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# MS 674 MW 708 Introduction to World Religions

Terry C. Muck

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## ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*Spring 2006*

**MS674, MW708**      **Introduction to World Religions**  
**Meeting Time:**    Tuesday, Thursday 8:00 – 9:15      **Room:** M305  
**Instructor:**        Terry C. Muck      **Phone:** 859-858-2145  
**E-Mail:**              terry\_muck@asburyseminary.edu      **Office:** MC314  
**Office Hours:**      Wednesday 2:00 – 4:30 or as scheduled

### I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students study the origin, history, and basic tenets of each of the major religious traditions of the world--Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Students learn basic religious study skills, and engage in research projects in one or more of these religions.

### II. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

David S. Noss. A History of the World's Religions. Tenth Edition.

New York: Prentice Hall Publishing Company, 1999.

Terry C. Muck. How To Study Religion: A Beginning Guide to Method

Wilmore, Kentucky: Wood Hill Books, 2005.

### III. ASSIGNMENTS

1. Attendance, participation, quiz (10 percent)
2. Five written exercises (10 percent each)
3. Read the texts
4. Two exams (25 percent each)

### IV. CLASS SCHEDULE

Feb. 7 - What is religion? Why study religion?    Noss, Chap. 1. Muck, Chap. 1

Feb. 9 - Three Views of Religion (**Exercise #1** - A Three View Visit - Due March 7)  
The Religious Studies Attitude; Quiz; Muck, Chaps. 2, 3

Feb. 14 - Hinduism: History  
Noss, Chap. 3

Feb. 16 - Hinduism: Beliefs  
Noss, Chap. 4

Feb. 21 - Buddhism: History  
Noss, Chap. 6

Feb. 23 - Buddhism: Beliefs  
Noss, Chap. 7

Feb. 28 - Determining a Religious Studies Event  
Muck, Chap. 4 (**Exercise #2** - Isolate An Event - Due March 30)

March 2 - Sikhism

Noss, Chap. 8

March 7 - Taoism

Noss, Chap. 9

**EXERCISE #1 DUE**

March 9 - Confucianism

Noss, Chap. 10

March 14 - How To Talk To Someone About Religion

Muck, Chap. 5 (**Exercise #3** - Interview - Due April 11)

March 16 - **EXAM #1**

March 21 – TBA

March 23 - How to Compare and Contrast Religions

Muck, Chap. 7 (**Exercise #4** - Compare/Contrast - Due April 27)

March 28 - Roots of Western Religions: A Different View

Noss, Chap. 2; Muck, Chap. 6

March 30 - Zoroastrianism

Noss, Chap. 12

**EXERCISE #2 DUE**

April 4, 6 Spring Reading Week

April 11 - Judaism: History

Noss, Chap. 13

**EXERCISE #3 DUE**

April 13 - Judaism: Beliefs and Practices

Noss, Chap. 14

April 18 - Christianity

April 20 - The Question of Truth

Muck, Chap. 8

April 25 - Islam: History

Noss, Chap. 17

April 27 - Islam: Beliefs

Noss, Chap. 18

**EXERCISE #4 DUE**

May 2 - How to Go On Studying Religion

May 4 - **EXAM #2**

## V. EXERCISES

Exercise #1 - A Three View Visit. Write three, one page (typewritten, double spaced) descriptions of a religious service you have attended recently. One of the descriptions should be from the insider's stance, one from a reporter's stance, and one from a specialist's stance (for the latter, choose the viewpoint of the psychologist, the sociologist, or the philosopher). See Muck, How To Study Religion, pp. 31-43. Due March 7.

Exercise #2 - Isolate a Religious Event. Choose a religious subject of interest to you. Using the library, write a description of the time period of the subject (its beginnings and history, and what time period your study focuses on), the context of the subject (the role it played or plays in its culture), and the function and importance of the subject in its particular religious system. Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. See Muck, How To Study Religion, pp. 59-69. Due March 30.

Exercise #3 - Interview. Interview a classmate or friend about a religious topic. Plan on a twenty minute interview, and then write up the results in a five page paper. Include in the paper a statement of the interview time, location, and subject, and a description both physical and biographical of the interviewee. End with a transcript or summary of the interview itself, in question and answer format.

The topic of the interview could be one of many different things. Consider the following set of questions, based on issues raised in James McClendon's book, Biography As Theology (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990), as one possibility:

What are your main spiritual and theological images? (For example, if the subject is a Christian, you might ask her or him to consider Jesus: Is your mental image of Jesus on the cross? In Gethsemane? Preaching? etc.

How do these key images apply to your life?

How do your images apply to your religious community's life?

What parts of your religious tradition are most important to your spiritual life? Give examples.

What parts of your tradition are not so important to your spiritual life? Example?

Feel free to try some different approach to the interview.

See Muck, How To Study Religion, pp. 71-81. Due April 11.

Exercise #4 - Compare and Contrast. Do a religious studies comparison along the lines described in Muck, How To Study Religion, pp. 97-109. Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. Due April 27.

**VI. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will be able to write 300 word summaries of each of the eight religions studied during the semester, demonstrating knowledge of the history, core beliefs, and practices of each religious tradition.
2. Students will be able to do field research into a religion's worship practice and behavior.
3. Students will be able to interview people about their religious beliefs.
4. Students will be able to compare and contrast discrete elements of religious belief systems other than their own.