Program: UW in India
Course Title: Ritual, Pilgrimage, and Pluralism: the Practice of Religion in India
Course Equivalencies: History 273, Anthropology 330, Religious Studies 274, Sociology 497
Total Hours: 45
Recommended Credits: 3
Suggested Cross Listings: Religious Studies/Anthropology/Cultural Studies
Language of Instruction: English
Prerequisites/Requirements: None

**Description**
In its rich and vibrant religious landscape, India—and Varanasi as one of its holiest of cities—offers a uniquely complex and vividly multi-sensory experience of everyday religious practice. Through the study and observation of ritual, the interactive process of worshipping, pilgrimage, the movement of bodies to and through sacred landscapes, and pluralism, the mostly peaceful but sometimes fraught co-existence of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Christians and others in this crowded, bustling, ancient city and everywhere in India, students learn about people doing the things that often matter the most to them, that create meaning for them, and that define them.

Using the sacred city of Varanasi as the core classroom, and a range of primary texts in translation, as well as work by scholars of South Asia who have discussed and theorized the subject, students gain insight into the ways in which religious practices inform the cultural, social and political dynamics that drive both tradition and modernity in India.

**Objectives**
The course is designed to expose students to the complexities of religious practice in India, using Varanasi as a lens. Students are expected to complete the course with substantial knowledge of religious practices and their cultural and socio-political resonances in India today.

In particular, students are expected to:
- Gain a strong, basic understanding of the histories and complex heterogeneity of religious practices across time and space in India
- Engage with the subject through the study of secondary as well as primary sources, in addition to extensive field explorations
- Strengthen their appreciation and understanding of their host context through discussions of their independent and group field explorations
- Gain a keen appreciation of the presence of religion in the everyday lives of the people around them through the observation of their own and their classmates’ regularly maintained journal posts.
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- Develop their powers of critical thinking and analysis of the subject material by responding to selections from translated primary texts and participating in discussions about them
- Hone their independent research skills by working on focussed class presentations

Course Requirements

There are no pre-requisites for this course. Students may approach it with no or varying degrees of familiarity with the course material. However, given the complex and intense nature of the material, missing even one lecture, discussion or field trip could set a student back substantially in terms of their overall learning outcomes, so attendance will be strictly monitored. Apart from unavoidable absences due to illness or other emergencies, all absences could incur grade reductions.

All students – whatever their own personal religious affiliations or attitudes towards the practice of religion - will be expected to approach the course material with open-mindedness, enthusiasm and willingness to learn about the ways in which faith practices across geographical and other boundaries differ and yet are fundamentally focused on very similar human, spiritual quests and aspirations.

Course completion requirements will include participation in the following:
- Two weekly lecture and discussion classes
- Several intense, directed as well as independent field excursions of varying lengths that will match up with specific topics covered by the syllabus
- Regular posts on an online course folder that will each include a photograph and a short, descriptive caption that captures an example of the everyday practice of religion – such as a picture of Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, over a doorway, or a religious slogan painted in technicolour on the back window of a taxi
- Written responses to selected readings
- Class discussions of a range of textual, photographic, audio-visual and online resources
- Independent research on an aspect of religion not covered in the class, which will result in a 10-page paper and a 10-minute presentation

Methods of evaluation

Five 500-word written responses to readings…………………………………………..25%
Five 250-word posts related to site visits………………………………………………25%
Five Photo posts………………………………………………………………………10%
Class discussions………………………………………………………………………15%
Final Paper………………………………………………………………………………20%
Final Presentation………………………………………………………………………..5%

Primary texts

Ambedkar, Dr B.R. 1917:
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http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html
Eaton, Richard M. 2006: India’s Islamic Traditions
Fernando, Leonard and G. Gispert-Sauch 2004: Christianity in India: Two Thousand Years of Faith
Geertz, Clifford 1973: ‘Religion as a Cultural System’, in The Interpretation of Cultures
Guha 2010: Makers of Modern India: Chapter Sixteen, ‘The Hindu Supremacist M.S. Golwalkar’
Lewis, Bernard 2000: Islam in History
Lopez, Donald S., Daniel S. Lopez and Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed.: Religions of India in Practice
Long, Jeffery D 2010: Jainism: An Introduction
Omvedt, Gail 2003: Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste
Rajagopal, Arvind 2001 ‘Conclusion’, in Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India
&brand=eschol
Robinson, Rowena and Joseph Marianus Kujur 2010: Margins of faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India
SarDesai, D.R. 2008: India: The Definitive History
Sen, Shikha 2011: Anek Ramayan (privately produced movie)
Singh, Khushwant 1952: The Sikhs
Smith, Wilfred Cantwell 2006: Modern Islam in India, Part II: 6, Some Theological Groups: The
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Classical Theologians.
Thapar, Romila 1992: Interpreting Early India
Thapar, Romila 2002: The Penguin History of Early India: from the Origins to AD 1300, Chapter 4, 'Narratives of Beginnings'
Tully, Mark and Satish Jacob 1985: Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi’s Last Battle
Williams, Raymond B. 1996: ‘The Holy Man as the Abode of God in the Swaminarayan Religion’

Supplementary texts
Recommendations for supplementary texts that relate specifically to each student’s particular presentation topic will be made as necessary, in consultation with the student and local experts in the chosen field.

Outline of Course Content
Every topic will be supplemented by field visits to relevant locations. Each of the topics listed below will be explored over 1-3 weeks.

Topic 1: Early spiritual traditions:
- Origins of religion
- Magic and identification of the supernatural in nature
- Sacred symbols, sounds, words
- Possible spiritual practices of the Indus-Saraswathi River Civilizations
- Mother Goddess worship and fertility rites
- Interface with early Vedic religion

Topic 2: Hinduism:
- Possible origins
- Brahanism and Sramanism
- Philosophy and basic precepts
- The Vedic Age and the first ‘Hindu' texts
- The possible origins and development of caste as a concept
- Introduction of the tripartite system of gods
- Saivism and Shakta
- Concepts of gender in Hindu traditions
- Vaisnavism
- Women and Bhakti

Topic 3: Buddhism:
- The life of the Buddha
- Origins
- Guiding principles and philosophy
- Historical trajectories
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- the Buddha’s sermons

Topic 4: Jainism:
- The life of Mahavira Vardhamana
- Origins
- Guiding principles and philosophy
- Historical trajectories
- Jainism today
- Hindu Brahmanism responds to challenges from Sramanic Buddhism and Jainism

Topic 5: Sikhism:
- Origins and history
- The life of Guru Nanak
- The tradition of the Gurus,
- Sikh philosophy
- Sikhism in Modern India

Topic 6: Islam in India:
- Brief history of Islam
- History of Islam in India
- Mystic Islam and Sufi traditions

Topic 7: Contemporary interfaces of religion, political economy and society in India:
- The rise of militant religious groups
- Religion and economic liberalization
- Liberalized media and religion
- Women and contemporary religion
- Religion, politics and the law

Topic 8: Guru traditions within Hinduism

Topic 9: Other faiths present in India:
- Judaism
- Christianity
- Zoroastrianism
- the Bah’ai faith
- Rationalist traditions