Religious Studies 111
Mapping the Realm of Religion

Prof. Tyler Roberts
Department of Religious Studies
Steiner 203; x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu

Course Description
This course introduces the field of Religious Studies by focusing on a series of case studies that illustrate how diverse religious ideas and practices can be interpreted as forms of map-making. These cases will help to demonstrate how religious life in different times and places has been shaped by the dynamic interplay of social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic and personal factors and by peoples’ efforts to represent or “map” this interplay in bringing order, meaning, and purpose to their personal and collective lives. In considering these religious mappings, we will also be attentive to the ways that students of religion are also mapmakers and users. That is, we will pay attention to the methods and materials that we, as students of religion, use to make sense of the religious worlds of other cultures as well as of our own. Therefore, although we will attend closely to the description of various religious traditions and phenomena in the course of the semester, we will also reflect critically on how we, as students of religion, can interpret religion responsibly and self-critically.

Course Requirements and Grading
1) Class Participation (25% of final grade):
Each student will be responsible for preparing carefully for each class session, and for participating actively in the work of the class. Some of our work will be done as a large group, some in smaller groups. The success of the course depends on all of you contributing to the best of your ability in all phases of our work. Regular attendance is crucial; chronic lateness or more than two unexcused absences will have an adverse effect on your grade.

2) Atlas Assignments (25% of final grade):
During the course of the semester, you will be responsible for six “Atlas Assignments.” These assignments should be completed and brought to class on the due date, as indicated below.

3) Group Work (25% of final grade):
Early in the semester, I will form the class into groups of 3-5 students. Each group will be responsible for completing and presenting three projects: a map of Grinnell (Sept. 21), a report on 9/11 memorials (Oct. 10, 12), and a report on current situation in either Israel or Iraq (to be determined by the class), from the perspective of the study of religion (last week of classes).

4) Final Exam (25% of final grade).
Reading and Assignment Schedule
*Readings on E-Reserve

Introductions:
Aug. 31: Introduction to course

Week 1: Defining Religion
Sept. 3: Gary Kessler, *Studying Religion*: Chap. 1
Sept. 5: Kessler: Chap. 2
Sept. 7: Kessler: Chap. 3

Week 2: Mapping Religion
Sept. 10: Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps*: Chap. 1; readings from Keillor, Borges and Ross*
Library Visit
Sept. 14 *Atlas Assignment #1*

Week 3: Mandalas
Sept. 17: Mandala entries from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*
Sept. 19: Video: Tibetan Sand Mandalas
Sept. 21: *Group Discovery Exercise #1: Grinnell Maps*

Week 4: Myth as Sacred Story
Sept. 24: Kessler: Chapter 4
Sept. 26: Mircea Eliade on Myth, from Strenski, *Thinking About Religion*
Russell McCutcheon: “Myth,” from *Guide to the Study of Religion*
Sept. 28: Discussion: Myth

Week 5: Ritual as Sacred Action
Oct. 1: Kessler: Chapter 5, (through 5.3)
Oct. 3: Kessler: Ch. 5 (5.4-5.7)
Oct. 5: Kessler: Ch. 5 (Research Case: The Seder)
*Atlas Assignment #2*

Week 6: Ritual as Memory
Oct. 8: Robert Bellah: “Civil Religion in America”*
Kessler: 10.8
S. Pressley Montes on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*
Hugh Wilder: “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial”
(www.cofc.edu/VietnamRetro/wilder.html)
Oct. 10: *Group Discovery Exercise #2: 9/11 Memorials*
Oct. 12: *Group Discovery Exercise #2: 9/11 Memorials*
Week 7: Sacred Space, Time, and Art
Oct.: 15: Kessler: Chapter 6 (through 6.5)
Oct. 17: Kessler: Ch. 6 (6.6)
Oct. 19: Discussion: Class Research Project
  *Atlas Assignment #3*

Fall Break: Oct. 20-Oct. 28

Week 9: Experiencing the Sacred
Oct. 29: Kessler: Chapter 7 (through 7.7)
Oct. 31: Robert Sharf, “Experience”*
Nov. 2: Kessler: Chapter 7 (7.8)

Week 10: The Problem of Evil
Nov. 5:  Kessler: Chapter 8 (through 8.3.1)
Nov. 7: Kessler: Chapter 8 (through 8.7)
Nov. 9: F. Dostoevsky, from The Brothers Karamazov*
  *Atlas Assignment #4*

Week 11: Religion and Morality
Nov. 12: Kessler: Chapter 9
  Eqbal Ahmad: “A Jihad Against Time”
  (http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/415/op2.htm)
  Juan Cole, “Muhammed was a Terrorist?” (http://hnn.us/articles/1018.html)
Nov. 16: “Iraq and Just War: A Symposium”
  *Atlas Assignment #5*

Week 12:
Nov. 19: Film
Nov. 21: Progress Reports

Week 13: Organizing the Sacred
Nov. 26: Kessler: Chapter 10 (through 10.2)
  J.Z. Smith, “The Devil in Mr. Jones”*
Nov. 28: Riffat Hassan, “Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam,”*
Nov. 30: *Atlas Assignment #6*

Week 13: Human Existence and Destiny and “Postliminaries”
Dec. 3:  Kessler: Chapter 11 (through 11.4)
Dec. 5:  Kessler, 11.5-11.8
Dec. 7:  Kessler, Chapter 12

Week 14 Islam and Iraq
Dec. 10-14: Student Project Reports