

REL3308 | Studies in World Religions



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Why should we care about religion?

Sociologist Emile Durkheim saw religion as a part of the human condition, and while the content of religion might be different from society to society over time, religion will, in some form or another, always be a part of social life. Therefore, you do not need to be a religious person in order to be in contact with religion. This course will provide you the tools to learn and understand different religious beliefs from around the world and how they interact with your academic field.

Maybe Jesus was a Buddhist monk. Where exactly did your yoga class come from? Why are Native Americans some of the best eco-advocates today? Is Judaism a religion, a culture, or a tribe? It might be good to wonder if religion is a force for good or evil to begin with. Can we still be spiritual without being religious? These are not just entertaining questions but are highly relevant to your personal and professional development in our globalized world. In this interdisciplinary course, we will explore these questions and many more that emerge as we investigate humanity, religion, and the cosmos.

This is an introductory course to world religions and one of the many courses that complete the Global Learning requirement. Since it is an extensive subject, we will be focusing on some of the major religions of our world, examining them from their historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, and ritualistic practices. Furthermore, we will also learn about religions that are no longer in practice and had influenced some of today's religions. We will analyze the differences and similarities between religions and associate their practices, beliefs, and applications to contemporary issues in our world.

What are the objectives of this course?

- Demonstrate an understanding of themes, definitions, and symbols relating to religion.
- Compare and contrast the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern, Western, indigenous and shamanic religions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.
- Evaluate religious truth claims as potential sources of knowledge.
- Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
- Appreciate the history, basic teachings, practices, and underlying beliefs and principles of some of the world religions, analyzing them in a critical way and understanding their similitudes and differences.

Global learning objectives targeted

What does it mean to learn as a global citizen? As a Global Learning course, students will meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:

- Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
- Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions.
- Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.

Course prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Proctored exam policy

This course does not require proctored exams.

Textbook and course materials

Religions of the World (Required)

by Lewis Hopfe, Mark Woodward, and Brett Hendrickson
Pearson, 13th Edition,
ISBN-10: 0205158609
ISBN-13: 9780205158607

You may purchase your textbook online at the [FIU Bookstore](#) or from another retailer. You do not need to purchase any of the online material from the publisher. You can purchase the paperback, e-book, or loose-leaf textbook version of this text. E-book and loose-leaf versions are generally cheaper. You can also purchase used versions of the the textbook or rent it. We'll be referring to the 13th edition so, if you choose another edition, it's your responsibility to figure out how the textbooks differ so that you can keep up.

How does a hybrid class work?

In a hybrid course, 50% of the time dedicated to the course is in person, engaging in learning, clarifying concepts, debating, working in groups, and discussing and developing each of the concepts covered in the course. The other 50% of the time takes place outside the class and includes reading the textbook, writing papers, watching videos, reading articles, providing opinions on different topics, and posting weekly in a discussion board. My responsibility is to provide you with lots of material and activities for you to apply and put into practice the concepts learned in the readings, as well as clarify all of the questions that may arise from them. If we both do our part, we should be able to use the time in class to actively understand the concepts.

Important Information

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
 - You are capable of meeting my expectations for this course. If you are concerned about how well you are doing in this course, please come speak with me instead of considering academic misconduct.
- [Inclusivity Statement](#)
- [Panther Care & Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Policies](#)

Additional resources are also available under Student Resources at the top of the Modules page.

Course Communication

Communication directly with me in this course will take place via the Inbox. Check out the [Canvas Conversations Tutorial \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to learn how to communicate with your instructor and peers using Announcements, Discussions, and the Inbox. At some points in the semester, my inbox gets quite full. If you message me and don't hear back from me within two business days, please send a follow-up message. I will appreciate the gentle reminder.

Also, there is an open forum pinned to the top of the discussion forum for general questions about the class. If one student has a question about course materials or

assignments, that question is usually shared by others. Using the open forum will allow everyone in the course to benefit from each other's questions. I will check the forum several times a week to respond to questions, but, if you see a question that hasn't been answered yet and you know the answer, please feel free to share that knowledge with your classmates.

As a student in this course, you are expected to:

- Review the *Getting Started* information located in the Modules.
- *Introduce yourself* to the class during the **first week** in the appropriate discussion forum.
- Take the *Practice Quiz* to ensure that your computer is compatible with Canvas.
- Interact online with instructor and peers.
- Log in to the course at least **3-4 times per week, if not daily**.
- Respond to Canvas Messages **within 1 day**.
- Check regularly for any announcements.

I, the professor, will:

- Log in to the course at least **6 days per week**.
- Respond to Canvas Messages **within 1 day**.
- Respond to General Discussion posts **within 2 days**.
- Provide feedback on assignments **within 7 days** of submission.

Generally, I post any overall class information, including reminders or announcements, within the Announcements section of Canvas, but, if something is time sensitive, I will send a Canvas Message.

Attendance & Participation

Since we have limited sessions, you are expected to do your best to attend every session, arrive on time, and stay for the duration of the class. Attendance will be taken during each session. Arriving late, leaving early, or stepping out of the class for long periods of time may incur an absence penalty. Please refrain from texting and emailing in class. Please inform me immediately if a situation develops that will impact your performance or attendance. I cannot help you if you don't reach out to me.

Participation includes reading for class, contributing to discussions, and being attentive to lectures and student presentations. **Participation also includes introducing yourself in the online forum.**

Online Activities

Every week after covering a topic, you will have to submit one or two activities. Each activity will become available under the corresponding module and is due at midnight on Saturday, after which the link for the assignment will no longer be available. All the due

dates will be listed on the course's calendar. Points will be deducted for poor grammar or typos, and not well-justified answers.

Online Reflections

Before covering each topic in class, you will have to read the textbook, post in the designated online discussion, and respond to someone else's post. There will be a prompt for each of the discussions. I might bring some of your posts to be discussed in class. Since these are intended to be online "discussions" (similar to conversations), late submissions or make ups will not be allowed. The online reflection is due on Monday.

Writing requirements

As this is a Gordon Rule course, you are required to demonstrate "college level writing skills" throughout your assignments. Your written assignments must show good control of grammar, style, and structure. Your papers must have a clear thesis, supporting material, and a conclusion. All written work must consistently adhere to the [MLA Formatting and Style Guide](#). Students are advised to carefully proofread all papers before submitting them.

All students are encouraged to take advantage of the University resources for writing to be found in the [Center for Excellence in Writing \(Links to an external site.\)](#), a full-service writing center providing writing assistance and feedback to university students.

Term Paper

Each student will write a term paper on some topic relating to how religious communities change and adapt as they move to different areas or how they deal with other faith communities.

- Examples of the former would be how Christianity began in the Near East as a Jewish movement but eventually spread to non-Jews throughout the Roman Empire, or how Buddhism started in India but today has spread to places such as China and Japan where it has exerted immense influence, or how the slave trade led to a synthesis of African religions with Christianity producing the religions we know today as Santeria and Vodou.
- Examples of the latter, would be how Muslims view Jews and Christians as Peoples of the Book while rejecting polytheistic religions, or how Hindus view the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu (though this doesn't mean they convert to Buddhism).
- The topic must receive the approval of the instructor before it is handed in. The proposals will receive a completion grade. This assignment will include both a draft and a final version so that you can get feedback and receive the best grade possible on your final version.
- The paper should be six to nine pages long, excluding bibliography with 12 point font and lines double-spaced. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to MLA formatting.

Group Presentations

These will be done at the beginning of each topic. Each group will present on the religion being covered. Guidelines and a rubric will be provided in Canvas. It should not be more than 15 to 20 minutes. Groups are required to collaborate online via WhatsApp, Zoom, or GoogleDocs.

Weekly Chapter Quizzes

There are 13 weekly chapter quizzes (one quiz per textbook chapter). **The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.** Please review the specifics for each quiz below:

- Open from **Monday, 8:00 am, until Friday at 11:59 pm EST**. The first quiz on chapter 1 will be during the second week of the course.
- 10 multiple-choice and true/false questions
- 15 minutes to complete
- Total score is available immediately upon submission; answers feedback is available in My Grades after quiz due date

In order to mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is very important that you take the Practice Quiz from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams.

Assessments in this course are not compatible with mobile devices and should not be taken through a mobile phone or a tablet. If you need further assistance please contact [FIU Canvas Help Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Exams

The Midterm and Final Exams will be available online during their respective scheduled dates. Please review the specifics for each exam below. I am fully confident that you can do well on both of these exams if you use the quizzes and tools that we will discuss in class in order to prepare.

Midterm Exam

- Covers the first half of the course and will include 50 multiple choice and true/false questions.
- Administered online in Canvas
- Total score is available immediately upon submission

Final Exam

- Covers the second half of the course and will include 50 multiple choice and true/false questions.
- Administered online in Canvas
- Total score is available immediately upon submission

Students who miss the exam and request **make-ups must provide valid documentation for appropriate emergencies**. "Forgetting" is not an excuse.

Extra Credit

There may be some extra-credit opportunities that arise as the course progresses.

Extra-Credit if I know Your Name

Yes, that's right. You will get extra-credit if I can connect your name to your face. It's relatively easy to learn names and faces but connecting the two can be a challenge, especially when a professor has several large classes. That being said, it's very important to me to make the connection so, if you help me do it, you'll get extra-credit. This might be particularly challenging in our new masked world, but let's see how it goes!

[Everybody Knows Your Name](#)

Grading

I provide multiple opportunities for students to receive feedback on their performance throughout the course in order to give students opportunities to see how they are doing and so they can identify places where they need to apply more effort or new strategies along the way. My hope is that all of you will develop the knowledge and skills that you need to do well in this course.

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Weight
Attendance & Participation		100	12%
Online Activities		20	15%
Online Reflections		20	15%
Term Paper		100	15%
Group Presentation		100	13%
Weekly Chapter Quizzes	12 (out of 13)	10	10%
Exams	2	50	20%
Total			100%

Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	93 or above	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 92	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less