

*Encountering Religion in Its Global Context:  
An Introduction*  
RLST 101 - Fall 2010

**Meetings:** M / W / F, 10:10 – 11:00 a.m., Ascension Hall 202

**Instructor:** Visiting Assistant Professor David J. Howlett, Ascension Hall 312, howlettd@kenyon.edu

**Office Hours:** M, 1:00 p.m. -2:30 p.m.; TR, 1:00-2:30 p.m. or by appointment

**Course Description:** “Religion is the smile on a dog” poetically quipped Edie Brickell in a 2002 pop song, “What I Am.” Perhaps not intended as such, this quote advances a terse theory about “what religion is.” In this course, we will encounter several theories of religion and assess their utility as we study four major religious traditions through classic texts, short film clips, music, and secondary articles. For each tradition (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam), we will highlight two major analytic terms in the study of religion, such as sacred space, scripture, body, or ritual. Finally, we will consider how these categories, studied in class against a specific religious tradition, can illuminate or obscure understanding another religious community. And we will look for smiling dogs.

**Course Goals:** Students will leave this class with

- an understanding of several basic themes and approaches utilized by scholars in the academic study of religion.
- an awareness of some of the ethical issues and tensions confronted by religious studies scholars and the communities they study.
- an understanding of several major themes, practices, and beliefs in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.
- an appreciation for the diversity of experience between and within Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.
- an awareness how religions interact with other cultural constructions such as race, gender, age, and class.
- an ability to critically and empathetically analyze religions as cultural systems that orient people in time and space toward mundane and ultimate horizons, causes, and concerns.

<b><u>Final Class Grade:</u></b>	Mid-Term Exam	20%
	Final Exam	20%
	Four Roundtable Papers	35%
	Four Quizzes	15%
	Attendance and Participation	10%

**Mid-term and Final:** These examinations will consist of short identification terms and two essay questions, respectively. You will be given a review sheet one week before each examination, and we will conduct a brief review session in class.

**Quizzes:** Students will take four multiple-choice question quizzes (each quiz on a different religious tradition). Delivered online through the Moodle system, each quiz may be taken by students at their discretion, but no later than the respective dates specified on the syllabus. Once a student begins a quiz online, he or she has a time limit that may not be exceeded.

**Roundtable Papers and Discussions:** Throughout the semester, we will conduct four roundtable discussion sessions in class. The week before the roundtable, you will be given a question and then in a three to five-page paper you will lay out your argument. To be admitted to the discussion of the topic the following week, you turn in your paper. Together, your paper and your participation in the roundtable constitute your grade on each roundtable session.

**Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions. Students are expected to arrive on time. If a student is ten or more minutes late, he or she will be counted as absent, even if he or she attends the rest of class. If a student misses four classes, he or she will have his or her final grade dropped by one full letter grade. If a student misses eight classes, he or she will be expelled from the course. Each class will have a daily question or exercise that students are expected to complete in the first few minutes of class. Daily questions will be collected at the time of the midterm and at the last class of the semester.

**Assessment of Student Work:** Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A+	97-100
A	94-96
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	60-66
D-	56-59
F	55 and below

There is no curve for this class. A student will receive the grade he or she earns.

### **Classroom Procedures and Policies:**

**Plagiarism:** According to the Kenyon College website (and official college policy), a student is guilty of plagiarism “whenever the words, projects, performances, reports, or ideas of another person or source are presented as if they were the original contributions of the student presenting them.” Furthermore, a student has committed plagiarism “whether or not the misrepresentation was an intentional attempt to deceive.”<sup>1</sup> Plagiarism is a most serious offense and will not be tolerated in this course. If a student is guilty of plagiarism, he or she may be failed on an assignment, failed for the course, or expelled from the college. For further information on what

---

<sup>1</sup> “Academic Honesty and Question of Plagiarism,” accessed 21 August 2010, <http://www.kenyon.edu/x11747>.

Kenyon College judges as plagiarism, students should read the full definition of plagiarism (and the consequences for committing it) at the following site: <http://www.kenyon.edu/x11747>

**Late Assignment Policy:** Any paper not uploaded to the Moodle site AND not given to the instructor in person by the student at the beginning of class on the due date is late. Such a paper will have its grade automatically dropped by one full letter grade. A student will have forty-eight hours to upload a copy of the late paper to the Moodle site. (The student must still submit a hard copy.) Any paper that is not submitted within forty-eight hours of the due date will not be accepted, and the offending student will receive a zero for that assignment.

**Accommodations for Disabilities:** Associate Provost Ric Sheffield includes the following statement on his syllabi. It is applicable to this course, too.

It is recognized that at times special circumstances arise which necessitate accommodation. With the consent and guidance of the Dean of Academic advising, I am willing to work with you to the extent reasonable and appropriate to those circumstances. If you have a physical, psychological, or learning disability and, therefore, have need for some type of accommodation(s) in order to participate fully in this class, please feel free to discuss your concerns in private with me AND be sure to contact Erin Salva, Coordinator of Disability Services at PBX 5453 (SALVAE) or Dean Jane Martindell at PBX 5145. Notice of such need should be given sufficiently in advance of the due date for any assignment so that the necessary consultation with and confirmation from the appropriate offices can be made. Last minute requests for accommodation from students who have not consulted with Ms. Salva will not be granted.<sup>2</sup>

**Work Expectations:** For every hour of classroom time, students should budget at least three hours of study time. Students should therefore expect nine to ten hours of outside preparation work per week. On major written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week and revise their prose at least once, rather than cram all of their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

**Required Texts** (available for purchase at the Kenyon College Bookstore)

- Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).  
ISBN-13: 978-0-19-285387-5
- Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).  
ISBN-13: 978-0-19-285386-8
- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).  
ISBN-13: 978-0-19-280322-1
- Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).  
ISBN-13: 978-0-19-285389-9
- Other texts will be posted on Moodle, drawn from several journals, books, and primary source document readers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ric Sheffield, "Introduction to Legal Studies: Fall Semester 2009, Course Syllabus," document in possession of the author.

## SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY TOPICS & STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENTS

*Encountering Religion in Its Global Context:  
An Introduction*

RLST 101 - Fall Semester 2010

All assignments are to be read by Wednesday's class. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the reading schedule. Should changes be made, students will be informed in advance.

---

**WEEK 1**      Class Orientation  
(8/27)

Topics:      Course outline and introductions

---

**WEEK 2**      What is Religion?  
(8/30 – 9/3)

Readings:      1) Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284. [Moodle]

2) Vasudha Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.4 (2000): 761-779. [Moodle]

{35 pgs}

---

**WEEK 3**      Hinduism: An Introduction  
(9/6 – 9/10)

Readings:      1) Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

{117 small pgs}

---

---

**WEEK 4**      Hinduism: Sacred Space      **Quiz 1: Hinduism (9/13)**  
(9/13 – 9/17)

Readings:      1) Diana L. Eck, “India’s Tirthas: ‘Crossings’ in Sacred Geography,” *History of Religions* 20, no. 4 (1981): 323-344. [Moodle]

2) Diana L. Eck, “City of All India,” in Banaras, City of Light (New York: Knopf, 1982), 283-303. [Moodle]

3) “Atman: The Real Self,” “The Identity of Brahman and Atman,” “Karma and Transmigration,” “Emancipation from Karma,” in *The Hindu Tradition*, ed. by Ainslie T. Embree (New York: Vintage, 1972), 55-65. [Moodle]

{54 pgs}

---

**WEEK 5**      Hinduism: Sacrifice      **Roundtable 1 (9/24)**  
(9/20 – 9/24)

Readings:      1) Suchitra Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal’ and Divine Digestion: Goat Sacrifice to the Goddess Kali in Bengal,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 3 (1994): 779-830. [Moodle]

2) Primary Source Reading: selections from the *Bhagavad Gita* in *The Hindu Tradition*, 119-130. [Moodle]

{64 pgs}

---

**WEEK 6**      Buddhism: Key Concepts  
(9/27 – 10/1)

Readings:      1) Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

{125 short pgs}

---



---

**WEEK 11**      Christianity: Body      **Quiz 3: Christianity (11/1)**  
(11/1 – 11/5)

Readings:      1) Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Fast, Feast, Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,” *Representations* 11 (summer 1985): 1-25. [Moodle]

2) Mark 1-4; 10-11; 14-16:8 [Moodle link]

{36 pgs}

---

**WEEK 12**      Christianity: Belief      **Roundtable 3 (11/8)**  
(11/8 – 11/12)

Readings:      1) Colin Gunton, “Historical and Systematic Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-20. [Moodle]

2) “The Baptist Faith and Message” (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000); “Christian Principles for a Healthy Body and Spirit” (National Council of Churches of Christ, 2010) [Moodle link].

{22 pgs}

---

**WEEK 13**      Islam: Key Concepts      **Quiz 4: Islam (11/19)**  
(11/15 – 11/19)

Readings:      1) Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

{142 short pgs}

---

**WEEK 14**      **NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break**  
(11/22 – 11/26)

---

**WEEK 15**      Islam: Scripture  
(11/29 – 12/3)

Readings:      1) Lawrence Rosen, “Reading the Quran through Western Eyes,” in *Varieties of Muslim Experience: Encounters with Arab Political and Religious Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 75-92. [Moodle]

2) Quran 1, 10, 12, 55 [Moodle link]

{23 pgs}

---

**WEEK 16**     Islam: Pilgrimage  
(12/6 – 12/10)

**Roundtable 4 (12/8)**  
**Final Review (12/10)**

Readings:     1) Adbellah Hammoudi, *A Season in Mecca: Narrative of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 190-239. [Moodle]

**{50 pgs}**

---

**FINAL EXAM – Monday, December 13, 8:30 a.m.**

---