Course Description: This course takes an imaginatively critical approach to introducing 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.

The course is, therefore, not a survey of religious traditions around the world, but rather an extended reflection on how we as students of religion might imagine “religion” as an object of study and how we might then frame our studies in a self-conscious and responsible way. This course is, then, not in the first instance about description, though that is an essential part of our enterprise. It is, rather, about responsible interpretation—about how to productively approach the raw data of history and how to locate our perspectives in the larger context of humanistic inquiry. In short, this course is designed to introduce the problem of interpretation through selected case studies that challenge our assumptions and illuminate our subjectivity.

Mondays and Wednesdays will, at least initially, be devoted to lecture-discussions; Fridays will be reserved, at the beginning of the semester, for smaller group work. There will be a variety of daily and weekly exercises, some in-class and some assigned as homework. Many of these will involve paired or small-group collaborative work, with scheduled presentations to highlight major points that will be or have been covered in class. Reading will be balanced by “discovery” assignments, in which you will be asked to find evidence or examples of particular kinds of “mappings” or to produce your own “maps” of various sorts.

Narrative Overview:

Weeks I-II: The narrative of the course begins with the idea of maps as representations, allowing us from the very first day to examine a variety of critical issues and perspectives. Among the materials that will be used to illustrate our orientation will be some short imaginative and analytical readings; a variety of historical, topographic, and imaginative maps; and a sampling of liturgical calendars and ordinances to forecast the more focused and detailed and unusual kinds of maps we will be dealing with later in the course. We will then bring the general principles of mapping to bear on a series of brief but concrete historical examples that both illustrate the physical, relational dimensions of religious ideas and practices, and alert us to the social and geopolitical dimensions of critical studies in religion.
Weeks III-V are focused on the idea of mandala as an indigenous category and theory of practice analogous to the English term “map.” This unit is designed to provide a sustained example of the various ways in which cosmic, social, and personal perspectives can be subsumed under a single rubric (mandala), and of how the human body itself has at times been construed as a cosmic field that can be mapped.

Weeks VI-VIII extend the ideas of religious mapping and “embodied universes” to a Christian context, focusing on the case of Teresa, a medieval Carmelite nun whose “Interior Castle” handbook complicates our understanding of the particularities (as well as the generalities) of categories such as mapping and mysticism. While the text itself purports to provide a very personal kind of religious map, we will investigate whether it also provides a map of a more general sort both in its own historical context and within the field of religious studies.

Weeks IX-XI are designed to bring our attention back out from the specific to the general, highlighting Jerusalem as both a city and an idea. As opposed to the particularity of Teresa’s historical situation, we will extend the temporal range of our reflections to include ancient, medieval, and modern views of Jerusalem and the Holy Land more generally as the object of overlapping—and contesting—religious maps. The literary and historical legacy of this “site” is inexhaustible, but we will try to put the current geo-political “map” of Jerusalem into a new and critically productive perspective.

During Weeks XII-XIV, we will move to another case of overlapping and contesting maps as represented by the book Black Elk Speaks, and will reflect on some of the historical and cultural issues that the book and its author have engendered. The data and analysis will focus on 19th and 20th century materials and on the controversies that the historical data inspire.

Requirements:
1) 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. (20% of final grade)

2) Each student will be expected to make substantive written contributions to the electronic Blackboard Discussion Forums. These will comprise three kinds of postings. First, at least twelve times over the course of the semester and at least 16 hours before a class meeting, you will comment briefly on how some aspect of the assigned reading seems significant to you in the context of our class. Second, after at least two of our case studies (see the “Schedule of Classes”), you will be asked to write a 250-500 word (2-3 pp) analytical reflection illustrating what you have learned from that case and how it informs your understanding of the course as a whole—these will also be turned in as formal writing assignments as indicated in the schedule of classes [see below]. Third, you will post at least eight substantive responses to other students’ postings over the course of the semester. (20% of final grade)

3) Your short analytical reflection papers (see above and “Writing Assignments” on the course schedule) will represent 20% of your grade.

4) There will be regular short “discovery” projects over the course of the semester. Careful and timely completion of these assignments is expected, and no late submissions will ordinarily be accepted. (20% of final grade)

5) The final paper will be a revision of an earlier writing assignment or a new essay, analyzing a particular case in the context of the course as a whole. (20% of final grade)
Weeks I-II.  ORIENTATIONS

Jan 23 (M)  Overview of the course; Discussion of handouts
Reading for Wednesday: Wood, Intro and Chs. 1-2
Note: All “additional” readings will be available on Blackboard (“Course Documents”) and are identified with an asterisk below.

Jan 25 (W)  The Power of Maps: Discussion of Wood’s
Reading for Friday: Wood, Chs. 3-4
Discovery Assignment: Find two different city maps of Grinnell or two of the college campus. Be prepared to discuss them on Friday in light of Wood’s arguments about how maps work.

Jan 27 (F)  Mapping Grinnell (small groups)
Readings for next week: Wood, Ch. 7
“Pilgrimage to Mt. Kailasa” [Strong 7.5.1] (handout)
“To the Navel of the Earth” and “‘Nature’s Grand Mandala’ from Johnson & Moran [chs. 1, 4]*
S.H. Nasr, “Mecca and Medina” and “Mecca”*
Video script (Rites of Remembrance)*

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Jan 30 (M)  Pilgrimage in Comparative Perspective: Can this be “Mapping”?
Feb 1 (W)  Space, Place, History: Hiroshima (discussion of Foard article)
Feb 3 (F)  Video: Rites of Remembrance

Writing assignment #1: “Is Ritual A Form of Mapping?”
Reading for next week: “Mandala” entries in Encyclopedia of Religion*

Discovery Assignment #2 (for next Friday): Find an example of a mandala from Asia and be prepared to explain as much as possible about it in light of Wood’s arguments about maps. [See the study guide on the Blackboard.]

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Weeks III-V. MANDALA: An Exemplary Category

Feb 6 (M)  What is a Mandala?
Feb 8 (W)  How are mandalas used? How do they work?
           Video: “Preaching from Pictures” (40 minutes)
Feb 10 (F) Are mandalas maps? (small groups)
           Reading for next week*: J. Lidke, Vishvarupa Mandir*
           G. Grieve, “Laying Down the Grid”**
           *TBA

Discovery Assignment #3 (for next Friday): Investigate the religious,
           social, and economic conditions that inform the production and use of
           mandalas in South Asia and elsewhere today. [See study guide on the
           Blackboard.]

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Feb 13 (M)  Architecture of the Divine
Feb 15 (W)  Royal Cities, Ritual Sites
Feb 17 (F)  Mandalas as Material Culture and Micro-Economy (small groups)
           Reading for next week: TBA (will be available on Blackboard)*

Discovery Assignment #4 (for next Friday): Find a picture, diagram, or
           description from popular culture that illustrates similarities and differences
           between “Western” and “Eastern” conceptions of the body; be prepared to
           discuss its implications. [See study guide on the Blackboard]

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Feb 20 (M)  Tantric notions of cosmic bodies
Feb 22 (W)  Taoist notions of cosmic bodies
Feb 24 (F)  “Western” and “Eastern” Bodies (small groups)

Writing Assignment #2: “Are Bodies “Maps”?”

Reading for the next three weeks: Teresa’s The Interior Castle

Reading for next week (Wed): A. Weber, “The Interior Castle and the
           Rhetoric of Obfuscation”**

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Weeks VI-VIII. The Interior Castle: A Distant but Familiar Case

Feb 28  Locating Teresa: Discussion of the IC Introduction
Mar 2   Discussion of “The Rhetoric of Obfuscation”
Mar 4   Reading Day

Discovery Assignment #5: Prepare a biographical timeline (temporal map)
           for Teresa, marking both her spiritual development and literary
           production based on Kavanaugh’s “Introduction” to IC.
Mar 6-10  Discussion of Teresa’s "Dwelling Places"

Mar 14-18  Finish Interior Castle; Reorientation to the course

Writing Assignment #3: "Mapping Teresa"

Reading for Weeks IX-XI (after break): R. Gonen, Contested Holiness

For Apr 14: B. Long, TBA*

SPRING BREAK

Weeks IX-XI.  Jerusalem: A Familiar but Distant Case

Apr 3-5  Golen, Chapters 1-3 [See study guide on the Blackboard]

Apr 7  Reading Day (No class)

Apr 10-14  Golen, Chapters 4-5 [See discussion guide on the Blackboard]

Apr 17-21  Golen, Chapters 6-7 [See discussion guide on the Blackboard]

Writing assignment #4: "Jerusalem as Place and Idea"

Reading for Weeks XII-XIV: Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks

TBA*

Weeks XII-XIV.  Black Elk: A Misunderstood and Contested Case