



REL 141g Global Religions in Los Angeles
Class No. 60051 2:00-3:20 T/Th GFS 106
GE credit in GE-B, Humanistic Inquiry

Instructors:



Duncan Williams, School of Religion



Varun Soni, Dean of Religious Life

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

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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:

Midterm Exam	15
Reading Quizzes (once/2 weeks)	10
Group Projects	25
Field Trips (with reports on 2 out of 3)	15
Participation in Lecture/Discussion Section	10
Final Examination	25

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:

Flood, Gavin. *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Cpts. 1 and 3 (pp. 1-23, 51-75).

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 Lecture (Williams) Buddhism in America

Week 3 Readings:

Ama, Michihiro. *Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Modernization, Acculturation, and Globalization of Shin Buddhism, 1898-1941*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2011). Introduction and Cpts. 1-2 (pp. 1-48)

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:

Imamura, Jane. *Kaikyo: Opening the Dharma: Memoirs of a Buddhist Priest's Wife in America*. (Buddhist Study Center Press, 1998), pp. 1-26.

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:

Solomon, Norman. *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1996). Introduction and Cpts. 1-5 (pp. 1-83)

Hartmann, David and Tzvi Marx. "Charity." In *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs*. (The Free Press, 1987), pp. 47-54.

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:

Pogrebin, Abigail. *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk About Being Jewish*. (Broadway Books, 2005), pp. 60-66; 84-91; 146-167; 371-376.

Dreisinger, Baz. “Spot the Jew.” In *The Modern Jewish Girl’s Guide to Guilt*. Ruth Andrew Ellenson, ed. New York: Dutton, 2005, pp. 173-181.

Phillips, Bruce. “The Challenge of Family, Identity and Affiliations.” In *California Jews*. Ava F. Kahn and Marc Dollinger, eds. Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2003, pp. 17-28.

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)

Muslim Public Affairs Council. Policy Paper – “Not Qualified: Exposing the Deception Behind America’s Top 25 Pseudo Experts on Islam”

Muslim Public Affairs Council. Policy Paper – “Muslims and the Making of America”

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:

McLeod, Hew. *Sikhism* (Penguin Books, 1998). Cpts. 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 3-61).

Peace, Jennifer and Or Rose. *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation* (Orbis Books, 2012). Cpt. 34 (pp. 172-177).

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:

Chidester, David. *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (University of California Press, 2005). Introduction, Cpts. 1 and 2 (pp. 1-51).

Laderman, Gary. *Sacred Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, the Living Dead, and Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (The New Press, 2009). Cpt. 3 (pp. 43-63).

Sexton, John. *Baseball as a Road to God: Seeing Beyond the Game* (Gotham Books, 2013). Foreword, Cpt. 1 (pp. 1-35).

Week 13 November 17, 19 Interfaith

Nov. 17 Lecture (Soni) Interfaith and Interfaith in LA

Nov. 19 Interfaith Leaders Panel Discussion

Week 13 Readings:

McCarthy, Kate. *Interfaith Encounters in America*. (Rutgers University Press, 2007). Introduction (pp. 1-13).

Patel, Eboo. *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*. (Beacon Press, 2012). Cpts. 4, 5, and 6 (pp. 65-107).

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.