

**PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**in partnership with the Gap Year Association (GYA)**

**PHL 299: Introduction to Spiritual / Religious Studies & Their Roles in Culture**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**CREDITS: 4 quarter-credits – Continuous Enrollment Course**

Students who plan to use this course to fulfill specific requirements should discuss transfer options and obtain written approval from a counselor or study abroad advisor at their own college/university PRIOR to enrolling in this course.

**PREREQUISITES:**

There are NO prerequisites for this course.

**METHOD OF INSTRUCTION:**

This course is a field-based self-study. The course instructor will correspond with the student and provide written feedback on course assignments via email and other remote communication.

**INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD:**

PSU has approved the following Instructors of Record, one of whom will be assigned to you (typically two+ weeks prior to the beginning of your program):

- Britt Basel, MS - [brittbasel@ecothropic.com](mailto:brittbasel@ecothropic.com)
  - Dianna Hahn, MA - [dianna@gapyearassociation.org](mailto:dianna@gapyearassociation.org)
  - Alexander Papouchis, MS - [alexpapouchis@gmail.com](mailto:alexpapouchis@gmail.com)
  - Cam Sylvester, MA – [ccamsylvester@gmail.com](mailto:ccamsylvester@gmail.com)
- Office: 503-206-7336  
[www.gapyearassociation.org](http://www.gapyearassociation.org)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course engages students in meaningful work/volunteer experiences while helping them gain an understanding of and develop the necessary skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world. Students will study the spirituality and religious practices in their region in order to understand local spiritual traditions and gain insight into their personal belief systems, influencing how they structure daily life during their academic study away.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS:**

- **Environment of Respect:** Disagreement and diversity of opinions are encouraged. You will be challenged to think critically about the impact of cultural differences, which may emerge in concepts of gender, race, the roles environment has in business and market development, socioeconomic status, physical and cognitive ability, sexuality, and other forms of diversity. You are encouraged to ask difficult questions and engage in discussion and critical reflection. Please be respectful of others, listen, and try to understand differences.
- **Experiential Learning:** In this course, learning is an experiential process in which you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences throughout the term. The richness of the course will depend on the questions, insights, and active participation that you bring.
- **Personal Responsibility:** You are expected to engage fully in the coursework and take action if you need help. Please communicate any concerns about assignments, deadlines, or course activities to your Instructor of Record.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please adhere to university policies. Take special note of policies regarding plagiarism and course withdrawal. Each student is expected to prepare their own assignments, and any assignments submitted should be the sole work of the student. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information, will not be tolerated. PSU's Code of Student Conduct may be found at <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>

## STUDENT OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Examine differences and similarities in spiritual/religious practices and their role in structuring daily living.
- Understand traditions and customs of different spiritual/religious practices, by working or volunteering in an unfamiliar environment.
- Summarize and analyze insights gained from engaging in varied local spiritual/religious experiences.
- Improve cross-cultural communication and interpersonal skills through volunteer activities.

## CONTACT HOURS, EXCURSIONS, AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

A total of 40 contact hours will be facilitated. These hours will come in the forms of:

- Homestays
- Introduction to relevant cultural norms
- Introduction to religion and its role on world view
- Excursions to sites of religious import
- Attendance at religious events (including churches, temples, monasteries, etc.)
- Excursions to historical sites
- Excursions to markets and culturally significant sites
- Interviews with local contacts
- Service-learning projects focusing on social service
- Service-learning projects with an environmental focus

## ASSIGNMENTS

**ATTEND AT LEAST TWO RELIGIOUS SERVICES OR EVENTS** for each religion discussed. These are meant to augment, but not replace, living in the religion's host culture for an extended period of time.

**DAILY JOURNAL:** The journal requirement is an important component of your grade for this course. It will count for 30% of your final grade. Elements that make a strong journal include self-reflection and evidence of critical thinking.

*\*If you are enrolled in multiple courses, you are only required to **maintain one journal** for all courses\**

Journals should be **handwritten and legible**, as handwritten reflections tend to be deeper and more insightful than those maintained digitally. Additionally, many programs have limitations to device usage in different locations; as such, a typed version may not be an option.

Journals will be graded as follows:

- **Self-reflection (20%):** Ask yourself critical questions about the experience you are having. How is this different from what you expected? What personal challenges are you experiencing? How are you learning and growing from this experience?
- **Reflection about your location and host culture (20%):** What is similar to and/or different from your home culture/environment? What is unique about this place/location? How is your day-to-day experience and learning in the host culture challenging or validating your worldviews?
- **Sharing reflections on group dynamics (20%):** What lessons can you take away from the experience you are having with your cohort? How are you developing or changing within the group?
- **Reflection on specific course themes (20%):** Review the student outcomes from the courses you are registered for. In your journal entries, speak directly about your inquiry and learning related to those course themes.
- **Quality & Consistency (20%):** Journaling every day or every few days with focus on the above elements will lead to higher quality journals and a better overall journal grade.

**REQUIRED READING:** You must read at least **ONE** book from the Recommended Reading list and demonstrate knowledge learned and/or perspectives expressed (**with [MLA](#) or [APA](#) citations**) in your FINAL REPORT.

A **FINAL REPORT** of insights gained from your study-away experience is required in order to complete the course. **Our expectation is that the paper you submit will reflect college-level writing.** Your report should be 8-10 pages in length. Reports must be typed (double spaced) with a cover page that includes your name, the academic quarter (e.g. fall 2021), the name of the program you attended, and the course number.

**Submit a comprehensive analytical paper comparing and contrasting a religious or spiritual practice you experienced during your program. How has your introduction to this host spiritual practice/religion influenced your worldview? How has this host spiritual practice/religion changed your perception of yourself?**

**Final Report will be graded as follows:**

- Description and history of the local religious/spiritual practice - 20%
- Description of our own religious/spiritual practice - 10%
- Description of your experience with the local religious/spiritual practice - 10%
- Self-evaluation and observations - 20%
- Clarity and organization of ideas - 20%
- Grammar and punctuation - 10%
- Ability to demonstrate knowledge from the required readings - 10%

#### **DEADLINES & SUBMISSIONS:**

All course requirements must be submitted by:

- Fall Semester: January 20th
- Spring Semester: June 20th

#### **SUBMITTING JOURNALS & FINAL REPORTS:**

- **Journals:** Once complete, please capture legible images/scans of your handwritten journal and submit as **ONE COMPLETE** document via email/shared drive to your instructor. Instructors reserve the right to refuse your journal submission if it is not legible. Some tips for quality submission when photographing or scanning your journal:
  - Ensure adequate light
  - Use equal camera height/distance if taking photos of journal
  - Turn OFF the flash
  - Pay attention to shadows and reflections
  - Ensure the entire page is captured and sections are not cut off (even margins)!
- **Final report:** Please email or share your final report with your Instructor of Record

#### **COURSE EVALUATION:**

- **Daily Journal** (30% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, clearly presented ideas and observations, creative thought, and relevant concepts.
- **Final Paper** (70% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, appropriate grammar and verb use, format, content relevance, organization, analysis, originality, and summarization skills.
- **Required Readings:** This is a requirement for successful completion of this class and 10% of your paper grade depends on your referencing examples and lessons learned. Citations are required.
- **Required Hours:** The Gap Year Association will provide verification of these hours.
- **Grading:** This course is graded with letter grades A - F. See more details about PSU's grading system [here](#).
- **Attendance at Two Events:** This is a requirement for successful completion of this class.
- **Required Hours:** The Gap Year Association will provide verification of these hours.

- **Grading:** This course is graded with letter grades A - F. See more details about PSU's grading system [here](#).

## **READING LIST**

**Students must read and cite at least ONE book in the final assignment. The following books have been approved for this course. Any other books not on this list must first be approved by your Instructor of Record.**

### **ALL REGIONS:**

*Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, by Thich Nhat Hanh  
World-renowned Zen master, spiritual leader, and author Thich Nhat Hanh shows us how to make positive use of the very situations that usually pressure and antagonize us.

*Animism: Respecting the Living World*, by Graham Harvey  
In this study, Graham Harvey explores current and past animistic beliefs and practices of Native Americans, Maori, Aboriginal Australians, and eco-pagans.

*The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, by Chogyam Trungpa  
There is a basic human wisdom that can help solve the world's problems. It doesn't belong to any one culture or region or religious tradition—Chögyam Trungpa calls this the sacred path of the warrior.

*The Cosmic Serpent*, by Jeremy Narby  
This is a first-person narrative of scientific discovery that opens new perspectives on biology, anthropology, and the limits of rationalism.

(Fiction) *The Story of B*, by Daniel Quinn  
The story of how the "big four" religions of the world are actually fairly new to human history and that returning sustainable living practices will be the only way to avoid the destruction of our planet.

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert M. Pirsig  
The story of a summer motorcycle trip across America's Northwest, undertaken by a father and his young son that becomes a personal and philosophical journey into life's fundamental questions.

### **CENTRAL AMERICA:**

*I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, by Rigoberta Menchu  
The remarkable life of Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan peasant who became a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

*Secrets of the Talking Jaguar*, by Martin Prechtel  
The autobiography of Martin Prechtel, who spent thirteen years studying Tzutujil (Maya) culture and became a village chief and a famous shaman.

*God's Will in Cuba: The Plight of the People and the Churches in Cuba*, by Daniel Fulton  
This book is written as a travel log to the churches that have survived and thrived during and after the Castro revolution in Cuba. The author takes you on a journey to the Cuba that Castro has neglected and time has forgotten.

*Teachings of the Santería Gods: The Spirit of the Odu*, by Ócha'ni Lele  
The first book to explore the sacred myths of Santería

### **EAST AFRICA:**

*The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior*, by Tepilit Ole Saitoti  
The autobiography of Tepilit Ole Saitoti, from his birth into a traditional society in Tanzania in 1949, through his youth, initiation as a warrior, career as a game park guide and ranger and life in the USA.

(Fiction) *The Famished Road*, by Ben Okri

The narrator, Azaro, is an abiku, a spirit child, who in the Yoruba tradition of Nigeria exists between life and death.

## **INDIA:**

*Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, by William Dalrymple

A look at the nine varieties of religious devotion in India today.

*The Bhagavad Gita*, by Eknath Easwaran (Translator)

In the Bhagavad Gita, Prince Arjuna asks direct, questions of his spiritual guide on the eve of a great battle. This is one of the most famous and popular of Hindu scriptures.

*The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying*, by Sogyal Rinpoche

This book is an introduction to Tibetan Buddhist wisdom. An enlightening, inspiring, and comforting manual for life and death.

## **SOUTH AMERICA:**

*The Four Winds: A Shaman's Odyssey into the Amazon*, by Albert Villoldo

In this narrative of spiritual discovery, the authors journey to Peru to investigate the jungle plant Ayahuasca, used by Indian shamans to access the four paths of the medicine wheel.

*Journey to the Heart of Pachamama*, by Ann Windes

Professional athlete and adventurer, Ann Windes travels to from California to this is her journey the indigenous villages of Peru in order to learn about her own limitations.

## **SOUTH PACIFIC:**

*Returning to the Void: Papa Joe, Maori Healing & Sacred Teachings*, by Iris Loesel

The teachings of Hohepa Delamere, alias Papa Joe, who is a widely known and highly respected Maori elder and healer from New Zealand.

## **SOUTHEAST ASIA:**

*Phra Farang: An English Monk in Thailand*, by Phra Peter Pannapadipo

At forty-five, successful businessman Peter Robinson gave up his comfortable life in London to ordain as a Buddhist monk in Bangkok.

(Fiction) *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse

In the novel, Siddhartha, a young man, leaves his family for a contemplative life and questions the nature of suffering, rejection, peace, and, finally, wisdom.