For a person who has conquered his lower self by the divine self, his own self acts as his best friend. But for that person who has not conquered his lower self, his own self acts as his worst enemy. *Bhagavad Gita*

In ancient times there were great Taoist Sages.
Their way of living was so deep, so subtle, it cannot be directly explained.
Instead, here is how they looked:
Cautious, as if crossing the ford of a stream in Winter
Alert, as if surrounded by danger
Polite, as if they were always a guest
Yielding, like ice that is on the verge of melting
Sincere, like an uncut block of wood
Receptive, like a valley
Opaque, like muddy water.
*Tao Te Ching*

**Course Overview**

This comparative religions course examines the world’s major eastern and western religions, both ancient and contemporary. They are studied from historical, psychological, sociological, anthropological and archeological perspectives. The religious beliefs, rituals, practices, creation stories, scriptures, myths and spiritual leaders of indigenous peoples, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the New Age are studied with an eye toward understanding the similarities and differences between them.

**Course Texts**

- The *MLA Handbook* (Modern Language Association) is also recommended for writing class papers. 6th Edition or higher.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, the successful student will be able to:

- Understand the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern and Western religions.
- Discern the major similarities and differences between Eastern and Western religions, including cultural and historical contexts, as well as local, national and/or international contexts.
- Be aware of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.
- Appreciate the early bases and origins of religion among Indigenous Peoples and Shamanic cultures.
- Critically engage the issue of religious diversity in national and international context (Global Engagement).
- Analyze issues in the field of religions studies from multiple approaches (Global Perspective).
- Evaluate the interrelationship between his/her own and others’ religious views as they relate to understanding other cultures and solving common problems (Global Awareness).
Requirements, Assignments and Grading

1. Regular attendance and punctuality are expected by all. Up to three absences will go without penalty. Each additional absence beyond will bring the Attendance Grade down (4 absences = 80%, 5 absences = 60%, 6+ absences = 0%, 8+ absences are grounds for failing the course) and bring down your overall grade. Perfect Attendance results in an attendance grade of 110%, so it boosts your overall grade.

2. It is the student’s responsibility to be attentive, respectful, keep up with the work, and hand in assignments on time. Cell phones must be turned off during class. **No texting and no surfing on computers in class!**

3. If a student is having any difficulties with the assignments, readings, papers, tests, punctuality, or attendance they should speak to the professor before it becomes a problem. Good communication will lead to a good resolution of the issue.

4. **Plagiarism** is the theft of someone else’s intellectual property: their ideas, theories, concepts, opinions, or words. It consists of the unattributed (no reference citation) quotation of the exact words of a published text, or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles or oral sources, each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large, or the form, structure or style of a secondary source must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate citation procedure (in our course THE MLA Handbook). Only widely known facts, thoughts, and observations original to the student do not require citations. In addition, extensive quotations from textbooks or other sources mechanically inserted (cut and paste) into the paper for the sake of padding or bulk will not be accepted either. Your quotations should be selective and should not be strewn throughout the essays overshadowing or disproportional to your own original writing. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will cause the guilty student to be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and possibly fail the class. Whenever a student is unsure as to what constitutes plagiarism, they are encouraged to consult their professor.

5. **Assignments and Grading**
   a. **Three Tests (24% Each)** Multiple Choice, Matching, True/False, Short Essay
   b. **One 500 Word Opinion Essay (25%)**: Watch and write on one of these movies: Dances with Wolves (Kevin Costner, Graham Greene), The Last of His Tribe (Jon Voight, Graham Greene). The Mission (Robert Deniro, Jeremy Irons), Thunderheart (Val Kilmer, Graham Greene). Gandhi (Ben Kingsley), Kundun (Martin Scorsese), Schindler’s List (Liam Neeson), The Education of Little Tree (Graham Greene), or Whale Rider (Keisha Castle-Hughes). Explain, discuss, and analyze the themes of the movie, the spiritual and religious traditions, and how the story affected you. **Do not retell the story for me. Analyze!** Compare what you have learned about other religions and religious practices to discuss common themes and similarities or significant differences.
   c. **Class Participation/Attendance (5% Total)**
   d. **One Extra Credit Paper (2%)**
      1. 500 Word Movie Review The Peaceful Warrior with Nick Nolte, or The Da Vinci Code with Tom Hanks. Explain and discuss the themes of the movie, the spiritual and religious traditions, how the story affected you, and what it means today.
      Or
      2. 500 Word Movie Review **(on Jesus Camp).** Analyze the movie, especially what you liked/disliked about the religious training depicted and larger issues of the separation of religion and state in our country.

Guidelines for Writing and Research

1. Your grade on all papers will consist of three parts: **Organization and Structure** (30% of grade), **Style and Grammar** (20% of grade), and **Content and Argument** (50% of grade). **Organization and Structure** refers to a solid introduction (with thesis statement), building of argument and points, and finishing with a sound conclusion. **Style and Grammar** refers to how well you write: grammar, sentence structure, word usage, including use of interesting and varied words and phrasing. **Content and Argument** refers to how well you logically build your case and follow the FIRES model (Facts, Incidents, Reasoning/Rationale, Examples, and Statistics). FIRES makes for a more interesting paper in which you back up your points with specific examples and facts.

2. All essay assignments will be turned in through the **Turnitin** website (www.Turnitin.com) on the day they are due. The class user number and password will be given out before the first paper is due. There is a 5% grade penalty per day for late papers. You may write more than the minimum word requirement, but not less without penalty.

3. We use **The MLA Handbook** for writing papers in this course. Check out **Dr. Norris’ Excellent Tips for Writing Papers** to guide you in writing your essay.
4. Please take advantage of the (free) FIU Writing Lab which will provide you with someone to go over your papers for grammatical, format, and content issues before you hand it in. Stop by to set up an appointment with them in PC 247. Their website also contains examples of MLA style and other helpful tools.

Class and Reading Schedule

Week 1
M 1/10 Lesson: What is Religion I?
W 1/12 Reading for Next Class: Chapter 1: Religious Responses
F 1/14 Lesson: What is Religion II?

Week 2
M 1/17 Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday (No Classes)
W 1/19 Lesson: The Beginnings of Religion I
F 1/21 Lesson: The Beginnings of Religion II

Week 3
M 1/24 Lesson: The Beginnings of Religion III
W 1/26 Lesson: The Beginnings of Religion IV
F 1/28 Reading for Next Class: Chapter 2: Indigenous Peoples

Week 4
M 1/31 Lesson: Indigenous Religions I
W 2/2 Lesson: Indigenous Religions II
F 2/4 Exam: Online Test I (Introduction and Indigenous Religions)

Week 5
M 2/7 Lesson: Yin Yang Principles
W 2/7 Lesson: The Hindu World I
F 2/11 Lesson: The Hindu World II

Week 6
M 2/14 Lesson: The Hindu World III
W 2/16 Lesson: The Hindu World IV
F 2/18 Reading for Next Class: Chapter 5: Buddhism

Week 7
M 2/21 Project Due: 500 Word Movie Paper (A-L Students)
W 2/23 Lesson: Little Buddha Movie
F 2/25 Lesson: The World of the Buddhist I

Week 8
M 2/28 Project Due: 500 Word Movie Paper (M-Z Students)
W 3/2 Lesson: The World of the Buddhist II
F 3/4 Lesson: The World of the Buddhist III

Week 9
M 3/7 Exam: Online Test II (Hinduism and Buddhism)
W 3/9 Reading for Next Class: Chapter 8: Judaism
F 3/11 Lesson: Judaism II

Week 10 Spring Break (March 14-19) No Classes

Week 11
M 3/21 Lesson: Judaism III
W 3/23 Lesson: Judaism IV  
Reading for Next Class: Chapter 9: Christianity  
F 3/25 Lesson: Christianity I  

**Week 12**  
M 3/28 Lesson: Christianity II  
W 3/30 Lesson: Christianity III  
F 4/1 Lesson: Christianity IV  

**Week 13**  
M 4/4 Movie: *The Message*  
W 4/6 Movie: *The Message*  
F 4/8 Movie: *The Message*  
Reading for Next Class: Chapter 10: Islam  

**Week 14**  
M 4/11 Lesson: Islam I  
W 4/13 Lesson: Islam II  
F 4/15 Lesson: Islam III  

**Week 15**  
M 4/18 Lesson: Islam IV  
**Project Due: All Extra Credit Papers**  
Reading for Next Class: Chapter 12: New Religious Movements  
W 4/20 Movie: *Life After Life*  
Reading for Next Class: Chapter 13: Religion in the 21st Century  
F 4/22 Lesson: Universalism and the New Age  

**Week 16**  
M-S 4/25-4/30 **Final Exam Week: Online Test III (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, New Age)**