

## Teaching log for the 2005-2006 academic year<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Religion 157 - The idea systems of Chinese religions (Spring 2006)

Known as the "Three Teachings," the Daoist, Buddhist and Classicist idea systems put down early roots and then flowered in second- and third-century China. They gradually permeated every aspect of Chinese life, from family structure to foreign trade, from cosmological speculation to court politics, from liturgy to landscape painting. We examine how they borrowed from one another and yet still delineated their own identities. Unique pedagogical strategies include:

- *A syllabus shaped by Clifford Geertz's fivefold definition of religious idea systems.* Beginning with a theoretical model not only helps organize a religion's numerous components, it also forces us to ask questions about whether those components relate to one another in a way the model predicts.
- *An emphasis on close reading.* For examples, my students literally draw elaborate "concept maps" for the Classicist "Doctrine of the mean"<sup>2</sup> and later contrast third-century philosophical and religious commentaries to the Daode jing, the latter commentary excavated from northwestern China in the twentieth century.

### 2. Religion 160 - Religion & philosophy in pre-imperial China (Spring 2006, sectioned)

While a billion people can today claim an intellectual inheritance from Greece, more than two billion recognize ancient China as their foundation. Beginning in material culture with the Shang Dynasty oracle bones and Zhou Dynasty sacrificial bronze vessels, this course progresses to the "Confucian" canon and the blossoming of Chinese philosophy. We closely read primary sources such as the Classicist Book of songs, the Daoist Zhuangzi and the pre-imperial narrative histories of The Zuo commentary. Unique pedagogical strategies include:

- *A syllabus shaped by Roy Rappaport's fourfold hierarchy of liturgical order.* Rappaport's model forces us to ask how much practice is dictated by the integrity of lofty ideas on one side and the needs of on-the-ground circumstances on the other.
- *The quest for deuterio-truths.* A deuterio-truth is an idea one holds without knowing one holds it, such as particular notions of self, time and knowledge. All Reedies are well versed in the Greco-Roman tradition from their yearlong mandatory Western Humanities course. I challenge that tradition by excavating its deuterio-truths via comparison with an alternative tradition.

### 3. Religion 201 - Theories and methods in religious studies (Fall 2005)

Academia looks at religion through lenses supplied by several disciplines, from anthropology to sociology, from psychology to linguistics. Each lens is used to define religion, to understand its mechanics, and to scrutinize its role in society. This course thus analyzes twentieth century lenses polished by the pioneers of the field such as Weber, Otto, Durkheim, Freud, James, Geertz, Eliade and Rappaport. Unique pedagogical strategies include:

- *Developing a theory about developing theories.* A course devoted to religious theory is in itself rare and usually tackled by only a small handful of graduate programs. As a prerequisite for all upper-division coursework, it provides juniors and seniors with a common vocabulary and set of lenses for any religious tradition they ultimately study.
- *Lens projects.* At the end of the semester, students in groups find a religious phenomenon to serve as an object of study and then use each author as a disciplinary lens, learning how to ask different questions of the same object.

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<sup>1</sup> All syllabi are available online at <http://www.reed.edu/~brashiek/syllabi/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> While these teaching strategies are generally my own creation, I've taken "concept maps" from Duch, Groh and Allen's The power of problem-based learning.

#### 4. Religion 310 - Death and remembrance in Chinese history (Fall 2005)

From Buddhist hells to Daoist immortals, Chinese religions are preoccupied with rationalizing and resisting human extinction. This course examines death through the lenses of early Chinese literature, art, medicine, and philosophy, beginning with early forms of the ancestral cult and ending in a nineteenth-century hell. Unique pedagogical strategies include:

- *Contextualizing the question.* This course begins in the modern Western world with nineteen religious descriptions of death and then moves back to the early Greek perspective, requiring students to formulate their own methodologies and questions before tackling death in Chinese history.<sup>3</sup>
- *Chinese hell scrolls.* This course ends in hell. Nineteenth-century Chinese hell scrolls usually come in groups of ten, each scroll graphically depicting numerous captioned torture scenes to inform the living about what awaits them for their sins. I possess thirty such scrolls, and together with my students, we have already created the largest site on the internet devoted to this disappearing medium.<sup>4</sup>

#### 5. Religion 313 - Chinese Mahayana texts (Fall 2005)

After examining the transmission process of texts from India to China, this course focuses upon close reading of sutras in translation from four major schools of Chinese Buddhism. These sutras include the Lotus sutra from Tiantai Buddhism, the Flower ornament sutra from Huayan Buddhism, the Pure land sutra from Jingtu Buddhism, and the Diamond, Vimalakirti, Lankavatara, and Platform sutras from Chan (a.k.a. Zen) Buddhism. Unique pedagogical strategies include:

- *Philosophical sutras in modern contexts.* While our readings generally consist of the most famous sutras, we conclude by applying them to modern contexts to learn how religions adapt. For examples, we hunt for Buddhist influence in Falun gong's central scripture Zhuan falun, and we speculate on how self-identified American Buddhists manipulate the sutras in their attempts to justify environmentalism.
- *The Buddha Palace.* An experimental interactive website that I created with Jeffrey Barlow at Pacific University, the Buddha Palace is an elaborate web-based tool to foster the learning of Buddhism in a graphic setting.<sup>5</sup>

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#### Independent student projects for the 2005-2006 academic year

1. "The immortal discourse: Tracing Ge Hong's transcendent tradition," a yearlong senior thesis project by Jeffrey Peterson.
2. "Li Hongzhi's mechanized religion in the information age," a yearlong senior thesis project by Margot Kniffin.
3. "Facing Indra's net: A text-based analysis of the case for an innate Buddhist environmental ethic," a yearlong senior thesis project by Amanda Cooper.
4. "Sacred space in modern church architecture," a fall-semester independent study course by Dana Logan.
5. "Non-discursive logic in the Zhuangzi," a spring-semester degree paper by Linda Meng for the college's Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically I use Johnson and McGee's How different religions view death and afterlife and then move on to Vermeule's Aspects of death in early Greek art and poetry.

<sup>4</sup> Please visit our class's website at <http://www.reed.edu/~brashiek/scrolls.html>.

<sup>5</sup> For the website, go to <http://mcel.pacificu.edu/mcel/omm/>; for a project description, go to the online archive of the Sunday Oregonian, 14 August 1999, where it was featured on the front page. I was the site architect and content director whereas Barlow and his crew of a dozen students in computer studies put it together through a generous grant from the Northwest Academic Computing Consortium.