Los Angeles is a world-class laboratory for the study of religion. It is home to more than six hundred different religious groups, including many faith traditions which were brought to Southern California by immigrants.

This course surveys the rich variety of congregational expressions of religion, but it also acknowledges that many individuals pursue a spiritual quest that is not located in an organized religious community.

Through video presentations, fieldtrips, group projects and lectures led by Duncan Williams and Varun Soni, guest lectures from the School of Religion faculty, as well as Los Angeles religious leaders, students will learn how these diverse groups interact with each other and with the city of Los Angeles at large. (See syllabus below.)
REL 141g Global Religions in LA
[60051R]

Tuesday, Thursday 2-3:20pm
Location: GFS 106

Professor Duncan Williams duncanwi@usc.edu
Office (ACB 130), Phone (213-740-0270), Office Hours (by appointment)

Professor Varun Soni vasoni@usc.edu
Office (University Religious Center 106), Phone (213-740-6110), Office Hours (by appointment)

Teaching Assistant:
Sana Tayyen, sana.tayyen@cgu.edu Office Hours (tba)

Course Description
This course examines the place of the major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism) in the context of Los Angeles. Through video presentations, fieldtrips, group projects and lectures by the two principle faculty (Duncan Williams and Varun Soni), guest lectures from USC’s School of Religion faculty, as well as Los Angeles religious leaders, students will learn how these diverse religious traditions interact with each other and with the city of Los Angeles at large.

Los Angeles is a world-class laboratory for the study of religion. It is home to more than six hundred different religious groups, including many faith traditions that were brought to Southern California by immigrants. This course surveys the rich variety of congregational expressions of religion, but it also acknowledges that many individuals pursue a spiritual quest that is not located in an organized religious community. Exposure to the many religious groups and spiritual pursuits in Los Angeles will involve fieldtrips to notable religious institutions in the Los Angeles area that are accessible through public transportation. In addition, the students will participate, through learning group teams, in the mapping of and fieldwork about religious institutions in the immediate area of the USC campus. The course includes the introduction of methods and analytical tools from ethnography, fieldwork studies, and other humanistic and social sciences to enable students to make sense of the complexities of the array of issues that a multi-religious city like Los Angeles brings to the fore.

Some of the assigned readings are specific to Los Angeles; other readings focus more broadly on religious traditions in their classical teachings, practices, and institutions.

Learning Objectives
By the end of the semester, the following objectives will have been accomplished:

- Students will have a broad knowledge of different religious groups and movements in Southern California, as well as some historical understanding of how they evolved and the civic role that they play.
- Students will acquire a strong familiarity with the basic doctrines, practices, and institutions of the major global religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism).
- Students will have realized that awareness of and attention to religious diversity is as integral to civic discourse and civil society as are racial and ethnic diversity. Students
will develop religious literacy necessary in a world that is increasingly marked by religious encounter and conflict.

- Students will have developed analytical and critical skills to engage and document religious diversity through the mapping project and learn about the ethics of ethnography by engaging the diverse religious landscape of Los Angeles.

**Course Requirements and Grades**

There will be occasional quizzes, one midterm examination on the assigned readings and lectures, and a final examination covering the entire course content. In addition, all students will be expected to join “learning group teams” of 4-5 students to work on group research projects and attend at least 3 of the class field trips.

This course places varied emphasis on lecture, discussion and groups projects. The two examinations equal 40 percent of the grade and the project accounts for 25 percent of the grade. Occasional quizzes are intended to keep students current on their reading. And the participation grade is to reward students who make a contribution to the class through their regular and thoughtful comments.

Students will be divided into groups of 4-5 individuals to work on collaborative group projects. These projects will involve interviews with religious leaders and/or congregation members and the documenting of religious life in the area immediately around USC. In consultation with Professors Williams and Soni, each group of students will select a group, movement or religious theme to investigate during the semester. If students opt to do a media oriented project, each student will be asked to write a 2-3 page interpretive essay reflecting on their chosen project. This essay should describe the research that went into the project (i.e., interviews, field research, etc.), the editorial decision-making that was involved in developing the collaboration, and a summary of the argument underlying the work. Media projects can be NPR-style mini-documentaries, websites, or video presentations.

**Required Readings and Supplementary Material** – there are no required textbooks for this course. All articles and other readings will be posted to the course Blackboard site at least one week prior to the assignment date.

**Grade Breakdown:**

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Quizzes (once/2 weeks)</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Projects</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Trips (with reports on 2 out of 3)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in Lecture/Discussion Section</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>25</td>
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Extra Credit – on occasion, Professors Williams and Soni will announce religion-related lectures sponsored by the School of Religion or one of several religion-related research centers. Proof of attendance at these lectures will count for an extra point added to a reading quiz.
Course Schedule

Part I: Orientations

Week 1 August 25, 27 Introduction to the Course
Aug. 25 Introductions (Williams and Soni) - Los Angeles: A Laboratory for World Religion, Interfaith Encounters, and Global Issues
Aug. 27 Lecture (Williams): Approaches to the Study of Religion

Part II: Religion, Immigration, and Converts: A Focus on Buddhist and Hindu Communities in the American Religious Landscape

Week 2 September 1, 3 Hinduism: An Overview
Sept. 1 Lecture (Soni) Hinduism – An Introduction
Sept. 3 Guest Lecture: Philip Goldberg (author of American Veda) Hinduism in America

Week 2 Readings:
Goldberg, Philip. American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West (Harmony Books, 2013). Cpts. 1 and 2 (pp. 7-47).

SEPTEMBER 2 EXTRA CREDIT – 1-2:15pm Doheny DML 110C – “Book Talk by Gil Garcetti - Japan: A Reverence for Beauty”

Week 3 September 8, 10 Transformations of Buddhism
Sept. 8 Lecture (Williams) Transformations of Buddhism – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha Sept. 10
Sept. 10 Lecture (Williams) Buddhism in America

Week 3 Readings:
Seager, Richard. Buddhism in America (Columbia University Press). Cpts. 1-4 (pp. 3-47)

Week 4 September 15, 17 Asian Religiosity in America: Immigration, Converts, and Los Angeles
Sept. 15 (Williams) Race, Religion, and American Pluralism: The Case of Japanese American Buddhism
Sept. 17 Field Trip (I) – Zenshuji Buddhist Temple (Little Tokyo) with Rev. Shumyo Kojima – Two Tours – 2pm group and 3pm group

Week 4 Readings:
Williams, Duncan “America is a Buddhist Nation”: Lessons on Religious Freedom from the World War Two Incarceration of Japanese Americans (essay)

SEPTEMBER 14-18 EXTRA CREDIT - USC Religious Center – observation of Drepung Loseling Phukhang Khangtsen Buddhist monks building a sand mandala

**Part III: Christianity and Social Engagement**

**Week 5 September 22, 24 Christianity: An Overview and Social Engagement**  
Sept. 22 Guest Lecture: Cavan Concannon (USC School of Religion) Christianity – An Introduction  
Sept. 24 Panel Discussion: The LDS Church and Social Engagement

**Week 5 Readings:**

SEPTEMBER 24 EXTRA CREDIT – 7-9pm Tutor Campus Center Ballroom A – Religious Impact on the Public Square Symposium

**Week 6 September 29, October 1 Christian Social Engagement**  
Sept. 29 Guest Lecture: Jim Heft (President, Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC) “Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching”  
Oct. 1 **FIELD TRIP (II) TO CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

**Week 6 Readings:**

**Part IV: Judaism in Los Angeles**

**Week 7 October 6, 8 Mid-term Exam and Judaism – An Overview**  
Oct. 6 Mid-Term Exam  
Oct. 8 Guest Lecture: Jessica Marglin (USC School of Religion)

OCTOBER 12 EXTRA CREDIT – 4:15-5:30pm Doheny DML 110C – “Painting Enlightenment: The Art and Science of the Heart Sutra” by Paula Arai (Vanderbilt)

**Week 7 Readings:**

Windmueller, Steven. “Snapshot into Jewish LA: Some Insights and Reflections”  
<http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/snapshot-into-jewish-la-some-insights-and-reflections/>
Week 8 October 13, 15 Social Issues in Jewish and Jewish Interfaith Life
Oct. 13 Guest Lecturer: Sarah Benor (Hebrew Union College Associate Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies) “Jewish Identity and Communal Life”
Oct. 15 Guest Lecture: Leah Hochman (Hebrew Union College Louchheim School of Judaic Studies Director; USC School of Religion affiliate) “Jewish Notions of Ethics in Contemporary Questions of Justice and Ethics”

Week 8 Reading:

Part V: American Islam – Democracy, Law, and Gender Issues

Week 9 October 20, 22 Islam in Contemporary Societies
Oct. 20 Guest Lecture: Sherman Jackson (King Faisal Chair in Islamic Thought; USC School of Religion)
Oct. 22 Field Trip (III): Masjid Omar ibn Al-Khattab

Week 9 Reading:
Esposito, John. *Islam: The Straight Path.* (Oxford University Press, 4th ed., 2011), Cpts. 1-3 (pp. 3-103)

OCTOBER 23 EXTRA CREDIT – School of Cinematic Arts – Screening of Documentary on Vietnamese Buddhism (Thich Nhat Hanh Order)

Week 10 October 27, 29 Islam in LA
Oct. 27 Guest Lecture: Muslema Purmul (Muslim Chaplain, USC and UCLA)
Oct. 29 Guest Lecture: Edina Lekovic (Director, Muslim Public Affairs Council)

Week 10 Reading:
Pew Research Forum, “Portrait of Muslim Americans” (2011)
Bagby, Ihsan. A Comprehensive Survey of Southern California Mosques. (Islamic Shura Council)

Part VI: Sikhism in America

Week 11 November 3, 5 Sikhism
Nov. 3 Lecture (Soni) Introduction to Sikhism
Nov. 5 Guest Lecture: Jyotswaroop Kaur (Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund) - The Sikh American Experience

Week 11 Readings:

Part VII: Wrapping It Up

Week 12 November 10, 12 Religion and Popular Culture
Nov. 10 Lecture (Soni) Introduction to Religion and Popular Culture
Nov. 12 Guest Lecture: Gotham Chopra – The Religion of Sports?

Week 12 Readings:

Week 13 November 17, 19 Interfaith
Nov. 17 Lecture (Soni) Interfaith and Interfaith in LA
Nov. 19 Interfaith Leaders Panel Discussion

Week 13 Readings:

Week 14 November 24 Putting It Together: Team Meetings for Presentations
Nov. 24 Group Meetings to Prepare for Presentations in Discussion Section
Nov. 26 No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 December 1, 3 Section Winner Presentation of Group Projects
Sections – selections of winners for the final group project presentations

Dec. 1 Top Groups from Section Contest – Presentations (Part I)
Dec. 3 Top Groups from Section Contest – Presentations (Part II)

Final for REL 141g – Thursday, December 10, 2-4pm
Course Policy Statements

**All laptops and cell phones must be switched off** completely during class.
**Class sessions may not be recorded in any way without explicit permission from the instructor.**
**Paper extensions and exam re-scheduling will not be allowed unless you provide documented evidence of a medical or family emergency.** Penalty for papers submitted after the due date: 1/3 letter grade (eg. from B to B-) for each day that the paper is late.

Statement on Academic Integrity
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

*It is critical that you understand and adhere to University policies on academic integrity, as those caught plagiarizing or cheating will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and expelled from the course. There will be no second chances.*

Statement for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:
http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis
In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.