignment  |
|---|---------|--|---|
| Module I:<br>Introduction<br>to the<br>Academic<br>Study of<br>Religion | 1       | Introduction to Course                           |   |
|   | 2       | The Religious Map of Reality                     | •Purchase Textbooks   |
|   | 3       | The Academic Study of Religion                   | <b>Read:</b> • <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> , Prefaces and Chapters 1-9 (pp. xvii-101 in the Premier Edition).   |
|   | 4       | The World's Religious Traditions                 | <b>Read:</b> • <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> , Chapters 10-18 (pp. 103-169 in Premier Edition).   |
|   | 5       | The Seven Characteristics of Religion            | <b>Read:</b> • Chapter 2: What is Religion? (Comstock, pp. 23-41)   |
|   | 6       | Discussion: Black Elk Speaks                     | <b>Finish Reading:</b> • <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> Chapters 19-25, Author's Postscript and Appendices (pp. 171-316 in Premier edition)<br><u>NOTE: By this time you should have completed all of <i>Black Elk Speaks</i></u><br><b>Read:</b> •pp. 13-19 in Comstock 's Chapter 1 "How should I respond to Religious Autobiographies?"<br><b>Prepare for discussion</b> on <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> by writing empathic and critical questions. |
|   | 7       | The Nature of the Sacred                         |   |
|   | 8       | Discussion: <i>Black Elk Speaks</i>              | <b>Prepare for discussion</b> on <i>Black Elk Speaks</i>  |
| Module II:<br>Native<br>American  | 9       | Native American Religious Traditions I           | <b>Complete Journal Entry #1</b>  |
|   | 10      | Cultus/Ritual                                    | <b>Read:</b> •Introduction to Chapter 3 (Comstock, pp. 44-46)   |
|   | 11      | Discussion: Autobiography of John Fire Lame Deer | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of John Fire Lame Deer (Comstock, pp. 61-75)  |
|   | 12      | Native American Religious Traditions II          |   |
|   | 13      | Discussion: Autobiography of Mary Crow Dog       | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Mary Crow Dog (Comstock, pp. 47-60)  |
| Module III:<br>Hinduism   | 14      | The Rise of the Hindu Faith                      | <b>Complete Journal Entry #2</b>  |
|   | 15      | Creed/Belief in Hinduism                         | <b>Read:</b> •Introduction to Chapter 5 (Comstock, pp. 116-120)   |
|   | 16      | Discussion: Autobiography of Gopi Krishna        | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Gopi Krishna (Comstock, pp. 121-136)   |

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| Module                                | Chapter | Topic   | Assignment   |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---|--|
|                                       | 17      | Creed/Belief  |  |
|                                       | 18      | Hindu Mythology                                     |  |
|                                       | 19      | Discussion: Autobiography of Shudha Mazumdar        | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Shudha Mazumdar (Comstock, pp. 137-151)                             |
|                                       | 20      | <b>Exam on Modules I-III</b>                        |  |
| Module IV:<br>Buddhism                | 21      | Introduction to Buddhism                            | <b>Complete</b> Journal Entry #3   |
|                                       | 22      | Zen Buddhism  | <b>Complete</b> Journal Entry #4<br><b>Read</b> •Introduction to Chapter 6 (Comstock, pp. 152-156) |
|                                       | 23      | Discussion: Autobiography of Thich Nhat Hanh        | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Thich Nhat Hahn (Comstock, pp. 157-175)                             |
|                                       | 24      | Experiencing the unCanny/Transcendent               | <b>Complete</b> Journal Entry #5   |
|                                       | 25      | Discussion: Autobiography of Satomi Myoda           | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Satomi Myodo (Comstock, pp. 176-191)                                |
| Module V:<br>Judaism                  | 26      | The Development of Judaism (Part 1)                 | <b>Read:</b> •Introduction to Chapter 8 (Comstock, pp. 241-247)                                    |
|                                       | 27      | The Development of Judaism (Part 2)                 |  |
|                                       | 28      | Discussion: Autobiography of Samuel Heilman         | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Samuel Heilman (Comstock, pp. 263-278)                              |
|                                       | 29      | Community/Society                                   |  |
|                                       | 30      | Community/Society in Judaism                        |  |
|                                       | 31      | Discussion: Autobiography of Judith Magyar Isaacson | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Judith Magyar Isaacson (Comstock, pp. 248-262)                      |
|                                       | 32      | <b>Exam on Modules IV &amp; V</b>                   |  |
| Module VI:<br>Honduran<br>Catholicism | 33      | Christianity  |  |
|                                       | 34      | Roman Catholicism                                   | <b>Read:</b> •Introduction to Chapter 9 (Comstock, pp. 279-282)                                    |
|                                       | 35      | Discussion: Autobiography of Elvia Alvarado         | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Elvia Alvarado (Comstock, pp. 299-314)                              |

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| Module   | Chapter | Topic  | Assignment   |
|--|---------|--|--|
|  | 36      | Code/Morality                                    |  |
|  | 37      | Liberation Theology                              |  |
|  | 38      | Discussion: Autobiography of Padre Carney        | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Padre Carney (Comstock, pp. 238-257)      |
| Module VII:<br>African-<br>American<br>Protestantism | 39      | American Denominationalism                       | <b>Complete</b> Journal Entry #6   |
|  | 40      | Course/History of African American Protestantism | <b>Read</b> •Introduction to Chapter 10 (Comstock, pp. 315-320)          |
|  | 41      | Discussion: Autobiography of Benjamin E. Mays    | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Benjamin E. Mays (Comstock, pp. 321-336)  |
|  | 42      | African/American Protestantism                   |  |
|  | 43      | Discussion: Autobiography of Bessie Jones        | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Bessie Jones (Comstock, pp. 337-351)      |
| Module VIII:<br>Islam                                | 44      | Mohammad and the Abrahamic Traditions            | <b>Read</b> •Introduction to Chapter 11 (Comstock, pp. 352-358)          |
|  | 45      | Islamic Teachings and Practices                  | <b>Complete</b> Journal Entry #7   |
|  | 46      | Character/Identity                               |  |
|  | 47      | Discussion: Autobiography of Jalal Al-e Ahmad    | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (Comstock, pp. 360-375)  |
|  | 48      | Discussion: Autobiography of Zaynab al-Ghazali   | <b>Read:</b> •Autobiography of Zaynab al-Ghazali (Comstock, pp. 376-390) |
|  | 49      | <b>Final Exam over Modules VI-VIII</b>           |  |