



REL 200 SCRIPTURES

Syracuse University Fall 2025

Time: 3:30-4:50 on Mondays and Wednesdays

Place: Life Sciences 100

Instructor: [Jim Watts](#), PhD (he, his, him)

Course Description: Many religious communities claim particular books as sacred texts or scriptures (though many do not). This course compares some famous scriptures, including from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions. We will read their contents

and compare how religious communities use scriptures in rituals and personal devotions. This course therefore covers some of the literary contents and forms of scriptures, and also their cultural performances and social impacts. We will discuss questions such as: What are scriptures? What kinds of subjects do they address? What functions do they serve? How do communities ritualize scriptures? Why are there disagreements over translating scriptures? Can oral traditions be scriptures? How does singing change scriptures? How did printing change scriptures? How do movies change scriptures? How have digital texts changed scriptures?

Audience: Students interested in religious scriptures or religion generally as well as majors and minors in Religion, Jewish Studies, History, and Literature.

Prerequisites/Co-requisites: None.

Course Objectives: The goals of this course are to have students

1. gain sufficient familiarity with a variety of scriptural literature to be able to compare how they deliver their messages
2. be able to recognize the effects of using scriptures' material forms and of expressing them in various performance media (chants, songs, recitations, art, film)
3. become adept at analyzing the cultural impact of scriptures within and beyond religious traditions

Course Requirements: The course consists of class discussions (attendance is **required**), student study and research, and, most of all, readings. This course is a **reading** course, and students' completion of all reading assignments is essential for their success. Assignments, discussions, lectures and tests all presuppose that students have read carefully and on schedule the assigned readings.

No Required Textbooks: All **required readings** are available through the Blackboard System or online by links imbedded in the syllabus.

Evaluations of students' work:

- 15% **daily** reading responses to answer two questions: **What 3 important/interesting things did I learn from reading this? What questions am I left with?** Reading responses must be submitted through Blackboard **by 1 pm** on the day the readings are due.
- 25% each: Three (3) **in-class tests**, each consisting of multiple-choice or short-answer questions and an essay, on September 29, November 3, and December 13.
- 10% attendance and participation.