“If we take the world’s enduring religions at their best, we discover the distilled wisdom of the human race.”

Huston Smith

“Blessed is he who learns a lesson of worship from Nature.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Nothing worth knowing can be understood with the mind …”

Woody Allen

Course Description

Ever since the beginning of humanity’s existence on Earth, religion has been a singularly powerful influence on the lives of a vast majority of its occupants, and it seems likely that it will remain so far as far into the future as our minds can project. While there are some who view religion as a singularly powerful means for promoting goodness and morality in the world, there are others who see it as the source of most of the hatred and violence in the world. Whatever one’s opinion, however, it is incumbent upon all of us today to develop a familiarity with a number of the World’s major religions, so that we may be better able to understand our neighbors in what, today, is an enormously complex, interdependent, and global world.

It is not the intention of this course to uphold any one particular religious belief system over any other, but rather, to introduce students to the academic study of religion. Therefore, this course will introduce students to some of the World’s major and most enduring religious traditions – both Eastern and Western – by exploring their history, basic beliefs, practices, rituals, associated narratives, and relevant figures. One of the primary goals of this examination will be to identify those universal elements – those common threads – found in all of them, elements that bind all of us, as human beings living together on this small planet, to one another.

Course Objectives

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

- Analyze the differences and similarities between the religions studied.
- Analyze the historical development of the religious traditions presented.
- Compare and contrast religious societies and cultures in their local, national, and global context.
- Recognize the different ways of being religious and of interpreting the sacred.
- Appreciate the importance that the various religious traditions discussed throughout the semester hold for their practitioners.


(Other required readings will be made available to you at various times during the course of the semester.)

Class Participation:

Twenty percent of your final grade will depend on your level of participation, in the form of on-line discussions in a variety of formats to be determined.

In addition, students will have an opportunity to write a short research paper for EXTRA CREDIT, which will be due on Monday, March 28. You will receive 15 extra points added to your lowest exam grade for successful completion of this assignment. Specific details on this paper will be distributed separately.

*NOTE: The professor reserves the right to modify the course syllabus at any time. Students will receive written notification of any modifications, should they be made.

Grade Point Distribution:

20% Class Participation
20% Exam #1 – Monday, February 15
30% Midterm Examination – Monday, March 21
30% Final Examination – Friday, April 29

Grading Scale:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-99</td>
<td>74-76</td>
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<tr>
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<td>90-93</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<td>80-83</td>
<td>60-63</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>Below 60 F</td>
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Class and Reading/Assignment Schedule

Week of Monday, January 11 (Week #1)

Introduction to the course: course overview and review of course syllabus; discussion of various assessments of the term “religion”; some theories about the origins of religion

Reading Assignment for Wednesday, January 13: Hopfe & Woodward, Introduction /Overview (pp. 1-10) and Chapter One (Basic Religions, pp. 15-28)

Week of Monday, January 18 (Week #2)

Characteristics of Basic Religions

Film: Excerpt from the film “Zeitgeist”


Week of Monday, January 25 (Week #3)

African Traditional Religions

Film: Sorcerers of Zaire

Week of Monday, February 1 (Week #4)

African Traditional Religions (continued)

Papal Bulls, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the Middle Passage

Week of Monday, February 8 (Week #5)

Film: The Middle Passage

Reading Assignment for week of February 15: Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 4 (Hinduism)
Week of Monday, February 15 (Week #6)

*Monday, February 15 – Exam #1*

Hinduism

*Reading Assignment for week of February 22:* Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 6 (Buddhism)

Week of Monday, February 22 (Week #7)

Hinduism (continued)

Introduction to Buddhism and the Life of the Buddha

Week of Monday, February 29 (Week #8)

Buddhism

Week of Monday, March 7 (Week #9)

Buddhism (continued)

*Film: Compassion in Exile: The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet*

*Reading assignment for week of March 21:* Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 11 (Judaism)

Week of Monday, March 14-19 – Spring Break – no classes

Week of Monday, March 21 (Week #10)

*Monday, March 21 – Midterm Examination (on Hinduism and Buddhism)*

Judaism

*Film: A History of God, Part I*

Week of Monday, March 28 (Week #11)

Judaism (continued)

*Reading Assignment for week of April 4:* Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 13 (Islam)
Week of Monday, April 4 (Week #12)

Introduction to Islam and the Life of Muhammad

*Film: A History of God, Part III*

Week of Monday, April 11 (Week #13)

*Lecture and Discussion: Islam (continued)*

*Film: Islamic Mysticism: The Sufi Way*

*Reading Assignment for week of April 18*: Hopfe and Woodward, Chapter 12 (Christianity)

Week of Monday, April 18 (Week #14)

Introduction to Christianity and the Life of Jesus

*Film: A History of God, Part 2*

Week of Monday, April 25 (Final week of semester) (Week #15)

Christianity (continued)

*Friday, April 29 – Final Exam* (on Judaism, Islam, and Christianity)