

The Sikhs (Religion 3150)

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The Sikhs is an upper-level Religion class, and has been offered five times at Carthage College since Fall 2006. The course is a broad survey of Sikh religion, history, and culture from the time of Guru Nanak to the present. The first part of the class is primarily historical, and traces the development of the community and its religious ideas from Guru Nanak through the late 19th century. The focus then shifts to lived religious life, from worship to life-cycle rituals to the Rahit to popular practices. The final part resumes the historical focus by looking at the twentieth century history, particularly the troubles in 1947 and 1984, and then examines varying sociological topics, such as gender, caste, contemporary politics, and the community's efforts to define itself in a world religious community.

Since the College is 28 miles from the Oak Creek Gurudwara, the class opens by discussing the events of Aug. 2009. This highlights the Sikhs as a local religious community--of whom most of the students are unaware--and the reality of hate crimes. From an instructional perspective I wanted to discuss this early in the class, rather than building up to it all semester as we work toward contemporary times.

My initial drive to develop the course came from multiple visits to Amritsar, where I was struck by the aesthetic beauty of the Darbar Sahib, and filled with admiration for the piety, generosity, and sincerity of the Sikhs there (and in other places). The course has been well-received, and I am delighted to introduce my students to this relatively small but highly vibrant community.

