

Religion in the Wild

RELST/ES 155 - WI

"The meaning of wilderness, like love, changes as soon as it's defined." - Paul Schneider, *The Adirondacks*

Instructor: Prof. Stephen Brent Rodríguez Plate (just "Prof Plate" for short)
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Office hours: 10.00-11.00am Mon/Wed, or by appt. Room 108 Benedict Hall

Course Objectives and Goals:

Jesus, Moses, Siddharta, and Mohammed all had significant experiences in the wilderness. These experiences shaped their lives and the religious traditions that they helped found. We will read from and about philosophers, mystics, and spiritual seekers who have gone to untamed spaces for inspiration. And we will look to the modern world, and its ongoing spiritual/secular divisions to see if there are any differences. We will work through some definitions of "wild" and "wilderness," and enquire how these resonate within religious traditions.

Course Materials:

Students will need to purchase the following books:

- Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*
- Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
- Belden Lane, *Solace of Fierce Landscapes*
- Cheryl Strayed, *Wild*
- Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*
- Other texts will be made available online through Blackboard (noted "BB" in schedule below) or emailed to you.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

Presence: (20% of the final grade) This grade includes attendance and participation, but entails a more general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. There are readings or other assignments for every day of class (listed below) and you are required to have read *before* class, and to be prepared to discuss the readings. "Presence" means not coming to class and asking what you were *supposed* to have read; "presence" means listening to the

others in the classroom; "presence" means, to use the title of a great religious film, "being there."

The class is small and therefore relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. The grade for presence includes attendance (see below). The grade also entails that students have read assigned readings *before* class, and come prepared to discuss the readings. You will be graded on your ability to analyze and synthesize assignments; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, and 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion.

Finally: You are expected to treat this classroom as if you were on an airline flight: That is, all electronic devices must be turned off and safely stowed away for the duration of our flights. Cell phones will not be tolerated in this classroom, and laptops are not allowed, except on particular days. A ringing phone or text messaging during class will result in that student being marked absent for the day.

Short Writing Assignments (SWA): (10% each x four in total = 40% of final grade) Most will be 1000-1200 words.

Papers: (20% each x two in total = 40% of final grade). There will be two of these, one of which will be rewritten and the grade will be averaged between the first and second versions.

This course is Writing-Intensive (WI). Because learning to write well is an on-going process, the faculty has committed to a WI Program that will assist students in learning to write well in multiple disciplines and throughout their time at Hamilton. We will meet the WI requirement through individual meetings with Prof Plate to discuss student writing assignments, through multiple written assignments, and the rewriting of one paper.

Statement on Disabilities

Prof Plate will work with any students with disabilities as need be. Students should contact Prof Plate **in the first two weeks of class** to discuss any specific needs, and should have already spoken with Dean Harrison (aharriso@hamilton.edu) about this. If in question, feel free to contact Prof Plate.

Course Schedule

{NOTE: the readings are subject to change. Please check with Prof Plate, read your emails, and/or Blackboard for updates.}

<u>Introductions</u>
M 2 Sept - NO CLASS. We had our first class in the wild, as an Adirondack Adventure Pre-Orientation trip
W 4 Sept - SWA #1 due. Discuss in class.
<u>This is the modern wild</u>
M 9 Sept - Read Cheryl Strayed, <i>Wild</i> (at least through p. 174)
W 11 Sept - Finish Cheryl Strayed, <i>Wild</i> . Emily Palen from Writing Center will come to class for final 10 minutes of class
<u>Pilgrimages: Secular and Sacred</u>
M 16 Sept - Read Victor and Edith Turner on pilgrimage (BB) and come to class prepared to discuss. Guest lecturer: Prof Seth Schermerhorn on pilgrimage.
W 18 Sept - Read, Plate on "Varieties of Contemporary Pilgrimage" (BB)
F 20 Sept - SWA #2 Due. By 5pm via email.
<u>The Modern Wild: Take Two</u>
M 23 Sept - Read Jon Krakauer, <i>Into the Wild</i> (at least to p. 102)
W 25 Sept - Finish Krakauer, <i>Into the Wild</i> . Discussions in class.

SAT 28 Sept. Back to the Adirondacks for day hike.

Writing Personal Reflections

M 30 Sep - NO regular Class. Meet with assigned small groups to discuss drafts of your paper. Strongly suggested: start reading Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* for observations on the wilderness.

W 2 Oct - NO Class. **First Paper Due by email, 5pm**

The Senses and Observations: The Arts and Poetry of the Wild

M 7 Oct - Read Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (first half)

W 9 Oct - Finish Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (second half)

M 14 Oct - Read Belden Lane, *Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, pp. 1-85

W 16 Oct - Continue discussion on Lane, *Solace*

M 21 Oct - Romantic art and poetry viewings and readings in class. Readings on BB

W 23 Oct - Hudson River School viewings in class

SAT 26 Oct - Field Trip to Munson Williams Proctor Art Museum

M 28 Oct - NO Regular Class. Individual meetings with Prof Plate about your Second Paper.

W 30 Oct - NO Regular Class. Individual meetings with Prof Plate about your Second Paper.

Fri 1 Nov. Second Paper Due by email, by 5pm.

<u>Religious Foundations 1:</u> The Wild Life of the Buddha
M 4 Nov - Reading, "Life of the Buddha" (BB). Watch parts of <i>The Buddha</i> in class.
W 6 Nov - Continue readings for week. Discussion of Buddha in the wild. Guest lecture: Prof Abhishek Amar
<u>Religious Foundations 2:</u> Muhammed's Wilderness Adventure
M 11 Nov - Reading, "Muhammed" + readings on Islam (BB)
W 13 Nov - Continue readings. Discussion of Muhammed in the wild Fri 15 Nov. SWA #3 due
<u>Religious Foundations 3:</u> Jesus In the Desert/In the Garden
M 18 Nov - Reading, Belden Lane, <i>Solace</i> pt III, pp. 149-232
W 20 Nov - Continue Lane discussion
M 25 - 29 Nov - NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK

<u>Religious Foundations 4:</u> The Religious Wilderness of the US/The Wild Religion of the US
M 2 Dec - All readings for week on BB: selections from Roderick Nash, <i>Wilderness and the American Mind</i> ; David Williams, <i>Wilderness Lost</i> ; and William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"
W 4 Dec - Readings on Joseph Smith, beginnings of the LDS church
SAT 7 Dec - Field Trip to Palmyra, NY. Foundations of Mormonism
M 9 Dec - SWA #4 Due. NO regular class. Individual meetings with students about the final paper rewrite.
W 11 Dec - NO regular class. Individual meetings with students about the final paper rewrite. Sometime this week we will do a final class gathering at Prof Plate's house. Details TBA.
Fri 18 Dec. Final Papers (rewrites) due via Email by 5 pm.