

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Studies in World Religions

REL 3308–UHB

CERTIFIED HYBRID COURSE

M 11:00 A.M. – 12:15 P.M.

CP 107

FALL 2023

Professor: Dr. A. Fernandez

Contact: CANVAS EMAIL

Office Hours: By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion remains one of the most important facets of the world we live in today. Religion can be explained as a set of beliefs, norms, and values concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a divine agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

In this introductory course we will explore the beliefs, historicities, scriptures, material cultures, practices, institutions, and values of select world religions. Anthropologically, there are three phenomenological criteria that classify a world religion. First, **adherence**, or the religion's number of followers. Second, **diffusion**, or how widespread the religion is across the world. And third, the **historical importance** and what type of influence the religion has had in shaping the world socioculturally to include, but not limited to, aesthetics, education, language, law and politics, social organizations, economics, ecology, and technology.

AIM OF THE COURSE

Interfaith dialogues: This course is designed to help you grow in your understanding of diverse faith-based traditions through exposure to religious customs, and asks you to open your eyes, your minds, and your hearts to consider other religions and their voracity, similarities, and their overall religious worldviews. Drawing from interdisciplinary sources, we will open-mindedly, objectively, and respectfully create a space for the neutral exchange of thoughts, feelings, and emotions with regard to several religious traditions. Grounded in a pluralistic approach towards the study of religion, this course seeks to bridge religious ideologies, creating a space that is both culturally diverse and inclusive.

LEARNING OUTCOME

Advantages of this course: You do not need to be personally religious, majoring in religious studies, or in a field within the humanities to benefit from this course. Whatever your academic field is, this course will:

- Introduce you to the major beliefs and features of a range of religious traditions, including important terminology, [un]texts, history, practices, and major figures, showing how religion is seen as a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies.
- Teach you to analyze world religions from an informed and reflective perspective.
- Give you the necessary theoretical tools to explore a variety of religious traditions and consider their influence in the analysis of the societies they shape on a global scale.
- Guide you to make important connections between your personal religious worldviews and those of others, in this manner exploring the practice and competency of interfaith dialogues.

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Our approach for this course is *interdisciplinary*, which means you will learn how to critically draw from theories reflecting diverse fields of study to include, but not limited to, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, and ecology.

- This course is taught in *seminar style* as opposed to a lecture format. This means that as a collective – professor/students – we help guide one another to understand the ideas reflected in the assigned material through a group discussion format.

HYBRID MODALITY DISCLAIMER

Welcome to hybrid modality, a new and exciting way to learn! Hybrid learning takes the best of both worlds by combining face-to-face learning with online learning. Within a hybrid course design, parts of the curriculum are taught online via Canvas, while other activities are taught in a classroom setting. In other words, 50% of the course is dedicated to in-person, face-to-face facilitation where the professor and students engage in learning by discussing and developing concepts in a seminar style arrangement, and the other 50% of the time takes place outside of the classroom doing the assigned work in the Canvas portal as you would with a regular course except that a hybrid class only meets once a week.

Course Activities

The course is designed to engage you in a process of pre-class activities (online), in-class activities (face-to-face), and post-class activities (online).

- ***All students are assigned the same pre-class and post-class activities to work on online.***

In-Class Activities (Face-to-Face)

Students are expected to attend every face-to-face class and remain in class for the duration of the session. The face-to-face class is not a lecture but seminar style that provides time for demonstrations, applications, discussion, polls, and problem-solving. Our class sessions are intended to elaborate on and supplement the pre-class readings, not merely to regurgitate this material. Occasionally, we will have review sessions or project discussions. Some topics will be

covered in much greater detail in class than that offered by the readings. You may use class time to ask relevant questions.

Pre- and Post-Class Activities (Online)

You will do your best and get the most from this course if you prepare well and read the assigned materials before class. You are responsible for working independently online to complete all assigned activities and discussions in Canvas by the due dates (as applicable). Pay close attention to the order of activities and read all materials in the order specified in the schedule.

NOTE: Students should not consider the online work schedule as being “off,” but rather to switch into a different style of self-learning, reviewing, practicing, and checking in on discussions during the week. Try to manage your schedule and time on the computer at home to work on online activities and assessments for submission by the due dates.

CLASS CONDUCT

I conduct this class in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Your active participation is mandatory in class discussions. Each of us may have strongly differing opinions on the various topics of class discussions. The conflict of ideas is encouraged and welcome. The orderly questioning of the ideas of others, including mine, is similarly welcome. However, I will exercise my responsibility to manage the discussions so that ideas and argument can proceed in an orderly fashion. You should expect that if your conduct during class discussions seriously disrupts the atmosphere of mutual respect I expect in this class, you will not be permitted to participate further.

DISCLAIMER

The content covered in this course has no intended bearing on an individual's own faith or religious beliefs. *Our class is a safe* space for generative and thought-provoking discussion, always carried out with the highest levels of respect from all participants. *All ideas of belief are welcome* as are all points of view, keeping in mind that everybody has the right to think, believe, and practice – or not – in whatever capacity is meaningful to them. *This is an academic environment*; please come with a curious, respectful, engaging, and open mind and be ready to embrace the knowledge shared herein in a scholarly, diverse, inclusive, and objective manner. *This course, its content, its delivery, and interpretation[s]* are not meant in any way, shape, or form to coerce, convince, or convert any of the individuals enrolled in this class. *Our mission here* is NOT to question the validity of the religious traditions we will discuss, but instead, we will ask HOW they exist, for whom, and why.

Fundamental to Florida International University's mission is support for an environment where divergent ideas, theories, and philosophies can be openly exchanged and critically evaluated. Consistent with these principles, this course may involve discussion of ideas that you find uncomfortable, disagreeable, or even offensive. These ideas are intended to be presented in an objective manner and not as an endorsement of what you should personally believe. Objective means that the idea presented can be tested by critical peer review and rigorous debate, and that the idea is supported by credible research. Not all ideas can be supported by objective methods or criteria. Regardless, you may decide that certain ideas are worthy of your personal belief. In

this course, however, you may be asked to engage with complex ideas and to demonstrate an understanding of the ideas. Understanding and/or engaging with an idea does not mean that you are required to believe it or agree with it.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course. More information about prerequisites can be found in the [FIU course catalog](#).

COURSE COMMUNICATION:

It is important that you check your course emails twice a day – in the morning and evening. Read all my emails thoroughly, and when indicated, ***RESPOND ASAP*** – do not just either assume that I know you read them or ignore them altogether. Kindly always acknowledge my communications with you. I may periodically send emails updating an assignment, or with brainstorming of new ideas that are useful to our discussions and tasks, so again, ***READ MY EMAILS!*** Also, ***be courteous*** in addressing recipients of your emails. It is important to begin your message with a polite greeting and introduction. Being rude or abrupt will get you nowhere in the world of cyber communication!

NOTE: FIU's official hours of operation are MON - FRI 8 am - 6 pm. Emails will be received and responded to within those working hours.

NOTE: FOR THE PURPOSES OF ACCURATE, PROMPT, AND FAIR GRADING, I DO NOT ACCEPT ANY WORK EMAILED TO ME. ALL WORK IS TO BE SUBMITTED EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH CANVAS.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

CANVAS is the main resource for this class. Strictly adhering to the instructions detailed in Canvas is a crucial part of successfully passing this class. With that said, all students are required to regularly monitor Canvas for updates and deadlines. In Canvas, students will be able to access course information and materials, upload assignments, view course announcements, send and receive messages, and monitor progress.

CANVAS: Canvas is not a grading tool. It is a cloud-based ***Learning Management System (LMS)*** that makes teaching and learning easier. This simply means that Canvas is not tracking your final grade, it keeps a record of your accountability as a student with course requirements. Thus, you may see an A as your final grade in Canvas, but it is totally up to the professor what your actual final grade will be depending on their assessment of your overall performance during the semester. If you should encounter any technical issues with Canvas, please contact them directly at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/>

Attendance – Class Participation – Facilitation: Each student is an essential part of the overall learning experience of this course. Timely attendance in weekly sessions is mandatory and graded on a point scale, thus absences will greatly affect your overall grade. It is important to notify the professor of absences before scheduled class meetings unless there is an emergency. The following is **FIU’s policy on attendance:**

- At the discretion of the professor, excusable absences include personal illness, military obligations, jury duty, religious holidays, death of an immediate relative, disability accommodations as approved by FIU’s Disability Resource Center (DRC), serious family emergencies, and/or participation in official university activities, i.e., athletic events, artistic performances, and other required curricular activities.
 - **NOTE:** Sustainable and verifiable documentation must be submitted either via email or upon the immediate return to class.
 - **NOTE:** the professor **WILL** validate documentation. Falsifying documentation can lead to serious academic disciplinary action.

Discussion Forums: Our weekly seminars are guided by the layout and design of the discussion forums as detailed in the corresponding Canvas cells.

Weekly Quizzes: There will be timed weekly quizzes designed to challenge your knowledge of all the assigned materials. Each quiz is composed of **20 questions** made up of **True/False**, **Multiple Choice**, and **Fill-In** worth **one (1) point** each and timed at a **60-minute/1 hour** timeframe.

Research Proposal: A research proposal is a structured, formal document that explains **what** you plan to research (your research topic), **why** it’s worth researching (your justification), and **how** you plan to investigate it (your methodology). The layout and design for this assignment is detailed in the corresponding Canvas cell.

Final Synthesis Essay: The final project for this course asks the student to write a synthesis essay reflecting on one (1) of the religious traditions and one (1) element of religious analysis covered in this course. The layout and design for this assignment is detailed in the corresponding Canvas cell.

***Students are encouraged to make use of FIU’s Center for Excellence in Writing at:**

<https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/index.html>

Late Assignments??? *What are those?!*

- **Late submissions** will **NOT** be accepted – including final projects – except in cases of genuine and verifiable documented emergencies.

- **Excusable missed work** may be the result of personal illness, military obligations, the death of an immediate relative, disability accommodations as approved by FIU's Disability Resource Center (DRC), or serious family emergencies.

NOTE: Sustainable and verifiable documentation must be submitted either via email or upon the immediate return to class.

NOTE: the professor **WILL** validate documentation. Falsifying documentation can lead to serious academic disciplinary action.

- **It is the student's full responsibility** to inform the professor of any *expected absences* 48 hours before the class meeting in question.
- **It is the student's full responsibility** to provide substantiated documentation that provides evidence to support or prove the validity of their absence within 24 hours of the missed class or assignment. (All documentation will be verified for authenticity and validity by the professor).
- **Avoid leaving assignment submissions** for the last minute before a deadline. **Heavy user traffic** during the 11:59 p.m. time frame cause delays and/or errors, which lead to students missing crucial deadlines.

GRADING CRITERIA

COURSE REQUIREMENTS	NUMBER OF ITEMS	POINTS PER ITEM	TOTAL WEIGHT
Attendance/participation/facilitation	15	15	20%
Discussion Forums	12	15	10%
Weekly Reflections (4) / Quizzes (7)	(4) / (7)	(20) / (100)	20%
Research Proposal	1	20	20%
Synthesis Essay	1	30	30%
TOTAL	N/A	N/A	100%

GRADING GRID

LETTER GRADE	RANGE	LETTER GRADE	RANGE	LETTER GRADE	RANGE
A	95-100	B-	80-83	F	< 60
A-	90-94	C+	77-79		
B+	86-89	C	70-76		
B	83-85	D	60-69		

A, A-: awarded for excellent to exceptional work, free of technical and stylistic errors, showing an impressive academic level.

B+, B, B-: awarded for good to very good work, with some occasional errors, but nonetheless clearly indicating a good grasp of the material and assigned task.

C+, C: awarded for average to above average work, meeting minimal standards and exposing gaps in student performance and/or fulfillment of the assignment.

D: awarded for barely passing to below average work, usually seriously deficient in fulfilling the assignment.

F: awarded for unacceptable work.

Textbook: There is no required textbook for this course. All materials are provided by the professor via Canvas.

GORDON RULE REQUIREMENT

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write one major assignment. This final paper will be at least 1500-2000 words, double spaced – approximately four (4) pages, Times New Roman 12 pt. Font, and will be submitted through **Turnitin**. All source material must be cited correctly using **Chicago Manuel of Style** and long quotes should be avoided. Please be aware that papers processed through **Turnitin** with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points) for the course.

Link for Chicago Manuel of Style: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

GLOBAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a Global Learning course, students will be 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.

*This course fulfills the **Gordon Rule requirement**; a “C” or better must be earned to receive credit for this course.

*This course fulfills the **Global Learning Foundations requirement**.

To learn more about Global Learning requirements, please visit: <https://goglobal.fiu.edu/courses/graduation-requirement/>

PLAGIARISM USE OF AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Do you know what plagiarism is? Many students end up plagiarizing material because they do not know what it entails. In short, plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

- A written work that is entirely stolen from another source;
- Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
- Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

USE OF AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) or other automated writing tools to complete assignments is strictly prohibited in this class. Any evidence of the use of AI will be considered a violation of academic integrity and will be met with a failing grade for the assignment and may result in further disciplinary action. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that all work submitted for this class is their own original work, written and completed without the use of AI or other automated writing tools.

See the University Code of Academic Integrity at: <http://integrity.fiu.edu/plagiarism.html>

Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class.

All work will be submitted through Turnitin

All source material must be cited correctly using the Chicago Manual of Style (any edition). Please be aware that papers processed through Turnitin with an originality score of over **35% similarity** or higher will NOT be accepted. For more information about Turnitin please read:

How to submit a Turnitin Assignment at:

<https://help.turnitin.com/integrity/student/canvas/assignments/submitting-an-assignment.htm> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)

Any assignment turned in with a greater than **35% or higher similarity rating** will receive an automatic grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted work is not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class.

ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMODATION

The Disability Resource Center (**DRC**) collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the Center at (305) 348–3532 or visit its office at the Graham Center (GC) 190.

ATHLETES: *Please have the Associate Director of the SAAC email me all your travel and practice itineraries during the first week of class.*

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE! *A warning to students who put off work:* Smart is as smart does – start your research and your work early so procrastination will not happen to you! Procrastination can lead you to lose precious time, pass by good opportunities, not meet important goals, ruin your career, and even damage your reputation. In the words of good ole Benjamin Franklin **“Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”**
!!!>>>IMPORTANT<<<!!!!

PLEASE NOTE: CHECK YOUR CANVAS NOW FOR TECHNICAL ACCURACY!!!

I AM NOT A CANVAS TECHNICIAN!!! FOR CANVAS ISSUES, CONTACT CANVAS!!!!

If you are having **ANY TECHNICAL** issues with Canvas, **YOU MUST** contact their support team directly. Again, I am not a Canvas technician, nor do I – or any other professor, administrator, staff, or student at FIU – have inside information on how to resolve Canvas issues. Get in touch with Canvas for resolutions, **immediately!!!** Canvas is your only source for Canvas issues! Here is their link: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/> (Links to an external site.)

*****NOTE:** If you find yourself in a situation where you are emailing me telling me that for **"some odd reason"** Canvas is not working for you, kindly remember the above note!!! Canvas technical issues are not an excuse for late or missed work!

Canvas, and/or any other computer or laptop malfunctions or technical issues are not an excuse for late or missed work! It is the student's responsibility to monitor mechanical efficiency and performance.

!!! IMPORTANT !!!

****SUBJECT TO CHANGE!!!**

Because teaching and learning are creative and fun processes, I reserve the absolute right to amend, alter, change, transform, adapt, modify, readjust, and/or revise this syllabus at any time, all in the interest of enhancing the student's overall learning experience.

Any changes to the syllabus are shared with students in a timely manner.