PSYCH 348: Psychology of Religion  
Spring, 2012

Professor: Nathaniel Wade, PhD
Office: Lago w208   Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00 - 3:00
Phone: 294-1455   Thursday 1:00 - 2:00
E-mail: nwade@iastate.edu   TA: Rachel Bitman, MA (rlbitman@iastate.edu)

Course Description:

This course is a survey of psychological theory and research investigating religious beliefs, experiences, and practices. We will focus on those parts of the religious life that can be described and understood from a psychological perspective. We will attempt to explore the psychology of universal religion, although we will not comprehensively survey the beliefs and practices of different religious traditions. Also, we will not be attempting to prove or disprove religious claims. Instead, our main focus will be on the psychological elements of religious life.

Books:


Articles:

As assigned (see course schedule below). Articles can be downloaded from Blackboard.

Course Goals

I will . . .
1. Present an overview of how psychologists study religion and related topics through lectures, discussion, and assigned projects.
2. Provide the forum and opportunity to think deeply and critically about religion, psychology, and the psychology of religion.
3. Encourage hard work within a relaxed and collegial environment.

Students will . . .
1. Explore facets of religion from a psychological perspective, and learn the theories and conclusions psychology has proposed about religion.
2. Complete reading and writing assignments, presentations, and participate in class discussion to critically evaluate the material.
3. Acquire skills for thinking independently and critically and apply those to the course material.
Course Expectations

1. Attendance:
   Attendance is an important part of this learning experience. The reading will only cover a portion of the material learned in this course. In addition, there will be many opportunities for discussion and interaction. Your presence is needed to make these successful. However, I will not be recording or specifically grading your attendance. You are responsible for any information or material that was covered in class on a day you were absent.

2. Participation:
   Participation in class discussions, activities, and presentations is also an important part of the learning you will accomplish this semester. I will provide different opportunities for participation to try to include everyone, but you may need to stretch yourself some to take part in the class fully. In addition, we all need to work to make the atmosphere in the class respectful and open. This means that personal beliefs and opinions need to be owned as such, and differences need to be heard and respected.

3. Feedback:
   To make the class as beneficial as we can, we will need to give each other feedback. I welcome any and all thoughtful suggestions for our time together, via email, in person, or on anonymous slips of paper. I will provide formal feedback to each of you via graded assignments (see “Grading Criteria” below) and in person should anyone request it.

Grading Criteria

Your grade in this course will be determined by a point system. You have the opportunity to acquire 500 total points in this class. Based on this total point value, grades will be assigned as follows:

- 465 - 500 pts = A
- 400 - 419 pts = B-
- 335 - 349 pts = D+
- 450 - 464 pts = A-
- 385 - 399 pts = C+
- 320 - 334 pts = D
- 435 - 449 pts = B+
- 370 - 384 pts = C
- 300 - 319 pts = D-
- 420 - 434 pts = B
- 350 - 369 pts = C-
- below 300 pts = F

Assignments. You will complete four (4) assignments with different point values. The assignments, with point values, are listed below and due dates are listed in the course schedule. More information about each assignment can be found online. The assignments are worth 200 total points.

1. Personal Reflections on Religion  20 pts
2. Analysis of a Mystical Experience  40 pts
3. Religious Conversion Interview  100 pts
4. Experiencing a Religious Service  40 pts

Reaction Paper. You will write a 4-5 page reaction paper after reading the book Man’s Search for Meaning. The reaction paper should only briefly discuss the contents of the book (less than one page). The bulk of the paper should contain your reactions to the material, what you liked and did not like, and why. Write about connections with other material we have discussed, read, and studied. Connect the material with your own past experiences. Take a creative angle, this paper doesn’t have to be a formal essay. Don’t just summarize the book.

The Reaction Paper will be worth 100 points of your final grade.
Exams. There will be two exams and one final. They will cover the material we talk about in class and material from the required reading. They will contain multiple choice, short answer, and/or essay questions. The first two exams will each be worth 50 points and the final will be worth 100 points, for a total of 200 points of your final grade.

Exam 1: February 14th  
Exam 2: March 27th  
Final: May 4th (9:45 am)

NOTE: In order for me to return your work quickly, assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be deducted five percent (5%) for each day late. “Days” will be counted as weekdays only.

Class Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>READING</th>
<th>WORK DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>Introduction to the Class</td>
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<td>1-12</td>
<td>Brief History of the Field</td>
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<td>1-17</td>
<td>Brief History (continued)</td>
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<td>1-19</td>
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<td>Religion Expressed in Myth and Culture</td>
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<td>1-26</td>
<td>Religion, Myth, and Culture (continued)</td>
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<td>1-31</td>
<td>Religious Development: Overview</td>
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<td>2-2</td>
<td>Religious Development: Attachment</td>
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<td>2-7</td>
<td>Religious Practices</td>
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<td>2-9</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>2-14</td>
<td>EXAM 1</td>
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<td>Mysticism within Religious Contexts</td>
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<td>2-21</td>
<td>Religious Conversion</td>
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<td>2-23</td>
<td>Religious Conversion (continued)</td>
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<td>2-28</td>
<td>Religious Orientation</td>
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<td>Religion and Coping</td>
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<td>Alternatives to Religious Worldviews:</td>
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<td>Atheism and Secularity (Guest presentation)</td>
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<td>3-13</td>
<td>No Class: Spring Break</td>
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<td>3-15</td>
<td>No Class: Spring Break</td>
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<td>3-20</td>
<td>Religion, War, and Terrorism</td>
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<td>3-27</td>
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<td>EXAM</td>
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**DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READING** | **WORK DUE**
---|---|---|---
3-29 | Religion, Health, and Well-Being | George et al., 2001  
Powell et al., 2003  
Schultz et al., 2010 |  

4-3 | Psychology of Forgiveness |  
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4-5 | Psychology of Forgiveness (continued) | Wade et al., 2005 | Assign. 4  

4-10 | New Religious Movements |  

4-12 | Religion and Counseling | Worthington et al., 2010 |  

4-17 | Religion and Counseling: *Guest Panel* |  

4-19 | Religion Gone Bad: Jonestown |  

4-24 | Religion Gone Bad | Man’s Search for Meaning | Reaction Paper  
Prepare for exam review  

4-26 | Course Conclusion  
Exam Review |  

5-4 | Final Exam (Friday, 9:45 – 11:45 am) |  

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**Note:** “VRE” = *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James.

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**Academic Dishonesty**

We are colleagues, together in this learning endeavor. I trust that each of you will do your own work, that what you present to me is a product of your time and effort, not someone else’s. However, should there be any suspected academic dishonesty, I will follow the policies and procedures laid out by the Dean of Students Office. For more information see the Student Information Handbook, Policies and Practices, section XIII or come speak with me.

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**Students with Disabilities**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 calls for ISU to provide a “reasonable accommodation” to any individual who advises us of a physical or mental disability. If you have a physical or mental limitation that requires an accommodation or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with me at your earliest convenience.