

Course Syllabus
REL2300 - Intro to World Religions, Spring 2025
Instructors: Laura Ahrens James and Carol Rodriguez
M/W/F | Period 3 | 9:35 AM - 10:25 AM
Location: Keene-Flint Hall 013
Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description

This course provides a broad overview of world religions. First, questioning the definition of religion and the academic study thereof, students will assess the implications of religion as a subject of study and possible scholarly construct. The course material will briefly trace each individual religion from its origins, textual sources, and founder if applicable, to its historical developments, cultural landscapes, key figures, and finally to current-day practices and peoples. Each religion will be considered in its own historico-cultural context as an individual object of study without evaluation of truth claims or judgment of practices.

We will ask some of the following questions: what impact does our understanding of religion have on how we perceive what we study? What role does the study of religion play in a globalized world? Why is the study of religion important and applicable in a modern world, regardless of which major/career path each student in the class is on? It is the hope that students will leave with a more nuanced understanding of religion and of each religion, and a personalized understanding of how the topic contributes to their lives and the world at large.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will:

- Have a nuanced working definition of religion itself.
- Demonstrate a broad understanding of each religion studied.
- Be familiar with the hallmarks of each religion, including major textual sources, key figures, precepts and principles, holidays and festivals, and rites and rituals.
- Understand the historical origins of each religion, and the cultural developments thereof from inception to present day.

Required Reading

A Concise Introduction to World Religions: Fourth Edition-Edited by Roy C. Amore, Amir Hussain and Willard G. Oxtoby. Oxford University Press 2019. ISBN-13: 9780190919023
*Please do not use any other edition. The content and page numbers will be different.
You are welcome to use a physical copy or e-book.

Assignments

Academic Honesty

Student work must be original, independently and exclusively generated by the student. No plagiarism of any kind will be tolerated, either human or AI. This class relies heavily on attendance and prioritizes real learning. There will be no multiple choice quizzes or discussion posts; as such, you are expected to show up to classes consistently and on-time barring any university sanctioned absences with documentation. Electronic devices may be utilized for note taking/educational purposes pertaining to the class *only*, not for web browsing or communications. *Cell phones must be silenced and put away for the duration of the class.*

This course approaches religion from an academic perspective. As such, we are not engaging traditions theologically or personally. All observations must be of a critical nature, meaning that it deals in facts and features about a tradition rather than personal opinion. Students must be respectful of all traditions and of all their fellow students.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and is integral to your success in the course, which relies heavily on participation for the constitution of your grade. Please note that we understand that students might be introverted, learn differently, or deal with social anxiety, thus, we understand that participation may look different across a spectrum of individuals. If you cannot attend class, please provide documentation from a medical provider or the dean for extenuating circumstances. Every student is allowed 3 unexcused absences across the course of the semester; however you will not be able to make up missed 'class questions' (explained below) without the aforementioned documentation.

Weekly Readings

This course requires students to engage with weekly readings in preparation for each lecture, to be delivered by the instructors and/or guest instructors. This makes up the majority of your grade via participation and class questions. Assignments for the week are written under the topic heading on the syllabus- you will not be expected to read the entire chapter or reading assigned for each Monday. Your instructors will give you a breakdown by subheading (this will be done in person week by week, accounting for ebook and physical book page discrepancies and to accommodate the pace of the class).

Class Questions

Prior to each class, there will be a question engaging the reading/coursework on the board. Students will have the first seven minutes of each class to answer the question on a provided piece of paper, and the instructor will collect the submissions after the time has elapsed. There are no makeups or extensions for these assignments.

Pop Quizzes

Students may expect, from time to time, unannounced pop-quizzes. There will be no deduction from your grade for failing (except that your teachers will know that you did not read) and those who receive full marks will get extra credit on their final grade TBD.

Mid-Semester Reflection (2 Page)

Students will write a two-page single-spaced argumentative essay based on the course material, supported by evidence from the textbook and additional outside research. Further instruction will be provided in class. *Due 3/14 by 11:59pm*. Submit via Canvas.

End of Semester Reflection (1 Page)

Students will write a one-page single-spaced reflection to be submitted on or before the last day of class about what they have learned in the course. Including but not limited to: what you learned about approaches to studying religion or religion itself, what, if anything, from each religion was surprising or new to you (or most salient), and if/how this course helped to shift your perspective. If you are not a religion major, you might answer how you think your experience studying religion might be applicable to your future studies or life outside the course. You are welcome to answer other questions of your own design provided they are thoughtful, academically oriented, and relevant to the course. This assignment is subjective and, as such, will automatically earn each student full marks as long as time was taken for careful thought, writing, and editing prior to submission. *Due 4/22 by 11:59pm*. Submit via Canvas.

Paper Proposal

A one page proposal for the final paper (below) must be submitted by 3/30 at 11:59pm, and include a title, an abstract, and a bibliography.

Final Paper (5 Pages)

Students will write a 5 page single-spaced final paper about a topic of their choice pertinent to the course material. Students are welcome to expand on a subtopic of their interest from the coursework. The paper will be argumentative in nature, and students will generate a comprehensive essay complete with a thesis statement supported by evidence and well-crafted writing. Students may consult Graff and Gerald's *They Say/ I Say* for additional guidance on writing an academic argumentative essay. *Due 4/26 by 11:59pm*. Submit via Canvas. *Please see above for 'paper proposal' assignment, which must be completed and approved prior.*

Method of Evaluation

- Attendance and participation (30%)
- Engagement questions (20%)
- Research paper (40%)
- Reflection paper (10%)

Grading Scale

A 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D/PASS 65-69
F/FAIL 64 and below

University Policies

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office. [Links to an external site.](#)

The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams.

Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

University Policy on Academic Misconduct

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code. [Links to an external site.](#)

Note on Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and may warrant university action. The use of ChatGPT or other A.I. software is forbidden and goes against the university honor code.

Health and Wellness Resources

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care](#) [Links to an external site.](#) website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) [Links to an external site.](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the [Student Health Care Center website](#). [Links to an external site.](#)

University Police Department: Visit [UF Police Department website](#) [Links to an external site.](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the [UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#). [Links to an external site.](#)

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) [Links to an external site.](#) or call 352-273-4450.

UF General Education Criteria Page: All undergraduate students (except those transferring to UF with an A.A. degree from a Florida public college or an A.A. certificate from a Florida public state university) are required to complete UF's general education requirement to graduate. Requirements listed here. Links to an external site.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.

Course Schedule

Week 1 Defining and Studying Religion: Theory & Method in Religious Studies

Reading for the week- Textbook chapter 1 (p3-25)

M1/13 Introductions, syllabus

W1/15 Defining and Studying Religion

F1/17 Lincoln & Fitzgerald- Academic Feuds; *Group Work- Where does 'religion' belong in academia?*

Week 2 Religions of Antiquity

Reading Textbook chapter 3 (p77-125)

M1/20 *MLK Holiday, no class*

W1/22 Introduction to 'Ancient Traditions'

F1/24 Traditions at a Glance/Common Features

Week 3 Indigenous Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 2 (p27-75)

M1/27 Intro to Indigenous Religions

W1/29 Colonialism and Recent Developments
F1/31 *Group Work- Case study analysis*

Week 4 Jewish Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 4 (p172-181)

M2/3 Identity, ethnicity, and religion

W2/5 Judaism through the ages- Medieval to modern

F2/7 Modern and post-war Judaism (*Video testimony*)

Week 5 Christian Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 5 (p183-243)

M2/10 From Christ to Medieval Christianity

W2/12 Early-modern to the Church of Rome today

F2/14 *Group Work- in class activity*

Week 6 Muslim Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 6 (p244-301)

M2/17 Variations of Islam

W2/19 *Guest Lecture- Yekatit Teshayu of UF- Islam in the modern world*

F2/21 Recent developments- *Group Work- in class activity*

Week 7 Hindu Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 7 (p302-363)

M2/24 Origins and 'Classical' Hinduism

W2/26 Schools, Practices, Rituals, Arts

F2/28 Recent Developments- Global Hinduism and the Diaspora

Week 8 Jaina Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter (p400-433)

M3/3 Introduction to Jainism

W3/5 Expressive dimensions and recent developments

F3/7 *Guest Lecture- Jain Samanis of Florida International University*

Week 9 Sikh Traditions

Reading Textbook chapter 8 (p364-399)

M3/10 Introduction to Sikhism

W3/12 Cultural expressions and recent developments

F3/14- *Ghost class*

***Mid-semester reflection papers due at 3/14 at 11:59pm**

Week 10- Spring Break, No Classes

Week 11 *Buddhist Traditions*

Reading Textbook chapter 10 (p434-495)

M3/24 The Three Jewels

W3/26 Early Buddhism

F3/28 Buddhism in East Asia/ in modern world

***Final paper proposal due 3/30 at 11:59pm**

Week 12 *Chinese and Korean Traditions*

Reading Textbook chapter 10 (p434-495)

M3/31 Classical to Six Dynasties Period

W4/2 The Sui Dynasty to Modern Times

F4/4 Korean Religions

Week 13 *Japanese Traditions*

Reading Textbook chapter 11 (p496-559)

M4/7 Overview and Foundations

W4/9 Pivotal Developments and New Emphases in Japanese Religions

F4/11 Global Trends and Recent Developments

Week 14 *New Religions and Movements*

Reading Textbook chapter 13 (p592-627)

M4/14 *Group Work- Defining NRMS- Cults, Religions, and Sects*

W4/16 NRM, Sects, and Cults Cont'd

F4/18 *Guest Lecture- Humberto Perez, FSU, Religions Inspired by Other Forms of Spirituality*

Week 15

Reading None

M4/21 Semester Retrospective

***Final reflection papers due at 4/22 at 11:59pm**

W4/23 *Sharing Reflection Papers*

***Research paper due 4/26 at 11:59pm**