

## **Yoga: From Vedic Origins to Western Transplantation.**

Edwin Bryant

16:840:521:01 (Cross-listed with 01:840:321:01)

Tuesday/Thursday 3:20 p.m. – 4:40 p.m. (5th period)

Beck Hall Building, Room 251, Livingston Campus.

Office hours Tuesday 1.45 – 2.45 PM

(and by appointment before or after class).

### **Course Description.**

This course will undertake a close reading of Yoga as presented in the traditional Hindu sourcebook on the subject, the 3rd century Yoga Sutras, where it is defined as the stilling of all states of mind (meditative practices). The Yoga Sutras is the classical text on meditative practice accepted as authoritative by all the orthodox Hindu schools, and our reading of it will be informed by the primary commentaries that have elaborated on the source text over the centuries prior to the colonial period. The course will additionally trace the development of representations of Yoga from these pre-modern expressions, through its appropriation and reconfiguring by Hindu nationalists, and into its modern Western transplanted form as primarily postural exercise.

Students will read a section of the primary source text the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali for the first month with a view to obtaining a grounding in the pre-modern metaphysics and practice of Yoga. The remaining two months of the course will chart the development of notions associated with Yoga culminating in some of its present western transplanted forms.

### **Course objectives.**

The course has two main objectives. The first is to expose students to the classical Hindu source on contemplative practices (and thus contribute will be a foundational course for one of the academic tracks of the MA program, namely, Contemplative Studies). The second is intended to equip students with an exposure to how religious phenomenon are adapted and transformed by social, cultural and political circumstances, sometimes enormously.

### **Course Requirements.**

Students will be required to make weekly presentations on the subject matter, thus preparing them for participation at future conferences and panels. They will be expected to submit 10 page paper, which will afford them an opportunity to undertake a focused written research project. Additionally, the students will be assessed by class participation and three quizzes. Students will be assessed and graded as follows: class participation and chapter presentations (10%); mid-term exam (20%); two quizzes, 15 points each (30%); research paper (40%). A 7 page paper writing guide is provided all students containing comprehensive instructions on research paper writing.

## Required Reading

1) *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali with Insights from the Traditional Commentators*. By Edwin Bryant Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2010.

This book exposes the student to classical Hindu Yoga, the goal of which is an experience of content-less consciousness, along with its accompanying practices and presuppositions, as transmitted over a period of 1500 years prior to the pre-colonial period, drawing on the main pre-modern commentaries over this period. We will spend 5 weeks on this book.

2) *A History of Modern Yoga* by De Michelis, Continuum, 2004.

This book traces some of the earliest formative influences feeding into the transformation of Yoga from its traditional origins into its modern commodified forms. Some of the occult practices of late 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe that were formative in this process, and the main Hindu apologists and nationalists instrumental in the creating of modern notions of Yoga are examined. We will spend 2 weeks on this book

3) *Yoga Body: The History of Modern Posture Practice* by Mark Singleton, Oxford, 2010.

This book highlights the lack of any evidence in traditional Indian sources for the health and fitness orientated practices that are associated with Yoga today. The book argues that the popular modern yoga has more to do with British gymnastics and body-building than any ancient Indian yoga tradition, and examines how yoga became the hugely popular phenomenon it is today. We will spend 2 weeks on this book

4) *Gurus in America* edited by Forstheofel, Thomas, & Humes, Cynthia Ann. SUNY, 2005.

This edited volume examines the history, characteristics, and constructions of Hinduism presented to the West by nine prominent guru figures, who travelled to the West with a view to transplanting Hindu teachings and culture from the 60's to the present. We will spend 2 weeks on this book

## Recommended Reading.

Alter, Joseph S *Yoga in Modern India* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004

Strauss, Sarah *Positioning Yoga* Oxford: Berg, 2005

Syman, Stephanie *The Story of Yoga in America* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010

Singleton, Mark and Byren, Jean, eds *Yoga in the Modern World* London; Routledge, 2008

Sjoman, N.E. *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1996.

**Week I.**

**Tue/Thur Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup>**

Introduction to the course. Discussion in class examining the earliest pre-Patanjalian expressions on Yoga prior to the common era. The metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and soteriological backdrop of Yoga. Patanjali Chapter I.1-4: the definition and goal of classical Yoga

**Week II.**

**Tue/Thur Sept 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>**

Patanjali chapter 1. The conventional states of mind; samadhi: The six progressive stages of the stilled mind; the seventh Samadhi state beyond mind. Isvara: the theistic element in the Sutras.

**Week III.**

**Tue/Thur Sept 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>**

Patanjali Chapter I continued. Chapter 2. The klesas: suffering, karma and reincarnation

**Week IV.**

**Tue/Thur Sept 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>**

Patanjali Chapter II continued. The eight limbs of Yoga

**Week V.**

**Tue/Thur Oct 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>**

Patanjali Chapter III. The mystic powers

**Week VI.**

**Tue/Thur Oct 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>**

Patanjali Chapter IV. Yoga's response to the Buddhist challenge **Mid-term exam**

**Week VII.**

**Tue/Thur Oct 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>**

De Michelis: part I, chapters 1-4. Indian exposures to Western esotericisms and mysticisms; Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahma Samaj, Vivekananda and neo-Vedanta.

**Week VIII.**

**Tue/Thur Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>**

De Michelis part II. chapters 5-8. Vivekananda's Raja Yoga, alternative medicine, the Iyengar School of Yoga.

**Week IX.**

**Tue/Thur Oct 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>**

Singleton: Chapters 1-4. Colonials, 'jogis,' fakirs, and the social marginalization of the yogi; the International Physical Culture Movement.

**Week X.**

**Tue/Thur Nov 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>**

Singleton: Chapter 5-9. Countering colonial stereotypes, degeneracy, physical health and Hindu nationalism. Harmonial gymnastics and 19<sup>th</sup> century esoteric dance. The asana 'revival.' **QUIZ I**

**Week XI.**

**Tue/Thur Nov 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>**

Forstheofel, & Hume. Chapters 1-4. Anand Ashrama, Ramana Maharshi, TM, Krishna Consciousness.

**Week XII.**

**Tue/Thur Nov 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>**

Forstheofel, & Hume, Chapter 5-9. Sai Baba, Ammachi, Siddha Yoga, Osho Rajneesh, Adi Da.

**Week XIII**

**Tue/Thur Nov 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>**

**There is no class on Thursday due to Thanksgiving.**

**Week XIV**

**Tue/Thur Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>**

Tue, **QUIZ II**

Thursday, Concluding Discussions.

**Week XIV**

Tue Dec 10<sup>th</sup> Student presentation of their papers.

**ALL FINAL PAPERS DUE THE LAST DAY OF READING PERIOD, Dec 13<sup>th</sup> 5.00 PM. Loree 108, Douglass Campus. Hard copies must be delivered, no electronic copies.**