

REL 2300 INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS FALL 2013

INSTRUCTORS

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Office hours:

Online Chat hours *Fridays 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. EST* or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

In this course we will be exploring only a few of the religions of the world focusing primarily on seven (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) that have been determined "World Religions." We will approach these religions from a scholarly perspective checking our subjective value opinions as much as is humanly possible. We will attempt to gain a fuller understanding of the socio-cultural context of each tradition and examine how that tradition aids its adherents in negotiating the world around them. We will not simply look at religious philosophy or "what people believe," but we will also examine "how people act" and how their tradition influences their actions. In addition to these specifically religious studies goals, we will aim to hone our critical academic skills through examinations and engaging discussions.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Know the history, underlying theory and methodologies used within the academic study of religion.
- Identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the academic study of religion.
- Approach issues and problems within the academic study of religion from multiple perspectives.
- Communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively in forms appropriate to the academic study of religion, individually and/or in groups.
- Know the values, attitudes and norms that shape the cultural differences of peoples who live in countries other than the United States.
- Understand the effects of geographic location and socioeconomic factors on the lives of citizens in other countries.
- Analyze and evaluate your cultural norms and values in relation to those held by citizens in other countries.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Oxtoby and Segal: *Concise Introduction to World Religions (CWR)*, Oxford University Press (ISBN 978-0-19-542207-8). You **must** read this textbook. The material for your module quizzes will be from this text.

Additional readings will be placed on the course **E-learning site** <https://lss.at.ufl.edu>.

GRADING

Exams: 40% (2 x 20%)

You will have two non-cumulative exams each worth 20% of your overall grade in the course. These will consist of term definitions, map and slide identification, and essays.

Reading Quizzes: 20% (10x 2%)

Every week you will have an online open-book open-note quiz that covers the readings for that week. The questions will be multiple choice, true or false, and/or matching. These quizzes are intended to ensure that you are keeping up with the material in the course, and will be available only until noon of their due dates. More details will be available in the quiz link on e-learning.

Discussion Board/Participation: 20%

We believe that you as the student will learn a great deal in this course if you take an active role in it. In order to get the most out of your learning experience, you need to go beyond passive regurgitation of material. You will be expected to digest the material from the lectures and the readings. In order for us to monitor this, you will be expected to post your reflections on the content for each week. To do this, please answer the questions provided in the discussion forums or respond to the selected primary source readings (these primary sources are selections from the sacred text). To respond to the selected readings please reflect upon what you found most interesting in these texts and how it may or may not relate to the lectures and other readings. Each of your initial posts should be 250-500 words. They should be respectful, well written, and carefully edited and should exhibit your analytical thinking. In addition to your own entries you must read and reply to at least 2 posts from other students (100-200 words). These will be graded pass/fail. The initial post are due on Wednesdays by 12:00 p.m. EST and then your responses are due two days later, on Fridays, by 12:00 p.m. EST. These due dates, and any deviation from them, are noted in the course schedule below as well as in the due dates PDF.

Presentation and Peer-Review Project – 20%

At the end of the course, you will be required to construct your own presentation through sliderocket.com. You will select a topic from a suggestion list that will be provided later in the semester. You will be responsible for creating a slideshow with a minimum of ten slides. A presentation rubric will be provided later in the semester to guide your creation of the presentation. In addition, each student will be required to review one presentation from another student from within your discussion group. The student will be responsible for filling out the grading rubric appropriately, and creating a complete peer-review of the presentation of another student. You will be evaluated on the strength (both informative and design) of your presentation, as well as the effort and constructive critique given in your peer-review. More information will be given about this assignment in the Announcements section later in the semester.

You will be expected to complete all assignments on time. If you are going to be unavailable during the scheduled assignment, you must make arrangements prior to the due date. In case of emergencies, accompanied by written documentation, a make-up assignment will be given.

Grade Proportion	Grade Scale	Grade Value
Online Quizzes 20%	100-93=A	A=4.0
Exam #1 (Judaism, Hinduism, Indigenous and Chinese religions) 20%	92.9-90=A-	A-=3.67
Exam # 2 (Islam, Atheism, Christianity and Buddhism) 20%	89.9-87=B+	B+=3.33
Discussion Board/Participation 20%	86.9-83=B	B=3.00

Presentation/Peer Review 20%	82.9-80=B-	B-=2.67
	79.5-77=C+	C+=2.33
	76.9-73=C	C=2.00
	72.9-70=C-	C-=1.67
	69.9-67=D+	D+=1.33
	66.9-63=D	D=1.00
	62.9-60=D-	D-=0.67
	59.9-0=E	E=0.00

Course Schedule

Introduction

Readings: Course Handbook and Tutorials

Activities:

Complete “Start Here: Introduction” material

Video – Welcome Lecture with Susan Shaffer and Jaya Reddy

Video – Course Tutorials

Assignments

PREQUIZ: Contract Quiz: **Due August 26**

Module One: The Study of Religion

Part I: What is Religion?

Readings: John Esposito, et al. *World Religions Today*, “Chapter 1: Introduction” Pages: 3-14

David Hackett, “Is Gator Football Religion?” [e]

At a Glance: This portion of the class will look at “religion” as a theoretical category and how it is expressed in our global setting. We will also be introduced to categories of religious expression.

Objectives:

- The student will begin to identify a working definition of religion.
- Students will be able to identify and define myth and religious language (ultimate reality, sympathetic imagination, transcendence).
- The student will be able to see connections between myth and ritual.
- The student will be able to identify and define orthopraxy and orthodoxy.

- The student will be able to discuss the role of morality in religious traditions.

Activities:

Video Lecture - by Manuel Vasquez

Video: Clark Griswald's Prayer "I'm doing the best I can!"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02v0301n0aU>

Video TEDx Talk – Lesley Hazleton "On Reading the Quran"

http://www.ted.com/talks/lesley_hazleton_on_reading_the_koran.html

Assignments:

QUIZ 1: What is religion? **Due August 28**

Discussion Post: "Discuss the differences between definitions of religion found the lecture and the two readings. Which do you find the most compelling and why?" **Due August 28**

Discussion Responses: Due August 30

Part II– What are World Religions?

Readings: Concise Introduction to World Religions (CWR) pp. 3-26

John Esposito, et al. *World Religions Today* (pp. 13-35) [e]

At a Glance: In this section of the course, we will look at the concept of "world religions." We will be briefly introduced to religious expression throughout the world. And we will discuss the concept of religions of the world from a global perspective.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify broad trends in religious history.
- Students will be able to identify the significance of:
 - o Harmony
 - o Nature
 - o Liberation
 - o History
- Be able to discuss the difference between premodern, modern, and postmodern.
- Be able to discuss the postcolonial world and its relationship with colonialism.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Manuel Vasquez

Video: "Religious Defamation" <http://video.pbs.org/video/1573102450/>

Assignments:

QUIZ 2: What is 'World Religions?' **Due September 4**

Discussion Post: "How is our understanding of world religions a result of colonialism?" **Due September 4**

Discussion Responses: Due September 6

Module Two – Scripture

Part I – Judaism (Please Note: This part spans two weeks)

At-a Glance: In this module, we will be tracing the Jewish tradition from its Biblical roots through the Rabbinic development and into contemporary belief and practice. We will discuss the importance of the covenant between the patriarch Abraham and El Shaddai and how this notion has been a driving force through each period. We will also discuss the major divisions within Judaism and distinct beliefs and practices.

Readings: CWR pages 81-139 (Prepare for Quiz on September 12)

Selections from the Hebrew Bible [e] (Prepare for Discussion Post on September 12)

Michael Coogan *Enuma Elish* and *Genesis 36-37* [e] (Prepare for Discussion Post on September 14)

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Identify the historical periods of the Jewish tradition.
- Discuss the importance of the covenant in Jewish scripture.
- Identify the major divisions of contemporary Judaism.
- Recognize the teaching of influential modern Jews.
- Discuss “scripture” as it pertains to the Jewish Tradition.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Robert Kawashima

Video: Restoring the Torah http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/places/culture-places/work/honduras_hondurastorah.html

Video: Esther Midrashim? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgJInVvJSZg>

Assignments:

QUIZ 3: Judaism Due September 11

Discussion Post 1: What role does “scripture” play in Judaism? **Due September 11**

Discussion Responses 1: Due September 13

Discussion Post 2: Recognizing that religions do not develop in a vacuum, reflect on the similarities and differences between the materials from the Babylonian myths and Jewish scripture. Within your groups discuss positive and negative effects this can have on religious dialogue today. **Due September 18**

Discussion Responses 2: Due September 20

Part II – Hinduism (Please Note: This part spans two weeks)

At a Glance: In this module, you will be introduced to the historical setting from which all traditions originating in South Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc) derive. We begin in the pre-historic period in the northwest portion of the subcontinent with the Indus Valley Civilization and the Harappan Culture. Then we will discuss the culture of the Vedic Period starting around 1500 BCE. After understanding how this period shifted life and thought in the region, we will discuss the Hindu traditions and their various practices and belief structures.

Readings: CWR pages 273-335

Selections from the Vedas and Upanishads [e]

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Identify major deities in devotional Hinduism
- Discuss the “scripture” as it is viewed in the Hindu Tradition.
- Identify the sacred texts of the early Hindu traditions
- Discuss sacred texts and performance as viewed in the Hindu tradition
- Identify the different categories of early Hindu texts

- Compare the scripture of the Hindu traditions to Judaism

Activities:

Video Lecture - Vasudha Narayanan

Video: Sagar *Ramayana* "Rama's Coronation" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMINF5u9HU0>

Video (Week 2): *Sita Sings the Blues* <http://sitasingingtheblues.com/watch.html>

Assignments:

QUIZ 4: Hinduism Due September 25

Discussion Post 1: "Compare the role of scripture in the Hindu and Jewish traditions in ritual and daily life"- **Due September 25**

Discussion Responses 1: Due September 27

Discussion Post 2: *Sita Sings the Blues* (<http://sitasingingtheblues.com/watch.html>) From this perspective of the *Ramayana* do agree with the standard view mentioned in our reading (CWR 271-2) that Rama is the ideal son and husband? Why or why not? In your opinion does *Sita Sings the Blues* reverse standard gender roles? Why or why not? **Due October 2**

Discussion Response 2: Due October 4

Module Three- Cosmology

Part I – Indigenous Religions

At a Glance: In this section of the course, we will be exploring the concept of indigenous religions in three geographical locations. We will also be looking at the importance of creation myths and rituals in the understanding of place and the creation and maintenance of sacred space.

Reading: CWR Pages: 29-79

[Sam Gill "The Place to Begin" from Native American Religions pp. 10-26 \[e\]](#)

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify and define totem, manna, and shaman.
- Identify the major indigenous religious traditions of Africa.
- Identify the major indigenous religious traditions of North and Central America.
- Identify the major indigenous religious traditions of Northeast Asia and Australia.
- Discuss the relationship between colonialism and indigenous religion regionally.
- Identify important concepts within each indigenous religion.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Robin Wright

Video: Baniwa Shamanic Revitalization <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r53to2aCOE>

Assignments:

QUIZ 5: Indigenous Religions Due October 9

Discussion Post: Discuss the challenges of a place-based tradition in a globalized world. **Due October 9**

Discussion Responses: Due October 11

Part II - Confucianism / Daoism

At a Glance: In this module, we will be discussing the indigenous religious traditions of China. We will begin by discussing Confucius and Laozi, two philosophers whose teachings changed the course of Chinese thought and religious practice. We will follow the teachings of these masters through their students and how they have been integrated into Chinese society and religious practice. We will also discuss how these two traditions (and later Buddhism), though often contradictory, work together to form the basis for Chinese philosophy.

Readings: CWR pages 473-521

Selections from the *Analects* pages 44-64 [e]

Selections from the *Zhuangzi* pages 95-104 [e]

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Know the major trends of thought in both Confucianism and Daoism.
- Distinguish between the teachings, practices, and traditions derived from each tradition.
- Identify the “religious” elements in later developments in both traditions.
- Discuss whether Confucianism and Daoism are religions or philosophies.
- Discuss the Chinese construction of cosmology.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Richard Wang

Video- Life of Zhuangzi Part 1a <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM6kdJ6xq2A>

Video- Confucius Biography Part 1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCqJjq6ff-k>

Assignments:

QUIZ 6: Chinese Religions Due October 16

Discussion Post: “Are Confucianism and Daoism religions, philosophies, or systems of ethics?”- **Due October 16**

Discussion Responses: Due October 18

Exam 1: Due October 23

Module Four- Ethics and Moral Law

Part I – Significance of Nature and Law in Religion and Ethics

At a Glance: In this section, we will explore the background and description of a naturalistic nature religion.

Also, we will explore the ways that certain atheistic perspectives and understandings operate like religions. We will be looking at the formation of communities and orthodoxy.

Readings: Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion* Chap 2; pages 13-41 [e] (Prepare for Quiz on Oct 24)

Andrew Fiala, “Militant Atheism, Pragmatism, and the God-Shaped Hole” [e] (Prepare for Quiz on Oct 24)

Activities:

Video Lecture: Sarah Werner

Video - Double Rainbow! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQSNhk5ICTI> Video
(Week 2) - Sam Harris: "Science Can Answer Moral Question" TED Talk:
http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/sam_harris_science_can_show_what_s_right.html

Assignments:

QUIZ 7: Significance of Science, Naturalism and Atheism in Religion **Due October 23**

Discussion Post 1: Can science provide a foundation for morals and ethics? **Due October 23**

Discussion Responses 1: Due October 25

Part II – Islam

At a Glance: In this module, we will discuss the historical context from which Islam arose. Then, we will discuss the life story of Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam. We will then discuss the spread of Islam during the period after Muhammad's death and the major division of the tradition after the period of the Rightly-guided Caliphs. We will discuss the major beliefs and practices of these traditions and several movements that have emerged in modern times.

Readings: CWR pages 209-271;

Selections from Quran [e]

Ron Geaves "The Western Media and Islam" pages 12-17; 22-33 [e]

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Recount the historical context from which Islam arose.
- Recount the life story of Muhammad.
- Discuss the Sunni-Shia division.
- Identify the Arabian Peninsula, Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and Baghdad geographically.
- Know the major divisions of Islam and their beliefs and practices.
- Discuss the source of ethics for Muslims.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Terje Østebø

Video- History Channel Biography of Muhammad Parts 1 and 2

Part one: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZCbToxL6Bs>

Part two: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIVixCAGcyk&feature=related>

Assignments:

QUIZ 8: Islam **Due October 30**

Discussion Post: "What are the contributions made to science, ethics, and architecture by Islam?" **Due October 30**

Discussion Responses Due November 1

Module Five- Theodicy

Part I – Christianity

At a Glance: In this module, we will be discussing the emergence of Christianity from the context of Roman rule in Palestine. We will recount the life story of Jesus, the founder of the movement that would become Christianity. We will briefly look at the early church councils and fathers and the development of early

Christianity from its Jewish roots. We will then look at two important schisms within the tradition: the Great Schism of 1054 and the Protestant Reformation. Then, we will discuss some of the beliefs and practices of several contemporary divisions of Christianity.

Readings: CWR pages 141-207
Selections from Christian New Testament [e]

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Recount the historical context from which Christianity arose.
- Recount the life story of Jesus.
- Know major theological decisions made at major church councils.
- Identify Jerusalem, Rome, Istanbul, and Alexandria geographically.
- Know the major divisions of Christianity and Christian beliefs and practices.
- Discuss how Christianity has dealt with theodicy.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Anna Peterson

Video- BBC Archive Report: "Deadly Tsunami hits Asia" by Ben Brown

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/8428581.stm

Video- Tom Honey: God and the Tsunami TED Talk:

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/tom_honey_on_god_and_the_tsunami.html

Assignments:

QUIZ 9: Christianity Due November 6

Discussion Post: Is Rev. Tom Honey's solution to theodicy satisfying; why or why not? **Due November 6**

Discussion Responses: Happy Homecoming! NO response due this week.

Part II – Buddhism

At a Glance: In this module, we will take up a philosophical movement that arose during the 6th century BCE in South Asia call the *Shramana* movement from which Jainism and Buddhism developed. After understanding this context, we will learn about Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha and founder of the Buddhist tradition, and his teachings. Then, we will learn about the major schools of Buddhism and their practices and beliefs.

Readings: CWR pages 373-435

Selections of Koans [e]

Donald Lopez, *The Bodhisattva Vow* pages 389-393 [e]

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Recognize the major rejections of the Shramana movement.
- Recount the life story of Siddhartha Gautama.
- Know the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama.
- Know the major divisions of Buddhism and their distinct practices and beliefs

- Discuss the applicability of “theodicy” and the explanation of suffering in Buddhism.

Activities:

Video Lecture - Mario Poceski

Video-Dalai Lama “Beyond Suffering” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSXm-0u9vJo>

Assignments:

QUIZ 10: Buddhism Due November 13

Discussion Post: Discuss the applicability of theodicy to Buddhism **Due November 13**

Discussion Responses: Due November 15

Presentations and Conclusion

Readings: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Josaphat Towards A World Theology” [e]

Activities:

Video- Kahn’s Tiger Story <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45hM7iAkjk8>

Assignments:

Presentation Due November 26

Exam 2 Due December 2

Peer Review Due December 4

THE FINE PRINT:

Incompletes. An Incomplete will only be given under *very* special circumstances: when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.

Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

Academic Honesty. Students and instructors are expected to comply with all aspects of the university’s students’ rights and responsibilities, which can be found on the Dean of Student’s webpage

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php#studenthonorcode>. If you feel your rights have been violated please bring it to either Susan, Jaya, or Yan immediately for resolution. If your complaint is not resolved please contact the Dean of Students office in 202 Peabody Hall or by phone at (352) 392-1261.

Sexual Harassment. UF does not tolerate sexual harassment in any form. If you feel as though you have been sexually harassed in any way please notify Susan, Jaya, or Yan immediately for resolution. If you feel uncomfortable speaking to us or your complaint is not resolved please contact the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs in 155 Tigert Hall or by phone at (352) 392-1265. To learn more about sexual harassment, how it can be avoided, and reporting harassment visit the Office of Student Affairs’ webpage <http://www.ufsa.ufl.edu/students/sh/sexualharassment.shtml>.

Conduct. You are expected to uphold the university’s conduct code at all times

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>.

Requirements. This course fulfills the requirements for the following: **Humanities (H)** — Humanities courses provide instruction in the key themes, principles and terminology of a humanities discipline. The courses focus on the history, theory and methodologies used within that discipline, enabling you to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. **International (N)** — International courses provide instruction in the values, attitudes and norms that constitute the culture of countries outside the United States. These courses lead you to understand how geographic location and socioeconomic factors affect these cultures. Through analysis and evaluation of your own cultural norms and values in relation to those held by the citizens of other countries, you will develop a cross-cultural understanding of the rest of the world.