

RELIGION AND CULTURE (RELC)

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RELC 1010 Greek and Roman Mythology

Myths are traditional stories that have endured many years. Some of them have to do with events of great importance, such as the founding of a nation. Others tell the stories of great heroes and heroines and their exploits and courage in the face of adversity. Still others are simple tales about otherwise unremarkable people who get into trouble or do some great deed. What are we to make of all these tales, and why do people seem to like to hear them? This course will focus on the myths of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as a few contemporary American ones, as a way of exploring the nature of myth and the function it plays for individuals, societies, and nations. We will also pay some attention to the way the Greeks and Romans themselves understood their own myths. Are myths subtle codes that contain some universal truth? Are they a window on the deep recesses of a particular culture? Are they entertaining stories that people like to tell over and over? Are they a set of blinders that all of us wear, though we do not realize it? We investigate these questions through a variety of topics creation of the universe between gods and mortals, religion and family, sex, love, madness, and death.

1 Course Unit

RELC 2000 Gods, Ghosts, Monsters

This course seeks to be a broad introduction. It introduces students to the diversity of doctrines held and practices performed, and art produced about "the fantastic" from the earliest times to the present. The fantastic (the uncanny or supernatural) is a fundamental category in the scholarly study of religion, art, anthropology, and literature. This course focuses on both theoretical approaches to studying supernatural beings from a religious studies perspective while drawing examples from Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, Egyptian, Central Asian, Native American, and Afro-Caribbean sources from earliest examples to the present—including mural, image, manuscript, film, codex, and even comic books. It also introduces students to related humanistic categories of study: material and visual culture, theodicy, cosmology, shamanism, transcendentalism, soteriology, eschatology, phantasmagoria, spiritualism, mysticism, theophany, and the historical power of rumor.

1 Course Unit

RELC 2010 Monsters of Japan

1 Course Unit

RELC 2500 Asian Religions

This course is an introduction to the wide variety of religious beliefs, practices, and ritual technologies in Asia. These religious traditions will not be investigated in isolation. Each Asian tradition, like each Western religion, is syncretic and multiple, full of internal contradictions and presenting diverse definitions of the sacred and profane. They each "structure" and are often comfortable with "their own multiplicity." While we will look at traditions such as Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Zen, and Shinto, we will constantly question their boundaries and integrity. Week by week the panoply (or perhaps cacophony) of types and perceptions of religious experience, ritual, knowledge, directives, motives, and aspirations as displayed in these traditions will be touched upon. We will also think hard about the ways we approach the study of religion and question the very study of "Asian Religions" and "World Religions" in general. This course seeks to generate questions, promote critical inquiry and elaborate on ways the sacred has been made and continues to be made tangible and the vicissitudes of life made meaningful in Asia.

1 Course Unit

RELC 3100 Spirituality, Wellness, and Identity: Making Meaning in the Modern World

The fastest growing religion in the United States is "no religion." More and more people in the modern world are abandoning traditional institutional religions and taking up alternative ways of making meaning in their lives. These alternatives include health and wellness routines, sports, social justice initiatives, food cultures, meditation and yoga, philanthropy, ethnic and cultural identity memberships, gardening, music, and the like. In this course, we will explore these alternative paths, watch interviews with chefs, philanthropists, wellness experts, sports enthusiasts, as well as explore horticulture, new ascetic movements, and speak with social justice activists. We will ask ourselves, can we be spiritual in a post-religious world and what role can religion still play?

1 Course Unit