

RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP

FYS 033 (CRN 6974)

Drake University

Fall 2020

MW 12:30–1:45pm

Zoom link for class: <https://drake-edu.zoom.us/j/89350776253>

INSTRUCTOR

- Tim Knepper: tim.knepper@drake.edu
 - Office Hours (on ZOOM): T/R, 12:00-2:30 pm, or by appointment
 - ZOOM link: <https://drake-edu.zoom.us/j/85188274845>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

- This is a first-year seminar in religious literacy and interfaith leadership. It is problem-based, grounded in two hypotheses about religious literacy and interfaith leadership: (1) whatever else interfaith leadership is or does or involves, religious literacy is integral to it; (2) Americans, for all of their religiosity, are often religiously *illiterate*. The “problem” of this class, therefore, is religious illiteracy on Drake’s campus, and the “solution(s)” is what to do about it as interfaith leaders.
- Our course is structured into three sections, the first focusing on religious literacy with regard to Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, especially as lived in the metro area), the second, on religious literacy with regard to some Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, ditto), the third, on interfaith leadership, especially in its relationship to religious literacy.
- Meanwhile, the central problem of our class will require us, first, to ascertain the level of religious literacy on Drake’s campus, second, to come up with a plan for addressing religious illiteracy, and third, to implement at least one part of that plan (most likely a public event “on” Drake’s campus).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To become religiously literate about the largest six religions of the world, focusing especially on how they are organized and practiced in the metro area.
- To explore the relationship between religious literacy and interfaith leadership, appreciating the importance of the former for the latter.
- To measure religious literacy on Drake’s campus, propose ways to increase religious literacy on Drake’s campus, and implement at least one program to improve religious literacy on Drake’s campus.
- To critically reflect on the nature, function, and construction of religion, especially in light of how religion is lived in Des Moines.
- And, more broadly, to learn to read texts critically and empathetically, to learn to research topics insightfully and thoroughly, to learn to write papers cogently and coherently, and to learn to engage ideas and others in a seminar setting with clarity and considerateness.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Timothy D. Knepper and Bob Blanchard, *A Spectrum of Faith: Religions of the World in America’s Heartland* (Drake Community Press, 2017); ISBN: 0692855157
- Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Beacon Press, 2016); ISBN: 9780807033623
- I will also post to our Blackboard digitized copies of Mary Pat Fisher’s 6th edition of *Living Religion* (Prentice Hall, 2005, ISBN: 0131933159)
- We will also on one occasion read a chapter from Stephen Prothero’s *Religious Literacy* (HarperOne, 2008, ISBN: 978-0060859527), which I will also digitize and post to BB.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Three Papers (45% total, 15% each)**
 - At the end of each section of the course, you will write a paper, each approximately four pages in length (double-spaced), with proper citations and bibliography. On the day that each paper is due, you will also “present” it in class (which involves informally discussing it, focusing on its thesis, arguments, and insights). Each paper will require a modest amount of research of non-required sources (in a way that helps you learn the differences between encyclopedias, articles/essays, and books).
 - Paper questions will be distributed approximately one week prior to due dates. Papers will be graded on the basis of content (6 points), strength of argument (6 points), and clarity of expression (3 points). *Except in the case of extreme circumstances, late papers will be penalized by 1 point per day.*
- **Eight Reading Responses (24% total: 3% each)**
 - Student is responsible for writing (and posting to Blackboard) a total of 8 reading responses (out of 15 opportunities), each of which must be for a different reading assignment. Reading responses are due by 12:01 am on the day that the reading assignments will be discussed. They should engage the reading material, citing therefrom. And they should also contain a topic or question for class discussion (which the student will be responsible for raising in class, time permitting). They should be written in response to one of the reading threads created by the professor. And they should be approximately one, double-spaced page in length (i.e., 350 words). They will be graded as check-plus (3 points) or check (2 points) or check-minus (1 point) based on their accurate understanding of and thoughtful engagement with the reading material. *Reading responses will only be accepted for classes that you actually attend.*
- **Participation in Class Project/Campus Event (15%)**
 - Whatever campus event or class project we decide to program, you are expected to participate in the planning, implementation, and assessment of it. I will ask you to assign points to yourself for this, possibly also to other members of your small group (if indeed we do divide into small groups to plan and implement the event).
 - *Note that our event will ideally happen on the evening of Monday, Nov 30th or Tuesday, Dec 1st. If so, it must be a virtual/on-line event.
- **Information Literacy Survey (1%)**
 - This FYS constitutes one of the “Information Literacy” courses for the semester. Among other things, this means that you will take a short on-line survey during the first week of the semester about the “information literacy” that you possess prior to your college career. These surveys are not graded; you simply receive one point by virtue of doing it. Here is the link: http://drake.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6KWcXW5Q63p34IT.
- **Overall Course Contribution (15%)**
 - As you can probably imagine, there is a clamor of voices with advice about how to teach during COVID-19. What I have found thus far, is that it is best to treat this class like any other “regular” class, at least in certain ways. What I mean by that is that we will meet together (on ZOOM) for every single class period just like we would if this were a “normal” semester. By doing so, we will build a sense of community between us as we work together toward a common set of goals. That said, I certainly understand if your life under COVID-19 gets too complicated at times for you to attend class. But if that proves to be the case, *you need to let me know so that we can figure out together how you should make up the session.* Moreover, please note that *you are responsible for everything that occurs during classes that you miss.*

DISCLAIMER

- I reserve the right to revise the syllabus at any point in time should I deem it in your best interest.

BLACKBOARD

- This course will utilize Blackboard in at least four ways: (1) students *will* post reading and dialogue responses to the “discussion board” (see above) (2) students *may* post informal (and, if desired, anonymous) course evaluations to the “discussion board” (see below); (3) professor *will* post grades to the “gradebook;” (4) professor *will* post reading hints to the “announcements” (see below).

COURSE FEEDBACK

- I am teaching this course for you. This means that if something about it is not “working” for you in such a way that significantly hinders your learning experience, I want to know about it so that I can at least try to fix it. To this end, I will do two things: (1) invite you to write informal evaluations in class from time to time; (2) invite you to post informal evaluations to the discussion board of Blackboard anytime you so desire. Both may be done anonymously.

STUDYING RELIGION

- The academic study of religion is not the confessional practice of religion. When we study religion in the university, we do so from a perspective that is as impartial and objective as possible. This involves, in my opinion, an attitude of critical empathy—empathy in that it attempts to understand and appreciate religious beliefs and practices from the perspective of the practitioner, but also critical in that it attempts to understand and appreciate these beliefs and practices as objectively as possible.

READING RELIGION (READING HINTS)

- Reading about culturally and historically distant ideas and practices can be difficult, particularly when unfamiliar, technical terms are involved. I will post reading hints under the “announcements” section of Blackboard that should help focus your reading of the assignments. Still, these readings will require time and attention. Budget your time and determine your reading space accordingly.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- There are too many good resources in Cowles (both in stacks and in reference) to list them all. You really need to check them out for yourself! So, here I’ll just make three quick comments:
- *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Lindsay Jones, ed.) contains a vast number of entries on many different aspects of the world’s religions written by leading scholars of religion. (And the other encyclopedias of religion in the reference section are probably useful too.)
- I don’t know of a credible on-line encyclopedia or dictionary of religion. Both the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (iep.utm.edu) and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (plato.stanford.edu) sometimes provide scholarly articles on *religious* philosophers and philosophies. Please exercise caution when using websites that are not written by identified scholars or are written by passionate practitioners.
- Cowles subscribes to the ATLA Religion Database, the premier index of articles and books written in the discipline of religious studies. ATLA will allow you to search all the books and articles ever written on any given subject matter pertaining to religion. (Philosopher’s Index will do the same for philosophy.)

+/- GRADING

- This course will use +/- grading. This is how I understand it working: A= 93–100, A- = 90–92, B+ = 87–89, B = 83–86, B- = 80–82, and so forth.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

- If you have a disability and will require academic accommodations, please see me. Accommodations are coordinated through Student Disability Services. Please contact Michelle Laughlin, Director of Student Disability Service at 281-1835 or michelle.laughlin@drake.edu.

ZOOM ETIQUETTE AND POLICY

- A substantial part of your learning in this course will depend on your active and attentive engagement in class discussions and other collaborative learning opportunities. I strongly encourage you to turn on your camera during collaborative exchanges to help sustain a sense of community and co-presence as we learn together. *However, doing so is not required; if you have reservations about doing so, please let me know in advance so I can plan accordingly.*
- You are advised to mute yourself unless speaking.
- I will occasionally use “screen share” to share powerpoints, course documents, video clips, images, and other materials.
- I have found that “chat” function useful for asking questions and making comments; know, though, that I might not always see your chat (if, for example, I’m screensharing a powerpoint), so you might need to make me aware of chats that I should address but haven’t yet addressed.
- If you have a ZOOM emergency, it is probably best to text me at 515-306-9097. (I will have my email closed on my computer during class so you don’t continually hear the sound of my incoming email.)
- We will use the same ZOOM link for all our classes: <https://drake-edu.zoom.us/j/89350776253>.
- I will use the same ZOOM link for all my office hours (T/Th 12:00–2:30 pm): <https://drake-edu.zoom.us/j/85188274845>

COVID-19 INFO

- Please carefully monitor your own health and wellbeing throughout the semester, including frequently taking your own temperature. If you experience [Covid-19 symptoms](#) or a fever, even if you do not test positive, *please do not come to an in-person class meeting*. If you test positive for Covid-19 or have been exposed and need to isolate yourself, please send an email to dos@drake.edu from your Drake email account and include your full name and student ID along with information about your situation. College and schools’ deans’ offices will then contact your professors, who will work with you to provide fully virtual learning opportunities during your quarantine and/or recovery.

FIRST YEAR SEMINARS AND WRITING

- First year seminars, as you may already know, are designed to facilitate your adjustment to intellectual life at Drake. More elaborately, they “are intended to provide an optimum environment for promoting intellectual inquiry and growth among first year students by fostering a sense of community among class members, encouraging active participation and collaboration in the conduct of the class, and fostering the development of skills in creative thinking, critical analysis, and effective communication.” For more FYS info: <http://www.drake.edu/dc/firstyearseminarfys/studenthomepage/>.
- In particular, first year seminars should help you learn how to write like a college student. To such an end, I will be assigning a number of different writing assignments, each of which you will have the opportunity to rewrite. (Note, though, that rewritten papers must be entirely rewritten, i.e., not just *corrected*.) For help with your writing, see me. (Note that I might require some of you also to work with a writing tutor at the Writing Workshop: <http://www.drake.edu/english/studentresources/writingworkshop/>). As for citations, I do not care which format you use, just as long as you are consistent. (I encourage you to learn the style of your discipline/major.)

CRITERIA OF INFORMATION LITERACY (from <https://www.drake.edu/dc/areasofinquiry/informationliteracy/>)

- (1) Navigate and integrate scholarly resources into their research and reflection.
- (2) Articulate the social and ethical implications of information use and misuse.
- (3) Evaluate information resources and identify quality resources relevant to the problem or issue investigated.
- (4) Select and employ the appropriate method and data for disciplinary research, problem-based learning, experiential-based research, and/or reflective/integrative coursework.
- (5) Articulate the basic implications of information use and misuse related to issues of academic honesty and plagiarism and pursue their educational goals with a high level of academic integrity.

ACADMIC CONDUCT: PLAGIARISM

- Plagiarism will be taken very seriously in this class. Plagiarized papers will be automatically failed. Second offenses *will* result in failure of the course and *may* result in academic probation or expulsion.
- **My own rule:** If you use an author's ideas, whether verbatim or not, cite that author. If those ideas are "common knowledge," there is no need to cite—unless those ideas are copied word-for-word. If those ideas are not common knowledge, then you must cite.
- **The A&S Policy** (<http://www.drake.edu/studentlife/handbook-resources/handbook/academic/>):
 - Academic dishonesty is an all-encompassing term involving any activity that seeks to gain credit for work one has not done or to deliberately damage or destroy the work of others. It includes plagiarism (the misrepresentation, either by intent or negligence, of another's ideas, phrases, discourse, or works as one's own); cheating (the act, or attempted act, of giving or obtaining aid and/or information by illicit means in meeting any academic requirement, including examinations); fabrication (intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic sense in any academic exercise); and facilitating academic dishonesty (intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty). Examples of such cases include, but are not limited to:
 1. copying from the Internet and representing it as one's own thoughts or work;
 2. copying from another student's paper, laboratory report, or other report, or computer files or listing and representing it as one's own thoughts or work;
 3. using, during a test or laboratory experiment, material and/or devices not authorized by the instructor in charge;
 4. without the instructor's permission, collaborating with another, knowingly assisting another or knowingly receiving the assistance of another in writing an examination or in satisfying any other course requirements;
 5. incorporating into written assignments materials written by others without giving them credit, or otherwise improperly using information written by others (including that which might be stored on computer disks or other technological devices), or submitting commercially prepared papers as one's own;
 6. submission of multiple copies of the same or similar papers without prior approval of the several instructors involved;
 7. claiming as one's own work that which was done by tutors or others with no mention of credit to or the assistance of those persons;
 8. deliberately damaging or destroying another's laboratory experiments, computer work or studio work;
 9. knowingly obtaining access to, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release;
 10. substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, to take a test or other assignment or to make a presentation;
 11. intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise;
 12. forgery, alterations, or misuse of University documents;
 13. falsifying information submitted or failure to reveal relevant information in any University application form or offering any false information in any University disciplinary proceeding.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction

- 08.24 (M): Introduction to Course
- 08.26 (W): Introduction to Religion and its Study
 - Reading (1): Fisher, ch. 1: “Religious Responses,” pp. 1–28

Section I: Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

- 08.31 (M): Intro to Judaism
 - (Optional reading: Fisher, ch. 8: “Judaism,” pp. 226–281)
- 09.02 (W): Judaism in Des Moines
 - Reading (2): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 33–40, 73–80, 105–112
- 09.07 (M): NO CLASS – Labor Day
- 09.09 (W): Religious Literacy questionnaire
 - Reading (3): Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, ch. 1
- 09.14 (M): Intro to Christianity
 - (Optional reading: Fisher, ch. 9: “Christianity,” pp. 284–359)
- 09.16 (W): Christianity in Des Moines
 - Reading (4): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 17–24, 65–72, 113–120
- 09.21 (M): Intro to Islam
 - (Optional reading: Fischer, ch. 10: “Islam,” pp. 362–416)
- 09.23 (W): Islam in Des Moines
 - Reading (5): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 1–8, 57–64, 97–104
- 09.28 (M): Library Trip
- 09.30 (W): Diversity within religions
 - “Reading” (6): Long Search documentary on “Zulu Zion” (Christianity in South Africa)
- 10.05 (M): **PAPER 1 DUE**
 - (on differences within religious traditions)

Section II: Indian Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism

- 10.07 (W): Intro to Hinduism
 - (Optional reading: Fisher, ch. 3: “Hinduism,” pp. 69–113)
- 10.12 (M): Hinduism in Des Moines
 - Reading (7): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 25–32, 81–88
- 10.14 (W): Intro to Buddhism

- (Optional reading: Fisher, ch. 5: “Buddhism,” pp. 129–172)
- 10.19 (M): Buddhism 3: Buddhism in Des Moines
 - Reading (8): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 9–16, 81–88
- 10.21 (W): Intro to Sikhism
 - (Optional reading: Fisher, ch. 11: “Sikhism,” pp. 417–437)
- 10.26 (M): Sikhism in Des Moines
 - Reading (9): *Spectrum of Faith*, pp. 49–56, 89–96
- 10.28 (W): Blurriness between “religions”
 - “Reading” (10): Long Search doc. on “Taoism: A Question of Balance” (Religion in Taiwan)
- 11.02 (M): **PAPER 2 DUE**
 - (on blurriness between religious traditions)

Section III: Interfaith Leadership and Religious Literacy

- 11.04 (W): The Identity of an Interfaith Leader
 - Reading (11): Patel, chs. 1
- 11.09 (M): The Theory of an Interfaith Leader
 - Reading (12): Patel, chs. 2–3
- 11.11 (W): The Vision of an Interfaith Leader
 - Reading (13): Patel, ch. 4
- 11.16 (M): The Knowledge Base and Skill Set of an Interfaith Leader
 - Reading (14): Patel, chs. 5–6
- 11.18 (W): The Qualities of an Interfaith Leader
 - Reading (15): Patel, ch. 7
- 11.23 (M), 11.25 (W): Thanksgiving break
- 11.30 (M): Planning for our event(?)
- 12.02 (W): Evaluating our event; wrapping up our course
- **12.09 (W), 12:00–1:50 pm: PAPER 3 DUE**
 - (on interfaith leadership and religious literacy)