

ROWAN UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

PROPOSAL TITLE: New Course:
What Is Religion?

CHECK APPROPRIATE: UNDERGRADUATE GRADUATE 3 SEMESTER HOURS

SPONSOR(S): D. Ashton, J. Grace

DEPARTMENT/TELEPHONE #

CHECK ONE: COURSE MINOR PROGRAM CONCENTRATION SPECIALIZATION
 ACHIEVEMENT CERTIFICATE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM MAJOR PROGRAM

<p>Step #1 (Department)</p> <p><u>10/24/97</u> Approved (Date) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Approved (Date)</p> <p><u><i>David W. Conway</i></u> Dept. Curriculum Chr.</p> <p><u>10/24</u> Reviewed (Date)</p> <p><u><i>David W. Conway</i></u> Dept. Chr.</p>	<p>Step #2 (Receipt)</p> <p>SCC# <u>97-98-234</u></p> <p><u>2-5-98</u> Date Received Senate</p> <p>_____ Senate Curriculum Chr.</p>	<p>Step #3 (School)</p> <p>Reviewed Date: <u>1/27/98</u></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recommend to Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Recommend NOT to Approve</p> <p>Forward for Open Hearing: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WITHOUT Reservations <input type="checkbox"/> WITH Reservations:</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p><u><i>Joy Wiltenburg</i></u> School Committee Chr.</p>
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Step #4 (Academic Dean): Recommended NOT Recommended Conditionally Recommended (See Comments)

Comments:

Dean Signature/Date _____

Step #5 (Senate Curriculum Committee): Open Hearing Date: _____ Approved by Curriculum Committee Date _____

Returned to Sponsor(s) for the following reason:

Step #6 (Senate) Date announced/voted on at Senate _____ If voted on: Approved NOT Approved

Directed to Executive Vice President/Provost _____

Senate Curriculum Committee chair Signature/Date: _____

PROPOSAL FOR THE COURSE "WHAT IS RELIGION?"

1. Details

- A. Course title: What Is Religion?
- B. Sponsors: Dianne Ashton, Philosophy/Religion
James H. Grace, Philosophy/Religion
- C. Credit hours: 3
- D. Course level: 300
- E. Curricular effect: This course will be required of students majoring in Philosophy and Religion with an emphasis in Religion Studies. It will also be open to all students who have taken one course in Philosophy or Religion Studies. We hope it will also fulfill General Education requirements at the upper level.
- F. Prerequisite: One course in either Philosophy or Religion Studies.
- G. Imprementation: Fall Semester, 1998
- H. Adequacy of:
 - 1. Staffing - Our Department presently has two members who are qualified to teach this course. It is expected that other current or new staff could prepare to teach this course in the future.
 - 2. Library Facilities and Holdings - The Department has over the past ten years ordered many books and periodicals that address this topic and related issues. With these, and future additions, the Library's collection will suffice for an undergraduate course on this topic.
 - 3. Space Needs - One classroom with blackboards and with seating for thirty, at least once every third semester, will be needed for this course.

II. Rationale

Unlike our survey courses in world and new religions, which focus upon specific religious traditions, the course proposed here examines "religion" per se, focusing upon its major expressions(ritual, belief, ethics, scripture, etc.), its functions in human life(psychological, sociological, cultural, etc.), and the variety of descriptive/evaluative methodologies(Freudian, Marxist, Femininist, Symbolic Interactionalist, etc.)employed by scholars to study it.

The importance of the question, "wnat is religion?" is evidenced primarily at the level of modern culture which manifests a paradoxical trend in which, on the one hand, scientific and secular values appear to be relegating religion to the status of a cultural "fifth wheel," while, on the other, religion--particularly in its fundamentalist form--seems not only to be solvent but also undergoing a revitalization on a world scale(e.g., Evangelical Christianity in America, Shiite Islam in the Middle East, Orthodox Judaism in Israel, and Fundamentalist-nationalistic Hinduism in India).

Secondly, the topic addressed by this course is significant because traditional dictionary definitions of religion have been rendered anachronistic by two interrelated phenomena. First, modern technology and geo-political trends are rapidly creating a world in which the Buddhist in Vietnam is no longer a foreign curiosity but in a real sense our neighbor. This awareness of religious diversity in the emerging global village is accentuated by a second phenomenon, the proliferation of new and, in some cases, unprecedented religions, such as Scientology which identifies itself as a religion yet has few, if any, roots in established religious traditions.

Finally, this course is important because it addresses the kinds of questions that undergraduates frequently ask, questions about the nature of God, religion and morality, and organized religion. Such questions provide the existential context in which students and teacher alike may pursue the wide variety of "answers" suggested in the course, answers as diverse as the non-theistic arguments of Theravada Buddhism and Thomas Aquinas five "proofs" of God's existence.

III. Essence of the Course

A. Course Objectives: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to perform the following tasks:

1. Articulate the basic problems associated with defining the nature of religion.
2. Identify and explain the significance of the structural elements (e.g., ritual, belief, scripture, myth, and morality) of religion.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the variety of answers given by various religions and secular philosophies to the ultimate questions of human existence. For example, how can we make sense of evil and suffering?
4. Explain and critique the major descriptive/evaluative methodologies which constitute the academic study of religion.
5. Discuss in an informed manner the primary issues faced by religions as we approach the 21st Century (e.g., religious diversity and tolerance).

B. Topical Outline/Content: The following outline illustrates only one of a number of possible approaches to achieving the course objectives.

I. What is religion?

- A. Religion as a human activity
- B. The problems of defining "religion"
 1. Prescriptive vs. Descriptive
 2. Scope: Depth vs. Breadth
 3. Do "working definitions" work?

- II. Religion and the contemporary world
 - A. Hallmarks of modernity
 - 1. Science and technology
 - 2. Communications revolution
 - 3. The global village
 - B. Does religion have a future?
 - 1. Demographics
 - 2. Religion and resurgent nationalism

- III. The academic study of religion
 - A. Twin goals: Objectivity and Verstehen
 - B. Origins of religion
 - 1. E.B. Tylor - "primitive science"
 - 2. R.H. Codrington - "mana"
 - C. Functions of religion
 - 1. Karl Marx - "opiate of the masses"
 - 2. Emile Durkheim - "social cohesiveness"
 - 3. Joseph Campbell - "an ordered cosmos"
 - D. Structures/expressions of religion
 - 1. The Sacred
 - 2. Mythology
 - 3. Ritual
 - 4. The Arts
 - 5. Belief
 - 6. Scripture
 - 7. Morality and Ethics
 - E. Is Comparative Religion possible?
 - 1. Historicism
 - 2. Essentialism
 - 3. Phenomenology

- IV. Selected issues in religion studies
 - A. The Nature of God: Christianity & Hinduism
 - 1. One or many?
 - 2. Personal or Impersonal?
 - 3. Arguments Pro and Con
 - B. Theodicy: Greeks, Christians, & Buddhists
 - 1. What causes suffering?
 - 2. Fate, freewill, satan, and karma
 - C. Religion and Ecology
 - 1. Human hegemony over nature: Biblical religions
 - 2. Nature as Maya and Lila: Religions of India
 - 3. Nature as Earth Mother: Native American traditions

C. Evaluation and Grading: At the discretion of the instructor students may be evaluated on the basis of examinations, journals, class participation, research projects, and other written assignments.

D. Course Evaluations: SIRs and peer review as well as students' qualitative assessments presented at the end of the course concerning what they liked most or least about i) the course, ii) the instructor, iii) the material used, e.g., texts, tests, audio-visuals, etc. Students will also be asked to provide suggestions to improve the course.

E. Consultations: The following persons have been consulted informally about the content and structure of this course: Dr. Marion Caldwell, Iowa State University; Mr. Kenneth Barrows, Oxford University; and Dr. Michael Spears, UCLA.

F. Additional Information: Selected Bibliography

- Ayer, A.J. Language, Truth, and Logic.
Campbell, Joseph. The Power of Myth.
Capps, Walter H. Ways of Understanding religion.
Creel, Richard. Religion and Doubt.
Eliade, Mircea. Patterns in Comparative Religion.
Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair. New Essays in Philosophical Theology.
Freud, Sigmund. The Future of an Illusion.
Hume, David. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.
James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience.
Johnstone, Ronald L. Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion.
Magee, John B. Religion and Modern Man.
Parrinder, Geoffrey. Comparative Religion.
Reuther, Rosemary. Religion and Sexism.
Rubinstein, Richard. The Religious Imagination: A Study of Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology.
Shamra, Chandradhar. A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy.
Smart, Ninian. Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs.
Smith, Wilfred C. The Meaning and End of Religion.
Tillich, Paul. Dynamics of Faith.
Van Gennep, Arnold. The Rites of Passage.
Wilson, John F. Religion: A Preface.

G. Catalog Description

300 Level

Prerequisite: one course in Philosophy or Religion
Studies or instructor's permission '

WHAT IS RELIGION? 3 s.h.

This course will examine religion as a dimension of human existence. It will explore what is involved in the academic study of religion as well as cultural and existential issues that arise when people seriously reflect upon the meaning of religion.