

## Religion 387: Religious Ethics (Spring 2014)

Professor: Dr. Sarah Moses

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Office Hours: Mondays, 12:30-1:30; Tuesdays, 1-1:30; or by appointment.

### I. Course Description

The purpose of this course is two-fold: to survey various religious ethical positions on specific moral issues and to examine the methods of moral reasoning used by religious thinkers and communities. In Spring 2014, our primary focus is on social ethics and we will look at three of the world's major religious traditions and three key 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers from those traditions: Mahatma Gandhi (Hinduism), Abraham Heschel (Judaism), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Christianity). In addition to studying the ethical analysis and reasoning of these three thinkers, students will have the opportunity to analyze and engage social ethical issues in their own context through a service-learning placement at a local Oxford housing development.

### II. Course Format

This course is based on the careful reading of primary texts of religious ethical thought and seminar-style discussion, with student presentations on the assigned readings. Student presenters will prepare a one page handout that introduces the readings and provides one or two central questions that the class should address. The instructor's role will be to introduce each religious tradition through class lectures and to facilitate student discussion of primary readings. In addition, there will be class discussion of service-learning field work.

The goals of this course are:

- To gain knowledge of ethical approaches, concepts, and figures in some of the world's major religious traditions
- To equip students for citizenship in a religiously diverse, globalized world by exploring the role of religion in society
- To develop skills of moral reasoning and ethical analysis through textual study and service-learning experience
- To promote civic engagement and the development of leadership skills through a community-based learning experience
- To enhance habits of clear writing and speaking

### III. Required Texts

- ✓ Textbook: D. Fasching & D Dechant, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2011).
- ✓ Additional readings: Because a majority of our course's readings will be primary writings from the religious ethical thinkers, students are required to purchase a coursepack with additional readings. Students must bring this coursepack to class. Coursepacks can be purchased from CopyTime (ph.234-2679; 407 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, off of University Ave. behind Abner's).
- ✓ For general reference: Students who have not taken Religion 101 may find it helpful to consult chapters on Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity found in the world religion textbook on Reserve in the library: Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions* (McGraw Hill).

#### IV. Course Requirements

- ❖ **Attendance:** Because the course is based on class discussion, your presence in class is vital to your learning and to your classmates' learning. Thus, **after three** absences (for *whatever* reason), your final grade will be lowered 5% points for each additional absence, **WITHOUT EXCEPTION**. [If you suffer from serious illness that involves absence for more than 3 consecutive classes, you should notify the Dean's office to negotiate completion or withdrawal from your courses. If you miss class for official university activity, you must provide official documentation to your professor.]
  
- ❖ **Classroom requirements:**
  - ✓ *Unit quizzes* (10%): Students must complete quizzes on foundational material for religious ethics intro and for each religious tradition. Quizzes will be posted and completed on Blackboard. Consult the course schedule for quiz due dates. Students will be penalized one full letter grade for each day quiz completion is late.
  - ✓ *Participation* (10%): Your active, engaged, and thoughtful participation in class discussion is required for a successful course. To encourage your preparation for class discussion days, you will be asked to bring written/typed comments on assigned readings to class. In addition each student will respond to a student presentation as part of their participation grade. These exercises will be graded on a √- (75), √ (85), √+ (95) scale; no late work will be accepted except in cases of serious illness, official university activity, or family emergency; make-up work must be submitted within one week of original due date. Students may drop two failing scores. Consult the course schedule for due dates; details distributed separately.
  - ✓ *Student presentation* (15%): Each student will introduce a primary reading and provide questions for class discussion. Details provided separately.
  - ✓ *Synthesis paper* (25%): Students will write a 6-8 page synthesis paper in which they integrate course readings with their service-learning experience. Details provided separately.
  
- ❖ **Service-learning placement requirements:**
  - ✓ Students are required to complete 12 hours of field work at the service-learning placement site in Oxford designated by your instructor. **Failure to complete service hours will result in automatic failure in the course.**
  - ✓ *Service-learning portfolio* (30%):
    - Each student must purchase a pocket folder or three ring binder/folder.
    - Learning agreement contract and service hour log sheets.
    - Journal entries: students will complete three journal reflections concerning their placement experience. You will be penalized one full letter grade for each day the entry is late and receive a "zero" after four days. Details provided separately.
    - Final evaluations of service-learning placement.
  - ✓ *Group presentation* (10%): Students will work in groups to design a visual presentation of the placement agency for presentation to an on-campus organization or local business. Details to be provided separately.

**VI. Grading Scale: Note use of the plus-minus system.**

A	94-100	C-	70-73
A-	90-93	D +	67-69
B+	87-89	D	64-66
B	84-86	D-	60-63
B-	80-83	F	59 and below
C+	77-79		
C	74-76		

**VII. Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented learning disability that affects your learning style or test-taking ability, please see me as soon as possible.

**VIII. Academic Integrity:** You are expected to conduct yourself with the utmost academic integrity and honesty in this course. You will automatically receive a “zero” on any quiz or paper that violates the rules of academic honesty and you may also be subject to university disciplinary action and failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding the standards of academic integrity at the University of Mississippi and what constitutes a violation of them. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s official policy concerning academic integrity, “Student Academic Conduct and Discipline” (Policy # 10000600).

**IX. Support Services:** My office hours are intended to provide you an opportunity to discuss class material and address any difficulties you may be experiencing in the course. For additional academic support, you are encouraged to take advantage of the academic support services available to Ole Miss students, such as the Writing Center (J.D. Williams library). In addition, students are provided personal and psychological support services through the University Counseling Center located on Fraternity Row.