Duquesne University  
Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (PSYC 260-01)  
A University Core Curriculum Theme Area Course in “Faith and Reason”  
Summer 2015

Teacher: Will W. Adams, Ph.D.
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Meeting Time and Place: June 1 – 18, MTWR, 9:00 – 12:15, Rockwell Hall 305

Course Description and Purpose

In this course we will explore the interrelationship between psychology, religion, and spirituality. Through a psychological perspective, we will consider religious/spiritual approaches to phenomena such as meaning-making, self and others, consciousness, relationships, love, suffering, death, faith, reason, Spirit/God/Mystery (by whatever name), social engagement and justice, the natural world, meditative/contemplative practices, and personal and cultural transformation. Our central focus will be the spiritual path of inquiring into and awakening to our deepest nature, and actualizing this way of being, knowing, and loving as we interrelate with others in everyday life. This involves, for example, cultivating awareness, understanding, compassion/love, and justice, and bringing these forth for the well-being of all our relations (including our self).

Primarily we will be exploring the life-enhancing potential of spiritual experiences, world-views, practices, and ways of being. In addition we will consider the disturbing fact that, across humankind’s history, some of our most loving and creative actions as well as some of our most atrocious ones have been done in the name of religion. Along with ways of practicing religion that sponsor health, we will reflect on ways that are constraining, oppressive, and even violent. Freud’s critique of religion will provide useful insights here (yet we will also discuss the significant limitations of his theory).

Contemporary psychology and the world’s spiritual traditions share an interest in alleviating suffering and cultivating well-being by fostering transformations in consciousness, culture, and relationship. Our course inquiry will give special attention to direct experience, including spontaneous spiritual experience, formal contemplative/meditative practice, and daily existence intentionally imbued with a spiritual sensibility. Contemplative practice involves conscious attunement to the workings of our body-mind-heart-spirit in relation with oneself and others. (Thanks to such devoted exploration, the spiritual mystics were the world’s great psychologists long before psychology emerged as a distinct discipline.) Formal methods of practice include meditation, contemplative prayer, sacred reading (such as lectio divina), ritual, art, writing, body-centered practices (such as yoga and sacred dance), intimate relationships, psychotherapy, socially engaged action, dream interpretation, and involvement with the natural world. Most importantly, such practice aims to foster psycho-spiritual development and its integrated embodiment in daily relationship.
This course fulfills the University Core Curriculum requirement for the “Faith and Reason” theme area. The course be an inquiry into five major, interrelated themes:

I. Understanding Various Meanings and Functions of Religion and Spirituality
II. Cultivating An Engaged Contemplative Life: Integrating Knowledge and Practice
III. Appreciating Freud’s Critique of Religion: Insights and Oversights
IV. Approaching Relationship As A Spiritual Practice: The Path of Conscious Love
V. Fostering Social and Ecological Justice: Socially Engaged Spirituality

While these themes are mutually informative, they will be explored in sequence over the course of the semester, with each theme building upon the previous ones.

The course will include theoretical/conceptual and experiential exploration (both in and out of class). Readings will be drawn from various psychologists, spiritual teachers, theologians, and philosophers, both classic and contemporary. (See the reading list below.) Along with text-based lecture and discussion, you will be introduced to -- and participate in -- a variety of experiential spiritual/awareness practices. According to your interests, you will select one specific awareness practice to explore experientially across the semester. And the whole class will collaborate in an experiential eco-psychology/spirituality workshop either on campus or in a local (off campus) natural area.

**Required Readings**

Required texts (Relatively inexpensive paperbacks available in the bookstore, online, etc.):


Short selections from most of the following – as time permits – and possibly others, available on Blackboard:


**Formal Responsibilities and Assessment Process**

“Am I making this course relevant in my day to day life and relationships, my participation with my community and the larger natural world, and my preparation for future professional work and/or graduate school?” In my view, your answer to this question is the preeminent criterion by which your participation in the course should be evaluated. Of course, this is an ongoing self-assessment each student will do for herself/himself, and it cannot be graded by a professor. Therefore, your grade for the course will be determined by the quality of your work on the following assignments. The percentages indicate the proportion that each assignment counts towards your final grade.

1) Brief written reflection on each reading, to be given to Dr. Adams at the beginning of each class. (20%)

2) You will select one specific awareness practice to explore – conceptually, and especially experientially – throughout the semester. This will comprise part of your course participation grade, and will relate directly to your research paper.

3) A short research paper on the history, theory, and method of the specific awareness practice that you selected to explore, including material from books and/or journals. 5 pages; Due June 8, in class. (20%)

4) Classic Spiritual Text Paper: You will write a reflection paper based upon your study of a significant spiritual text. You will select a relatively short text or portion of a text, for example, something from a renowned mystic/contemplative or a classic sacred text. The 4 page paper will consist of your reflections on two or three themes in the text. For this paper you will not draw from any other literature, neither secondary sources nor other works. The paper should include some discussion of your text’s relevance for alleviating suffering and fostering well-being. As part of your study of this text, you will engage in a modified version of *lectio divina.* Paper due: June 16, by email. (20% of your grade)

5) Reflection on your learning and growth related to this course. 2-3 pages; Due June 17, in class. (5%)

6) Final exam, June 18, in class. Essay exam focused on content and critical/creative thinking. (25%)
7) Overall course participation: Attendance; timely completion of all assignments; quality and consistency of participation in class; and involvement in out-of-class activities, including your experiential awareness practice, research interview, and ecopsychology workshop. (10%)

Use of Blackboard for course correspondence, readings, and other tasks. This will comprise part of your course participation grade.

8) If you are a Psychology major and you have already taken PSYC 102 (Orientation to the Psychology Major), you are required to upload at least one assignment from the present class to your Blackboard portfolio. You may do this at anytime during the semester, but it must be done by the beginning of finals week. You cannot receive your grade from this class until after you have done this.

Specific responsibilities for all assignments will be explained and discussed in class, with handouts as appropriate. All written work for the course is to be typed, double-spaced, with 12-point font. Plus and minus grading will be used for final grades, as follows: A = 92-100; A- = 90-91; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79; C = 70-77; D = 60-69; F = below 60.

I strongly encourage you to participate actively in class through commentary, questioning, and dialogue. In order to optimize your learning it is important that you read each assignment thoughtfully prior to the class meeting in which it will be studied. This preparation will help you develop a deeper understanding of the material, formulate questions to bring to class, and to engage more fully in class discussions.

Consistent attendance is required as it is necessary for individual success and for a successful course overall. Your presence and absence affects not just you as an individual, but your peers and our whole class community as well. Thus, for each unexcused absence two points will be deducted from your final grade. To create the best learning environment, use of cell phones, text messaging, the internet, and related activities are completely prohibited during class.

**Learning Goals and Outcome Assessment**

The following learning goals interrelate and overlap. For the sake of organizational clarity, they can be categorized as Faith and Reason Theme Area goals, Psychology Department goals, and Course Specific goals.

**Faith and Reason Theme Area Goals**

This course fulfills the “Faith and Reason” Theme Area requirement of the University Core Curriculum. Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

* Identify themes addressed by religious faith and philosophy or the sciences and apply relevant methods for considering those shared themes -- Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Describe the complex relationship between rationality and religious faith, through a focused exploration of significant thinkers and a selection of literary works -- Assessed via reading reflections, research paper, final exam, and course participation.
* Articulate how religious faith can play a role in the critical analysis of social problems and in the choice of actions for their resolution -- Assessed via final exam, ecopsychology workshop, and course participation.
* Explain how intellect, affect, moral development, and religious faith work together in learning and find expression in works of literature and in other arts -- Assessed via all assignments and course participation.

Psychology Department Goals
As a Psychology offering, the course fulfills goals affirmed by the Psychology Department. Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:
* Understand some of the fundamental concepts, issues, and interest areas of psychology – Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Think critically and creatively about human psychology and life as a whole – Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Communicate effectively – Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Be critically and socially engaged with the contemporary world, including being appreciative of its many forms of diversity – Assessed via final exam, ecopsychology workshop, and course participation.
* Work with and apply ethical principles, both personally and in service – Assessed via interview/reflection assignment, ecopsychology workshop, and course participation.
* Become more prepared for careers and/or graduate study in psychology, social work, and counseling, and in related fields such as education, business, law, health care, and human services -- Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Cultivate their potential as distinctive individuals and participants in society -- Assessed via all assignments and course participation.

Course Specific Goals
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
* Describe various meanings and functions of religion and spirituality -- Assessed via reading reflections, final exam, and course participation.
* Articulate the value of a spiritually oriented life (defined broadly, in accordance with one’s deepest values) -- Assessed via all assignments and course participation.
* Articulate the value of contemplative/awareness practices --
* Discuss the insights and limitations of Freud’s critique of religion – Assessed via reading reflections, final exam, and course participation.
* Describe how close relationships may be approached as a transformative practice and path (“the path of conscious love”) – Assessed via reading reflections, final exam, and course participation.
* Describe the significance of engaged spirituality for social and ecological well-being – Assessed via reading reflections, final exam, ecopsychology workshop, and course participation.
* Make this course personally relevant in their daily life and relationships, their participation with their community and the larger natural world, and their preparation for future professional work and/or graduate school – Assessed via all assignments and course participation.

Academic Integrity, Special Accommodations, and Encouragement to Consult
I expect you to act with academic integrity in this course (just as I trust you are cultivating a life of integrity). To be aware of University policies, please consult Duquesne’s web site at: http://www.duq.edu/academics/university-catalogs/2014-2015-
In this Google/YouTube/Facebook/Twitter/etc. culture, it is easier than ever to violate a policy, perhaps without being fully aware that you are doing so. However, even an unintentional breach of integrity is subject to sanctions. I will not tolerate academic dishonesty of any kind. This refers to cheating, plagiarism, and all other types of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, using material from the web, another person’s work, or from books or articles without properly acknowledging the source. If I suspect that you have violated a policy I will follow the investigation and sanction procedures outlined by the University. I strongly encourage you to speak with me, at any time during the course, if you have questions about issues or situations regarding academic integrity.

The course as described in this syllabus may be revised during the semester according to the needs and interests of the class. If you need accommodations for a disability or other special need, please speak with me. You may also contact the Office of Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657). Please speak directly with me if you have any questions about the syllabus or about anything else regarding your participation in this course.

I look forward to our work together this semester!

~ Dr. Adams