

## **REL 450 Senior Seminar: Interreligious Dialogue**

Tues/Thurs 9:35-10:50 am Room 126 CCC

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Office hours: Monday 2-3; Tuesday 1-2:30; Thurs. 1-2:30 and by appointment



**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This is a capstone in the major course, designed to provide an opportunity to integrate the knowledge, skills and dispositions you have developed in your major program and apply those to solving real life problems. In this case, the problem we are addressing involves the misinformation, confusion, fear and prejudice concerning religious difference in our society, and we will be exploring the degree to which practices of interreligious dialogue can help ameliorate that problem. Toward this goal, the work for this course will combine traditional learning methods of reading, writing and research with engaged efforts to design, implement and reflect on an actual interreligious dialogue event.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- To explore the issues (philosophical, theological, cultural) that are implicated in the movement to interreligious dialogue
- To identify the potential benefits and pitfalls of interreligious dialogue
- To design, implement and reflect upon an interreligious dialogue event
- To practice and improve skills in close reading and accurate interpretation of texts
- To practice and improve skills in oral and written communication and information literacy
- To practice and improve skills in empathetic engagement and critical reflection with religious “others.”

*BOOKS FOR PURCHASE:*

Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Benares*

Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*

*BOOK ON TEXT RENTAL:*

Christoffer H. Grundmann, Editor, *Interreligious Dialogue: An Anthology of Voices Bridging Cultural and Religious Divides*

*AND ADDITIONAL READINGS in PDF format available through D2L contents*

*REQUIREMENTS:*

4 short reflection essays, based on readings and other course activities	25%
Research paper and oral presentation	30%
Report on active engagement in an interreligious dialogue event	10%
Midterm	10%
Final	10%
Attendance and participation	15%

*CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION*

4 Reflection essays (25%) will allow students to reflect upon and explore ideas raised by our readings and class discussion. These short essays will be assessed using the following criteria:

- based on assigned prompt
- demonstrates careful and close reading of relevant materials
- demonstrates thoughtful reflection on some key issue or question that emerges from those materials
- draws on at least two quotations or specific points from assigned materials
- is well organized, with a clearly defined paragraph structure, effective introduction and relevant conclusion
- is free of grammar and spelling errors, reflecting the professionalism of a college graduate
- is approximately 300 – 500 words, typed and double-spaced.
- Is handed in at time specified on assignment schedule

*Research Paper and Oral Presentation (30%)* will bring together the fruits of a focused research project relating to issues of interreligious dialogue, interreligious violence/prejudice, or comparative theology. Students can choose to focus on

- a particular thinker, and his/her contribution to interreligious dialogue or comparative theology (e.g. Masao Abe's contribution to Buddhist-Christian dialogue)
- a particular instance of interreligious dialogue or interreligious violence (e.g., Catholic responses to the Holocaust and the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism)
- a particular issue or question relating to interreligious dialogue (e.g., do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?)
- a particular ethical or social concern (such as global warming, animal rights, or peace making) that has been the subject of interreligious dialogue
- an authoritative document from a religious organization that calls for interreligious dialogue,

Research papers will be assessed using the following criteria:

- based upon an approved research paper proposal (due by late March)
- should be carefully thought out, showing evidence of close reading of relevant materials, clear argumentation, and critical thinking
- should show evidence of solid research methodology, including use of reference room materials, books, and scholarly articles (located through using databases). You must use at least 5 sources (beyond assigned readings) drawn from a variety of research media, and you must cite these sources appropriately in your paper. You may use any standard citation format such as Chicago or MLA style.
- Should be well organized, with a clearly defined paragraph structure, introduction and conclusion
- should be typed, double-spaced, and relatively free of grammar and spelling errors. Grammar and spelling errors will lower your grade significantly.
- Should be approximately 5-8 pages. Longer papers will be accepted with advance approval.
- Must be accompanied by an **oral report** concerning your research.

*Report on your active engagement in an interreligious dialogue event (10 %):* Students in this senior seminar will be challenged to apply their knowledge to real life situations by engaging in the work of planning, implementing and/or participating in an interreligious dialogue event.

- Students will work in teams of two or three to plan and implement an interreligious dialogue event focused around a specific question or theme
- Students will identify and invite participants for their event; students in this class can choose to be dialogue participants or not, as appropriate

- Students will advertise and do other appropriate forms of outreach to involve the public (students and/or community)
- Team members will equitably divide responsibilities among themselves for the planning and implementation of their event
- All team members will attend the event they have set up, and also where possible, the events their fellow classmates have set up
- Afterwards, you and your team members should reflect together on what worked, and what did not work as well, in respect to the goals of interreligious dialogue

After your event has been executed, you will write a report in which you reflect on the process of planning and implementing your interreligious dialogue event. This report should:

- Describe the planning process and the steps you and your team members took to implement this interreligious dialogue event
- Describe the event itself, highlighting any insights or new perspectives gained by participants, audience members, or yourself
- Evaluate the event as an instance of interreligious dialogue – what worked in fostering open conversation and mutual understanding, and/or what didn't work?
- This report should be approximately 300-500 words, typed and double spaced
- Your report is due one week after your interreligious dialogue event takes place
- Grammar, spelling and paragraph structure should reflect the professionalism of a college graduate

*The midterm (10%) and Final (10%)* will test your knowledge of issues, questions and themes covered in assigned readings and class discussions. Format TBA.

*Attendance and participation (15%)* are very important and key to your overall success in this course.

*Attendance:* You are expected to come to class consistently, having read the assigned material and thus able to participate fully. You may receive an “excused” absence for reasons of illness, family emergency, or school related trip, IF you inform Prof. Keefe of the reason for your absence in advance via email.

Excessive unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade.

Excellent attendance: two or fewer unexcused absences = A in this category.

Good attendance: three to five unexcused absences = B in this category.

Poor attendance: six to eight unexcused absences = C in this category.

Even worse attendance: nine to ten unexcused absences = D in this category.

Failing attendance: eleven or more unexcused absences = specific failing grade calculated by following formula –  $x*100/30$  in which  $x$  = number of unexcused absences.

*Participation* includes showing up to class ready and taking turns leading discussion:

*Showing up to class ready:* participation includes coming to class prepared and being actively engaged in the class discussion. You should read the assigned materials prior to our class meetings and *bring a copy of those materials with you in class.*

*Discussion leadership:* Provide introductory remarks and discussion questions in response to an assigned reading TWICE during the semester. As discussion leader, your responsibilities are as follows:

- Offer a brief overview of the reading, highlighting main points and the author's primary concerns (3 minutes maximum)
- Share your own response to some aspect of the reading; for example a point or quotation that you found particularly significant, and explain why (2 minutes maximum)
- Ask two or three questions based on the reading which are designed to engage the class in discussion
- Hand in a brief typed statement that offers an overview of the reading (150-200 words) and the discussion questions you will pose; due on the day you lead discussion.

**Plagiarism Policy** I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity. Any questions that you may have regarding academic integrity should be resolved before you turn your assignments in. The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. In addition, all infractions will be reported to the university. For more information regarding the university policy on academic misconduct (plagiarism) and disciplinary procedures, please see chapter 14 of the University Handbook, located at this web page link:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability Services Office and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way I can. For more information, please visit the Disability Services Office, located on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here: <http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>.