Traditionally, philosophy of religion has focused on arguments for and challenges to the existence of God in the Christian traditions. This course will attempt a broader application of philosophy to the phenomenon of religion. What is religion, and what are the meanings of terms associated with it: belief, faith, truth, the sacred, transcendence, mysticism, and good and evil? What is the relationship between religion and science? What do the data of religion as a global historical phenomenon imply about our understanding of the world and of ourselves?

“Good sense is the most evenly shared thing in the world, for each of us thinks he is so well endowed with it that even those who are the hardest to please in other respects are not in the habit of wanting more than they have” (Descartes, Discourse on Method, 27 trans. F. E. Sutcliffe, Penguin Books, 1968). Good sense as a faculty is at least rivalled by religion as a content area, for each of us, even those who are the hardest to please in other respects, are not in the habit of wanting to know more than they already know about religion, but nonetheless readily come to fixed conclusions.

Class schedule: Class will meet in PH 205 from 11:00 until 12:30, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Week 1.
What’s the Problem?
Introduction: What is the philosophy of religion? What are philosophy and religion?

Each class will introduce the students to some concepts, relations, ideas, and readings, which the students will then research on their own ready for discussion in the following class. For example, the ideas from the Readings listed for TUES 1/16 will be introduced in that class but in order to appreciate the arguments in support of those ideas, the readings themselves should be considered closely should be read before THUR 1/18 to be discussed in that class, and so on.

TUES 1/16 What is philosophy? An Introduction.
Readings:

THUR 1/18 Questions and discussion of the readings. What is Religion? An Introduction.
Readings:


**Week 2.**

The Study and the Practice of Religion

Starting from the end of week two students will begin to submit draft pieces of writing for commentary and response from the instructor. The target length of each final essay is c. 2,500 words. The drafts will not be assigned a recorded grade but will constitute practice and development of the skills required. These submissions will continue until the beginning of submissions for grading, with the first essay being due at the end of week seven and the final integration of all written work in week fifteen.

Readings:

Readings:

**Week 3.**

Philosophy and the Study of Religion

TUES 1/30 Questions and discussion of readings. Philosophical methodology and theory: Philosophy as Ontology, Epistemology, and Morality. Introduction to basic logic—syllogistic reasoning and common valid argument forms and fallacies.
Readings:
Various PowerPoints on Syllogistic Reasoning.
*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* on theories of truth.

THUR 2/1 Questions and discussion of readings. Continuing introduction to truth, logic and argumentation.
Readings:


The class will now begin to read the one assigned and required book for the course. Students must read and respond to it all. Starting now (if you have not done so earlier) read KS#1: intro – 10.

**Week 4.**

**Traditional or Disciplinary Philosophy of Religion:**

TUES 2/6 Questions and discussion of readings. Arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Pascal’s wager. Moral Philosophy: Divine Command vs. other Ethics and the religious justification of behavior. The naturalistic fallacy and the is/ought divide. Free will and determinism.

Readings:
Anselm
Aquinas
J. Hick

THUR 2/8 Questions and discussion of readings. Theodicy: the problems of evil and suffering in its standard Western form is a staple of the conventional Philosophy of Religion. Should it be expanded to consider equivalent problems of good and bad in other traditions?

Reading:

KS #2: 10-28

**Week 5.**

**A proposed solution.**

Starting in week five we will begin to have ten-minute student presentations. Based on the material so far and on their submitted written work students will present their thoughts to the class. Each Tuesday of weeks five through eight we will hear three individual presentations. These are worth 10% of each student’s grade. Students must also—individually or in pairs—post one other ten-minute presentation online by or before week thirteen. Further instructions and criteria for these presentations will be provided.

TUES 2/13 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom.

Reading:
KS#3: 28-40
An Introduction to the History of Religion
Wisdom = Sia, Ptahhotep, Enki, and others.

THUR 2/15 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: The Ancient Middle East.
Reading:
KS #4: 40-51

Week 6.
Wisdom = Ahura Mazda, Vohu Manah and Chokhmah

TUES 2/20 Questions and discussion of readings. Student Oral Presentations #1. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Zoroastrianism.
Reading: Willard Oxtoby on Zoroastrianism.

THUR 2/22 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Judaism.
Reading:
KS #5: 51-65

Week 7.
Wisdom = Prajñā

Reading: Excerpts from the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali (on D2L).

THUR 3/1 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Hinduism, continued. See this websites on Hindu Scriptures and on Patañjali’s yoga.
Reading:
KS #6: 65-81

At this point in the course Essay #1 will be due for grading (c. 2,500 words on something along the lines of: What is philosophy and how does it apply to religion? What do we know? How do we know it?)

SPRING BREAK: Saturday, March 3rd until Sunday March 11th.

Week 8.
Wisdom = Prajñā

TUES 3/13 Questions and discussion of readings. Student Oral Presentations #3. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Buddhism.
Reading:
KS #7: 81-96
THUR 3/15 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Buddhism, continued.
Reading:
KS #8: 96-111

Week 9.
Wisdom = zhì (智)


THUR 3/22 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Chinese traditions, continued.
Reading:
KS #9: 111-126 (includes reference to divination and logic)

Week 10. SECOND ESSAY DUE
What is indigenous wisdom? Anansi, Orunmila, and the great peacemaker.

Reading:
KS #10: 126-148

Reading:
KS #11: 148-163

At this point in the course Essay #2 will be due (c. 2,500 words on The Application of Philosophical Methodologies to Religious Data).

Week 11.
Does Wisdom enable Divination?

THUR 4/5 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Divination as the vanishing point of religion.
Reading:
KS#12: 151-174
Week 12.
Does Wisdom = Chokhma or Sophia?

Reading:
KS #13: 174-189

THUR 4/12 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Later Christianity.
Reading:
KS#14: 189-206

Week 13. THIRD ESSAY DUE
Is Wisdom beyond human grasp?


THUR 4/19 Questions and discussion of readings. A brief introduction to the history of the world’s religions from the perspective of Wisdom: Islam, continued.

At this point in the course Essay #3 will be due (c. 2,500 words on The Philosophical Study of Religion).

Week 14. FOURTH ESSAY DUE (reworking 1, 2, & 3 + another 2,500ww. = 10,000 ww.)

Pluralism:
How does the fact of religious pluralism influence our understanding of religion? Can the frequently made claim that pluralism is not only factual but also desirable be justified? What is the relevance of this alternative approach to a global philosophy of religions, including the attempt to identify the equivalent to philosophy in the non-Western traditions, to religious pluralism?

TUES 4/24 Questions and discussion of readings. Inspection of online presentations and reviews.
Readings:
W. Oxtoby,
W.C. Smith,
J. Hick.

THUR 4/26 Questions and discussion of readings.

At this point in the course Essay #4 will be due (a first draft of a reworking of the earlier three papers plus an additional c. 2,500 words = c. 10,000).
Week 15. FIFTH & FINAL ESSAY DUE (rewriting of #4, especially to include the concept of pluralism + 2,500 ww. = 12,000 – 12,500 ww.)

Final Considerations and Conclusions:
The Future of Religion

TUES 5/1 The “new atheists” debate and the secularization hypothesis.
Readings:
D. Dennett,
S. J. Gould,
S. Harris.

Last Class
THUR 5/3 Questions and discussion of readings.

At the end of the course Essay #5 will be due (the final resubmission of all earlier papers plus an additional c. 2,500 words for a final submission of 12,000 words minimum).