READINGS in ASIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 216, SPRING 2010

Professor Todd T. Lewis
Religious Studies Department, SMITH HALL 425
Office Hours: MW 4:30-6:15 and by appointment
Office Phone: 793-3436  E-mail: tlewis@holycross.edu

Course Description:
This course gives students a chance to read and critically analyze classic sacred writings in translation from the South Asian religious traditions, particularly those of Buddhism. The genres sampled will include a law code, ascetic mysticism, religious biography, popular narrative, and scholastic treatises. We will also consider the cross-cultural definition of “text,” hermeneutical approaches to exegesis, the idea of a “scriptural canon,” and the construction of tradition in the western historical imagination.

Required Textbooks:

All the books above have been ordered from the Holy Cross bookstore.

Course Requirements:
Separate guidelines for these will be distributed.
1. 3 Commentary Papers: on texts to be discussed in class
2. 8-10 page Term Paper
3. Final Oral Exam.
4. Participation
Course Design and Expectations:
This course is designed to give us a chance to carefully read, analyze, and discuss central texts in the history of two world religions in Asia. Joining the class entails the expectation that members will complete reading assignments in preparation for class, engage with the material intellectually, and take an active role in class discussions. Course assignments will entail the freedom for individuals to explore topics, themes, and genres of personal interest.

Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments

INTRODUCTORY

1. 1/20: First Class: Syllabi Distributed and Course Overview

2. 1/25: “Religious Tradition” Texts & Contexts; Exegesis and Hermeneutics
   Required Reading:
   “Asian Scriptures Among the World’s Religions” [E-res]
   “Shikar” from Ed Dimock, Mr. Dimock Explores the Mysteries of the East [E-res]

TOPIC 1:
Ancient and Formative Hindu Scriptures

3. 1/27: Sanskrit, Veda, Earliest Upanishads
   Required Reading:
   “Hymn to Agni”, “Hymn to Indra”, “Katha Upanishad” [E-res]
4. 2/1: Upanishadic Mysticism
Required Reading:

5. 2/3: The Asceticism Upanishads: Discussion
Required Reading:
Patrick Olivelle, trans. *Samyasa Upanishads*, 170-287

Required Reading:
Doniger and Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*, 1-127

Required Reading:
Doniger and Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*, 128-290

8. 2/15: Thinking Again about Texts and Contexts: Discussion
Required Reading:

9. 2/17: Analysis of the *Aggañña Sutta*
Required Reading:
Steven Collins, trans. “The Discourse on What is Primary” [ERE-s]
10. 2/22: Siddhārtha, Birth and Renunciation
Required Reading:
E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, 1-96

11. 2/24: Shākyamuni’s Enlightenment
Required Reading:
E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. 97-142

**SPRING BREAK**

12. 3/8: Shākyamuni, Last Days and *Parinirvāna (parinirvāna)*
Required Reading:
E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. 143-164, 211-236

13. 3/10: A Modern Biography from Nepal: *Sugata Saurabha*
Required Reading:
Todd T. Lewis and Subarna Tuladhar, trans. *Sugata Saurabha*

Required Reading:
Todd T. Lewis and Subarna Tuladhar, trans. *Sugata Saurabha*

15. 3/17: NO CLASS

16. 3/22: The Buddha in Other Texts: Presentations and Discussion
TOPIC THREE:

Jātakas and Avadānas: Former Lives of the Buddha

17. 3/24: Storytelling, Parables, Karma Stories as Buddhist Genre
Required Reading:
Todd T. Lewis, Popular Mahayana Texts from Nepal, 1-10

18. 3/29: Sanskrit Avadānas from the Divyāvadāna [1]
Required Reading:
Andy Rotman, trans. Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna PART I, 39-118

19. 3/31: Sanskrit Avadānas from the Divyāvadāna [2]
Required Reading:
Andy Rotman, trans. Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna PART I, Assigned Stories

4/5: Easter Break

20. 4/7: Sanskrit Avadānas from Nepal
Required Reading:
Todd T. Lewis, Popular Mahayana Texts from Nepal, 11-164

TOPIC FOUR:

Texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: Prajñā

21. 4/12: Overview of Mahāyāna Traditions; Heart Sutra
Required Reading:
Edward Conze, Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts
22. 4/14: Ultimate Perspectives: Prajñāpāramitā Texts  
Required Reading:  
Edward Conze, Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts

23. 4/19: Advice from a Philosopher: Nāgārjuna  
Required Reading:  
Jeffrey Hopkins, Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland., 92-164 [ERES]

TOPIC FIVE:  
Texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Lotus Sūtra

24. 4/21: Reading the Text (1)  
Required Reading:  

25. 4/26: Reading the Text (2)  
Required Reading:  

26. 4/28: The Lotus Sūtra in its Myriad Contexts: Discussions  
Required Reading:  
Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone, eds. Readings of the Lotus Sutra.

TOPIC SIX:  
Term Studies

27. 5/3: Presentation of Final Essays  
Reflections and Reconsiderations;

EXAM PERIOD: INDIVIDUAL ORAL FINALS