

## Printable View of: Syllabus

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#### Syllabus: HIST 304 History of [Sacred](#) Places

##### Instructor

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This is an online course taught through eCampus. While most of our communication will take [place](#) through eCampus (not MIX), I encourage you to contact me directly if you would like to meet personally to discuss issues related to the course. It is always best to contact me through the eCampus course format. Use [jsuper@wvu.edu](mailto:jsuper@wvu.edu) if the course email should fail (it never has). The following syllabus is lengthy and detailed. Take the time to read and reread it carefully, and you will have a good understanding of the content of the course, and my expectations for your participation.

##### Course Description

Welcome to the “History of [Sacred](#) Places.” This course provides an introduction to the study of [sacred](#) places. If you think of the course as one type of comparative history—one that emphasizes the intermingling of the spiritual and the material—you will have a better understanding of our approach. This is not a course in spirituality or religion, although these are key elements of the course, and those of you embarked on your own spiritual journey should find it particularly useful. Instead, it is an attempt to understand the way in which the [sacred](#) has expressed itself in places, and the way in which these places grow, change, and influence life around them.

[Sacred](#) places have something special, difficult to define but palpable and powerful. Special caves and mountains, ziggurats and pyramids, basilicas and mosques, tombs and birthplaces, and scores of other types of land forms and structures have achieved recognition as [sacred](#) places.

Their special character derives from a cosmic dimension, a connection to a religious or spiritual belief system that gives them the power to transcend ordinary life. They are grounded in time and [space](#), but they become timeless as they survive profound cultural, political, and technological change. They are a part of this world, but also a connector to another world, a bridge that connects the secular and [profane](#) with the [holy](#) and [sacred](#).

To help us understand these places, our course has four main components:

First, it discusses some of the methodological, theoretical, and theological problems faced when trying to understand [sacred](#) places. This provides an essential framework for analyzing and discussing the [sacred](#), religion, and history.

Second, it describes and analyzes the religion, history, and politics of specific [sacred](#) places from regions around the world. This by necessity is very selective, but as a result of our survey you will have a firmer grasp of the meaning of the [sacred](#), and a comparative understanding of the historical development of the [sacred](#) in many geographic regions.

Third, the course gives you the opportunity to develop your research and writing skills (and

more detailed knowledge of one specific [sacred place](#)).

Fourth, it gives you the chance to become an applied humanist/social scientist by taking the principles you have learned in class and using them to explain what makes a particular [place sacred](#).

The **Glossary** provides a list of many of the places mentioned in the course, and a very brief summary of the main concepts used in trying to describe the places.

The **Bibliography** contains complete citations for all of the required readings, and lists many additional works helpful for understanding [sacred](#) places.

## **Learning Outcomes**

### **Expected Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the above, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the concepts, theories, and terms required to understand the [sacred](#).
2. Identify and describe specific sites, their significance, and how they changed through time.
3. Analyze comparative approaches to the past, and the principles involved in making comparisons.
4. Demonstrate in writing your skills of organization, analysis, and criticism.

### **One final point**

This course allows you to explore ideas, problems, and issues that many of you probably have not previously thought about. My hope is that you grow intellectually in your understanding of [sacred](#) places, and that you grow personally. In other words, this course can provide another path for you to develop your potential as a human being. I have always believed that this should be a goal of a liberal arts curriculum, and at times it is necessary to state it explicitly.

A helpful technique is for you to keep a journal or notebook of your personal reactions to the course material. What make sense to you and what does not? How can it enrich your life? How can the experiences of other cultures and traditions help you to understand you own? On a practical level, the journal can be a good tool for you to use in participating in discussions, and in writing the papers. Don't worry. I will not look at your journal unless you ask me to do so.

Have fun with it!

### **Requirements and Expectations**

1. Success in the course comes foremost from reading and rereading the material presented in each unit. The units narrate and analyze the principal issues and problems associated with the topic. They constitute the basic text for the course.
2. Several units have required readings outside of the narrative contained in the online format. All of these readings are available on electronic reserve through the West Virginia University Library. Assigned readings are not distributed evenly across each unit, so expect to work harder for some units than for others. All readings should be completed by the time of discussions.

3. Every unit will have a threaded discussion, and every student is expected to contribute to every discussion. Bringing questions, comments, and examples drawn from your own experiences will be essential to the discussions. Much of the learning in the course takes [place](#) through the discussions. In effect, we all become teachers as we grow in understanding and sharing our understanding of the material.
4. Each student will write a research paper on a [sacred place](#). The [place](#) may be one discussed in class, but this is not necessary. The paper must approach the site from the perspective of religion, history, and/or politics.
5. All of the above can be done from the comfort of your own home. The application of what you have learned requires you to visit one [sacred place](#). The final requirement for you is to select a [sacred place](#) ([church](#), [mosque](#), [temple](#), pagoda, mountain, forest, stream, cave, etc.) and analyze it, asking what makes it [sacred](#). This requires you to use the principles discussed in the course to understand how and why a [place](#) is [sacred](#). Think of this as an applied interpretive paper, where you apply what you have learned to interpret a site which has meaning to you or someone that you know.

### Grading

Assessment	Points	%
Quizzes	225	45
Research paper	100	20
Applied interpretive paper	75	15
Discussion	100	20

### Quizzes

**225 points, or 45%** of the grade

Every unit will have a 15 question quiz. The quiz requires that you know the answer, and be able to spell correctly the answer. Don't worry, I do make allowances here. I review each quiz, and since at times there are different ways of spellings names and terms, I give you the benefit of the doubt.

Quizzes will be open from 12:01am-11:59pm, and you have 1 (one) hour to complete the quiz after you have opened it. Check the syllabus for the dates of the quizzes.

**Important**, there are no make-ups on quizzes because of the technical difficulties that we might encounter. If you have an absolute emergency contact me through the course email and we can discuss it.

### Research Paper

**100 points, or 20%** of the grade

The paper can concentrate on one of the [sacred](#) places mentioned in class, or on some other [sacred place](#).

Documentation for the paper can rely on [UNESCO World Heritage](http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31). (<http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31>) This takes you right to the list of 700++ sites which could be very helpful for your research. A critical evaluation of the UNESCO documentation can form the bulk of the paper if you so

choose.

All descriptions and arguments in the paper should be carefully documented, and refer to your sources. All papers have to include a bibliography with complete citations of the sources that you have used.

In evaluating the paper, I am particularly interested in organization, clarity, and careful and balanced use of evidence.

I will give you a detailed discussion of my expectations by the fourth unit of class. By that time, you should have a good idea of a topic for your research paper.

For length, think in terms of 7 double-spaced, typewritten pages (no more than 2,000 words).

The expectation is that this paper will be critical and analytical with careful attention to all sides of the questions that you are considering.

I have found that the best way to send the paper is through the course email by cutting and pasting, not by attachment. At times the attachments have been lost so I prefer the cut and paste method.

### **Applied Interpretive Paper**

**75points**, or **15%** of the grade

The **applied interpretive paper** should take the principles of the class and apply them to one specific site that you have visited. The paper does not require the customary scholarly apparatus (footnotes, bibliography). Think of it as an interpretative essay grounded in the examples and concepts discussed in class.

The paper should be a little shorter than the research paper, about 5 pages in length, or 1500 words.

Send the interpretative paper the same way that you send the research paper.

### **Discussion**

**100 points**, or **20%** of the grade

Discussion is important, and as you see, is heavily weighted in the final tally of grades. Our only chance to exchange ideas is through discussion, and it is my expectation that you contribute to every discussion. In effect, with your questions, observations, and comments you will be helping to teach the course. Since this is a web course, discussion takes on added importance, allowing you to participate as if it were a more traditional course.

To emphasize the importance of discussions, you should understand that it will be very difficult to earn an A in the course if you miss more than 3 discussions; if you miss more than 6 discussions it will be very difficult to earn a B in the course, etc.

**Please have your discussion posted by 9:00 pm the evening before the day of the quiz for that unit.**

In other words, if the quiz is on a Friday, have your post in by 9:00 pm Thursday. It does not help the other students in the class if you make brilliant observations on a unit weeks after we have already discussed it. In other words, there are no make-ups on discussions.

**To receive full credit** for the discussion, you have to refer to the readings for that discussion.

Use examples from the readings;

Comment on how helpful (or not so helpful) the readings are;

Agree or disagree with their arguments.

In evaluating the discussions, I pay particular attention to how you use the materials from the units. Bring in your own experiences and ideas, and how you frame your arguments.

## Images

Most of the units have images that illustrate the major points/places mentioned in the unit. For several of these images, I will provide an extended discussion that should prove helpful to understand the [sacred](#). My expectation is that you will go beyond these examples and analyze other images as you continue to study what makes a [place sacred](#).

## Acknowledgements

The Center for Extended Learning provided support to prepare materials for the course, and the staff of the Instructional Technology Resource Center (WVU) did the hands on work necessary to make it an eCampus course.

For content and images I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Donald Fidler, Steve McCluskey, William Trumbull, Clive Ruggles, and the many images used from Wikipedia. I also want to acknowledge that some of the text and ideas for the course come from

Super and Turley, *Religion in World History*.  
*The Persistence of Imperial Communion* (2005).

Other works, as you will see, whose concepts and ideas appear throughout the course are:

Mircea Eliade, *The [Sacred](#) and the [Profane](#)*.  
*The Nature of Religion* (1961), and Rudolph Otto,  
*The Idea of the [Holy](#)* (1917).

Two especially useful books that convey the meaning and complexity of [sacred](#) places are:

Edwin Bernbaum, *[Sacred](#) Mountains of the World* (1998), and  
Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the [Sacred](#)* (2001).

The WEB sources mentioned in the bibliography have also been very useful.

## Schedule

List of Topics Covered, with Readings

This is a survey of [sacred](#) sites, highly selective according to my own research interests, but also broadly representative of what is there. For most of the places we take four approaches:

1. Briefly describe its characteristics;
2. Give some indication of the theological underpinnings of the site;
3. Comment on the historical significance;
4. Refer to political issues and problems associated with the site.

Unit	Title	Topics	Readings
1	<b>An Introduction to <u>Sacred</u> Places</b>	Defining <u>Sacred</u> and <u>Holy</u> Mysterium Tremendum <u>Axis Mundi</u> and <u>Imago Mundi</u> Expressions of the <u>Sacred</u> How the <u>Sacred</u> Manifests Itself Significance of the <u>Sacred</u> <u>Sacred</u> Time and <u>Sacred</u> Place	John Super and Briane Turley, " <u>Sacred</u> Places" Joel P. Brereton, " <u>Sacred</u> Space," 526-535
<i>Quiz 1 Wednesday, May 19</i>			
2	<b><u>Sacred</u> Landscapes</b>	Inner Sacredness How the Landscape becomes <u>Sacred</u> Historical Processes Mountains Why the Importance of Mountains Some Examples of <u>Sacred</u> Mountains Artistic Renderings	
<i>Quiz 2 Friday, May 21</i>			
3	<b>The Constructed <u>Sacred</u></b>	Early Art and Religion Types of Religious Buildings The <u>Sacred</u> in Western Thinking By Way of Review: 10 Points that help to define the <u>Sacred</u>	Catesby Leigh, "What the Structure Says" Fustel de Coulanges, " <u>Sacred</u> Fire"
<i>Quiz 3 Tuesday, May 25</i>			
4	<b>The Primal <u>Sacred</u></b>	Stonehenge Celtic <u>Sacred</u> Places Rapa Nui and <u>Moai</u> Dreamtime and Uluru Psychological Explanations	
<i>Quiz 4 Thursday, May 27</i>			
5	<b>Native American Expressions of the <u>Sacred</u></b>	Principles of the <u>Sacred</u> Guadalupe Mountain and the Mescalero Apache Shiprock and Chaco Canyon Dwellings and Totems	Philip P. Arnold, " <u>Sacred</u> Landscapes of New York State and the Problem of Religion in America," 167 186

		Problems of Preservation	
<b>Quiz 5 Tuesday, June 1</b>			
<b>6</b>	<b>Classic Sites of the Ancient World</b>	<a href="#">Paleolithic</a> to <a href="#">Neolithic</a> Egyptian Pyramids Mesopotamia Ziggurats Greek Oracles and Games Ancient Americas Andes and Mesoamerica Mound Cultures	
<b>Quiz 6 Thursday, June 3</b>			
<p><i>Units 7 and 8 are the longest in the class, and will require more time than the other units. Since they come at the middle of the term, think of them as a substitute for a midterm exam.</i></p>			
<b>7</b>	<b>Jerusalem and the <a href="#">Holy Land</a></b>	Geography and History Jerusalem and the <a href="#">Temple</a> Rachel's Tomb Survey of Christian Sites <a href="#">Church</a> of the Nativity and <a href="#">Holy</a> Sepulchre Noble <a href="#">Sanctuary</a> and Dome of the Rock	Silvio Ferrari, "The Religious Significance of Jerusalem in the Middle East Peace Process," 223 234 Bernard Wasserstein, "The Heavenly City," 1 13 Bernard Wasserstein, "Old City, New City," 45 81 Bernard Wasserstein, "The Earthly City," 345 359
	<b>Jerusalem and the Politics of the <a href="#">Sacred</a></b>	<a href="#">Crusades</a> and Consequences Recent Politics Administrative and Legal Issues Unresolved Questions	
<b>Quiz 7 Monday, June 7</b>			
<b>8</b>	<b>Early Christian Sites</b>	Theological Perspectives Rome and St. Catherine's Santiago and Glastonbury Gothic Cathedrals Marian <a href="#">Sacred</a> Places Explanations and Controversies of the "Earth Mother" in History Artistic Representations Early Sites in America and Europe Modern <a href="#">Apparitions</a>	Lisa M. Bitel, "The Sacral Landscape," 42-74
<b>Quiz 8 Wednesday, June 9</b>			

9	<b>Islam and <a href="#">Sacred Places</a></b>	Rise of Islam Mosques Mecca, Djenné, Hassan II, Taj Mahal Wali and <a href="#">Marabout</a> <a href="#">Sacred</a> Transformation Córdoba and Constantinople/Istanbul	
<i><b>Quiz 9 Friday, June 11</b></i>			
10	<b>Hindu <a href="#">Sacred Sites</a></b>	Theology and History Benares and other Indian Places Sri Venkateswara <a href="#">Temple</a> (Pittsburgh) Jainism and Mt. Parsvenatha Devi and Home Altars	
<i><b>Quiz 10 Monday, June 14</b></i>			
11	<b>Buddhism and the <a href="#">Sacred</a></b>	Theology and History Stupas Angkor Thom Bamiyan Potola Ryoanji	
<i><b>Quiz 11 Wednesday, June 16</b></i>			
12	<b>Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism</b>	Confucian Temples Qufu and Beijing <a href="#">Temple</a> Home Altars Taoism and <a href="#">Sacred</a> Sites Shinto and Sikh <a href="#">Sacred</a> Places Shinto Beliefs Shinto Shrines Ise and Fuji Sikhs and the Golden <a href="#">Temple</a>	
<i><b>Quiz 12 Friday, June 18</b></i>			
13	<b>Syncretic Sites</b>	Historical and Cultural Problems Havana and Santeria Popular <a href="#">Orishas</a> Cuzco Christianity Celtic Christianity Chimayó	Lisa M. Bitel, "Isle of the Saints," 1-13, 42- 74

<i>Quiz 13 Monday, June 21</i>			
<b>14</b>	<b>The Civic and the <a href="#">Sacred</a></b>	Memory, Culture, and the <a href="#">Sacred</a> National Monuments Mother's Day <a href="#">Shrine</a> (West Virginia) Tupelo and Elvis Missions Examples from Hungary	Thomas A. Desjardins, "American Valhala," from <i>These Honored Dead</i>
<i>Quiz 14 Wednesday, June 23</i>			
<b>15</b>	<b>Why Go?</b>	Definitions of <a href="#">Pilgrim</a> Reasons and Explanations <a href="#">Pilgrimage</a> Commonalities Some Examples Deeper Meanings	
<i>Quiz 15 Friday, June 25</i>			
Paper Deadlines  <b>Both papers are due by midnight, Friday, June 25. No late papers will be accepted.</b>			