Course Description and Purpose

This course will explore the complementary relationship between psychology and religion/spirituality. 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. Through a psychological perspective, we will consider religious/spiritual approaches to phenomena such as meaning-making, self and others, consciousness, relationships, love, suffering, death, embodiment, faith, reason, social engagement and justice, the natural world, meditative/contemplative practices, personal and cultural transformation, and Mystery/Spirit/G-d/Buddha-nature/Life (or we might say the Unnamable, by whatever name). Primarily, we will be exploring the life-enhancing potential of psycho-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 and destructive ones have been done in the name of religion. Freud’s critique of religion will provide useful insights here, and we will also discuss the significant limitations of his theory.

Our study will be oriented by these interrelated themes:

I. Introduction: Understanding Various Meanings of Religion & Spirituality
II. Spirituality As Experiential Inquiry, Transformation, and Ethical Response:
   - Love, Understanding, Justice, and Engaged Practice
III. A Psychological Critique of Religion: The Wisdom & Limitations of Freud’s Theory
IV. Relationship As A Spiritual Practice: The Path of Conscious Love
V. Socially/Ecologically Engaged Spirituality: Ecopsychology/Ecospirituality

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, philosophers, and poets, both classic and contemporary. Along with text-based lecture and discussion, you will be introduced to – and participate in – a variety of psycho-spiritual awareness practices: meditation, contemplative prayer, sacred reading (such as lectio divina), ritual, art, journaling, body-centered practices (such as yoga), intimate relationships, socially engaged service, dream interpretation, conscious involvement with the more-than-human natural world, etc. According to your interests you will select one specific practice to study with a group of peers, and to explore personally and experientially across the semester.
This course fulfills the University Core Curriculum requirement for a theme area course in “Faith and Reason.” Most importantly, I hope you will discover how your learning in this course is relevant for your chosen major, future vocation, and daily life.

**Required Readings**

Relatively inexpensive paperbacks available in the bookstore or online:


Short selections from most of the following and possibly others (as time permits), 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 cannot be graded by a professor, as it is an ongoing self-inquiry that each student can only do for herself/himself. 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 reflections on our readings. Submitted each week via email, by Sunday at noon. (25%)  
2) Awareness practice. You will select one specific awareness practice to explore conceptually and experientially throughout the semester, both individually and with a small group of your peers. Two different formal assignments are involved in this activity:
   2A) Individual practice reflections. Two brief reflections describing your experience of actually engaging in your chosen awareness practice. The first reflection is due on February 25 and the second on April 21, both by email. (5% for each reflection = 10% of final grade)  
   2B) In collaboration with a small group of your peers, you will do a mid-semester, in-class presentation on your practice. The presentation will describe each of the following: the history, theory, and method of the practice, including research from books and/or journals; a report from an interview conducted with an experienced practitioner; and informal descriptions of how your individual practice is going at mid-semester. (25%)  
3) Final exam. Wednesday, April 27, 11:00-1:00, in class. Essay and short answer exam assessing both content and critical/creative thinking. (30%)  
4) Overall course participation: Attendance; timely completion of all assignments; quality and consistency of participation in class; involvement in out-of-class activities; use of Blackboard for various course activities. (10%)  
5) 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 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 or absence affects not just you as an individual, but your peers and our whole class community. Thus, for each unexcused absence two points will be deducted from your final grade. To create the best learning environment for everyone, 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.

Psychology Department Goals

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:
* Understand some of the fundamental concepts, issues, and interest areas of psychology.
* Think critically and creatively about human psychology and life as a whole.
* Communicate effectively.
* Be critically and socially engaged with the contemporary world, including being appreciative of its many forms of diversity.
* Work with and apply ethical principles, both personally and in service.
* 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.
* Cultivate their potential as distinctive individuals and participants in society.

Course Specific Goals

Upon completion of this course, and viewed from a psychological perspective, students should be able to:
* Describe various meanings and functions of religion and spirituality.
* Articulate the value of a spiritually oriented life (defined broadly, in accordance with one’s deepest values).
* Articulate the value of psycho-spiritual awareness practices.
* Understand the insights and limitations of Freud’s critique of religion.
* Describe how relationships with others may be approached as a transformative practice and path (“the path of conscious love”).
* Describe the significance of engaged spirituality for social and ecological well-being.
* 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.

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-undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity](http://www.duq.edu/academics/university-catalogs/2014-2015-undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity) 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.
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