Dr. Dan Capper
Office: LAB 340
Office phone: 601-266-4522
Office hours: 10-11 AM Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and 5:30-6:20 Tuesday
Email: Daniel.Capper@usm.edu

Course description:
REL 131. Comparative Religion Honors: Religious Diversity in the US. 3 hrs. This “active” Honors course studies comparative religion through a focus on religious diversity in the United States. Through lectures, readings, and an adventure at a Buddhist monastery, students will gain an appreciation of relations between many forms of religiosity, both traditional and alternative.

Course overview:
This course is a basic introduction to the variety of the world’s religions as well as methods for studying them. No prior experience in religious studies is assumed. The theme of the course involves discovering many types of religion, both traditional and alternative, as they are found in the United States. Examples of such religions include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and indigenous religions. Experiential learning is emphasized through a weekend at a Buddhist monastery. More traditional forms of learning such as readings, lectures, papers, and exams are also employed. Throughout we will learn and use concepts in comparative religion to highlight thematic convergences and divergences of different forms of religiosity. Students should leave the course with a better appreciation for some of the many manifestations of religion around the world as well as with intellectual tools for the future exploration of religious phenomena.

Course requirements are:
(1) Three in-class tests which cover discreet sections of the course. Each test will be worth 15% of the final grade.
(2) One take home test which covers the final units of the course. 15% of the final grade.
(3) One independent project in which students will go on their own to a service of a Mississippi religion which is not their own (aside from our field trip to Magnolia Grove) and compose a 5-7 page descriptive account of this event. 15% of the final grade. Students may submit this paper at any time during the semester but papers are due no later than May 2.
(4) One reflection paper of 5-7 pages which critically examines experiences of religion at Magnolia Grove Monastery in light of other course materials. 15% of the final grade.
(5) Participation in discussion sections for 10% of the final grade.
To fulfill course objectives, by the end of this course you will:
1. have and demonstrate suitable reading, writing, and other communication skills.
2. have and demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the development and inter-relationships of societies from a global perspective.
3. have and demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of artistic, creative, and cultural expression.
4. have and demonstrate a capacity for intellectual independence and analytical thought. You will demonstrate the ability to seek and evaluate information by asking questions, to make judicious decisions by using judgments on evidence, to understand and assess various kinds of reasoning, and to use critical thinking skills in all areas of your life.
5. have and demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of foreign cultures.

Professionalism statement:
Students are required to maintain a professional attitude in class and disrespect of professor and/or of students is not tolerated.

Academic honesty statement:
Students should be mindful not to plagiarize when constructing their papers. The Oxford English Dictionary defines plagiarism as, “the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another.” An example of plagiarism would be copying and pasting information from a Web site into one’s paper without complete attribution. Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty and will not be tolerated. Ideas and writings of others must be cited in the paper. Every paper will be checked for plagiarism with computer software. Following the U.S.M. Student Handbook, a student found plagiarizing will fail the course.

Disability statement:
The Office for Disability Accommodations (ODA) is Southern Miss's designated office to verify students' eligibility for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ODA works with eligible students on an individual basis in developing and coordinating plans for the provision of reasonable accommodations that are specific to their disabilities.

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act (1990), Southern Mississippi is committed to providing equal access for persons with disabilities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in programs or activities. ODA interacts with all offices and departments on campus to ensure that students with disabilities have full access to, and participation in, university activities. ODA strives to create a positive campus environment where students with disabilities are encouraged to pursue careers on the basis of personal interest and ability.

Address:
The University of Southern Mississippi
Office for Disability Accommodations
Course Web site:
Materials for this course, including syllabus, review sheets, electronic reserve readings, and other links, may be found online at:

http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~w312788/REL131/index.htm

This site provides essential course information. Some electronic readings require that you have Acrobat Reader installed on your computer. This software is free, simple, and small, and enables you to read a wide variety of Web documents. You can get this software from the course Web site.

Required texts for purchase:
Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions (also on reserve; call no. BL80.2 .S645 1991)

Required texts on reserve:
Catherine Albanese, “Introduction: Elephant in the Dark” RES 2666
Ninian Smart, “Religion and Human Experience” BL80.2 .S6 1996
Joan Halifax, pages 65-91 from Shamanic Voices BL2370.S5 H34 1991
The Upanishads call no. BL1120.A3 M32
Dhammapada call no. BL1411.D5 E76
The Essential Tao call no. BL1910.C63
Koran (in the Sacred Books of the East) call no. BL70.S23 1900
The Oxford Annotated Bible call no. BS191.A1 1965 N4
Whole Bible: http://www.hti.umich.edu/r/rsv/
Exodus: http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=217012
Matthew: http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=4563978

Class Schedule:
January 20-February 1: What is religion?
Reading: (1) “Religion and Human Experience,” the first chapter in Ninian Smart, The Religious Experience (on course web site)
(2) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 1
February 3-15: Indigenous traditions / vision quest  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapters 1 and 9  
                      (2) Joan Halifax, Shamanic Voices, pp. 65-91 (on reserve)

February 17: Test #1

February 19: Mysticism in the world’s religions

February 22-26: Chinese religions  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 5  
                      (2) “Chuang-tzu,” Chapters 2-6 (pp. 69-115), in The Essential Tao (on reserve)  
                      (3) “Passages from the Tao Te Ching” handout from course Web site

February 29-March 2: Judaism  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 7  
                      (2) The Book of Exodus, Chapters 1-24 (Found in the Old Testament in the Bible) (on reserve)

March 4: Test #2

March 7-23: Hinduism  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 2  
                      (2) Svetasvatara Upanishad, in The Upanishads (on Web)  
                      (3) “Krishna and Radha” handout from course Web site

March 28: Meditation in the world’s religions

March 30-April 11: Buddhism  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 3  
                      (2) Dhammapada Chapters 1, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 23 (on reserve)  
                      (3) “Noble Eightfold Path” handout from course Web site

April 13: Test #3

April 15-17: active learning trip to Magnolia Grove Monastery

April 18: debriefing

April 20-29: Islam  
Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 6  
                      (2) The Koran Suras (chapters) 1, 7, 76, and 88  
                      (Suras entitled “The Exordium,” “The Heights,” “Man,” and “The Overwhelming Event,” respectively) (on course Web site)
April 25: reflection paper due

May 2: Independent project due

May 2-6: Christianity
  Reading: (1) Huston Smith, The Illustrated World’s Religions, Chapter 8

May 9: Take-home exam papers due

Grading scale:
90-100 A
80-89 B
70-79 C
65-69 D
below 65 F