

Department of Religious Studies  
Florida International University

**STUDIES IN WORLD RELIGIONS**  
**REL 3308**

Professor Erik Larson  
DM 303  
Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00 and by appointment  
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Summer 2014  
MWF 12:00-2:15  
(305) 348-3518

**Introduction and Aims:**

This course will cover some of the most enduring religious traditions the world has ever known: Indigenous religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Their major teachings will be discussed in detail and set in their proper historical and cultural contexts. Similarities and differences between the religions will be considered, as well as each religion's unique contribution to world civilization. In addition, some representative texts from each will be read and discussed, and from time to time we will view some interesting films to enable you to see the religions "as they are practiced today."

Upon a successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Discuss various scholarly approaches to the study of religion
- Understand how an individual's identity and outlook are shaped by religious influences
- Identify the essential teachings, myths, rituals, and ethics of the major religious traditions
- Explain the history and development of the belief systems and practices of various religious communities
- Compare and contrast religious societies and cultures in a global context

This course counts as a Global Learning Course and thus will also teach students to:

- Analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives
- Appreciate the need and willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world
- Evaluate their own and others' religious views as they relate to understanding other cultures and solving common problems

**Syllabus**

1. [June 23] Introduction. Theories of Religion

Read: *EWR*, Chapter 1

2. [June 25] Indigenous Religions

Read: *EWR*, Chapter 2

3. [June 27] Hinduism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 3
4. [June 30] Hinduism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 3 continued
5. [July 2] Hinduism and Buddhism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 4
6. [July 7] Buddhism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 4 continued
7. [July 9] Buddhism and Jainism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 5 on Jainism only
8. [July 11] Confucianism and Daoism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 6
9. [July 14] Shinto  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 7  
**Midterm Examination 1:00-2:15**
10. [July 16] Zoroastrianism, Judaism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 8
11. [July 18] Judaism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 8 continued
12. [July 21] Judaism  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 8 continued
13. [July 23] Christianity  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 9
14. [July 25] Christianity  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 9  
Global Learning Question Due
15. [July 28] Islam  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 10  
Paper Due for Grading Option B
16. [July 30] Islam  
Read: *EWB*, Chapter 10 continued

17. [August 1] Islam  
**Midterm Examination 1:00-2:15**

**Textbook:**

Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge and Change*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2014) = *EWR*.

**Grading:** Some students prefer tests and some prefer writing papers. Therefore, you will have two grading options for this course. You will signify your choice by either handing in or not handing in a proposal for a term paper. The paper proposal must be handed in by the date indicated on the syllabus above. No late proposals will be accepted. Also, once you have handed in a paper, the grade for it **will** be counted toward your final grade. You cannot drop the paper grade if you do poorly. The two options are as follows:

Option A:

Midterm:	45%
Final:	45%
Global Learning Question:	10%

Option B:

Midterm:	30%
Final:	30%
Paper:	30%
Global Learning Question:	10%

**Note on Attendance:** Attendance is an absolutely essential part of the course! Although it will not be monitored at the beginning of the course, the instructor may choose to keep track of attendance if there is a major problem with students showing up and participating. If so, attendance will be 10% of the final grade, and the two tests will count for 40% each. Finally, remember that some material will inevitably be covered in class that is **not** to be found in the textbook so that each absence negatively affects your ability to do well on the tests.

**Academic Honesty:** Each student is expected to do his or her own work. It is absolutely unacceptable to submit someone else's work as your own. This is plagiarism and will result in a failing grade (F) for the assignment and possible disciplinary action. Thus, when in the course of writing your paper you quote or paraphrase an idea found in one of your sources you must give credit to the original author (usually by means of a footnote).

**Academic Conduct:** Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly

demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

**Examinations:** Both midterm and final examinations will be a combination of multiple choice, fill in the blank, matching and essay questions. The final examination is not cumulative—it covers only material from the second half of the semester.

**Global Learning Question:** You will read Kwame Appiah’s article “The Case for Contamination.” Based on the article and what you have learned during the semester, you will answer the following question:

Explain how religions help people express their identities both as individuals and as members of a group. Also, what did you learn about the need for and the potential of better understanding between religions? In your view, what is the best way to approach interreligious dialogue (For example, should we all become the same or should we value our diversity? If the latter, how do we do this? Is globalization a help or a hindrance to diversity?)

The essay should be 3-4 pages. If you make quotations from our textbook or Appiah’s article, you should use footnotes.

**Term Paper:** If you choose Grading Option B, you 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 not be graded, but failure to turn in a proposal will result in the final paper grade being lowered a third of a letter grade (e.g. a B would become a B-, a B- would become a C+, etc.). The paper should be 6-9pp. long, excluding bibliography. Each paper is to be printed or typed, not handwritten, with lines double-spaced. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to either that of *MLA* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. In the body of the paper you may use either footnotes or endnotes.

**Attendance: Note on Attendance:** Attendance is an absolutely essential part of the course! Although it will not be monitored at the beginning of the course, the instructor may choose to keep track of attendance if there is a major problem with students showing

up and participating. If so, attendance will be 10% of the final grade, and the two tests will count for 40% each. Finally, remember that some material will inevitably be covered in class that is **not** to be found in the textbook so that each absence negatively affects your ability to do well on the tests.

**Syllabus Note on Internet Use in Research:** You may cite from the internet in your term papers, but you must be discerning. Anyone can post “information” on the internet, and thus some of what is there is inaccurate, incomplete, and sometimes even blatantly untrue. As in print collections in libraries, only scholarly articles on the internet are acceptable as sources for research papers.

Internet articles should ideally have authors. Some will list individual authors; others will list institutions as sources. The credibility of the information depends on the credibility of the source. Acceptable sources include individual scholars with academic credentials, educational institutions (e.g., Institute of Reformation History, Princeton University), publicly supported national or international institutions (e.g. the World Health Organization or the National Institutes of Health) or other well known institutions with credible reputations (e.g. the World Council of Churches, the Children’s Defense Fund). Most educational institutions have addresses which end with the letters “edu.” You must use your judgment since many reputable institutions may not be well known by most students. Also, sometimes websites may list a university as the place from which the material emanates, but which does not sponsor or in any way support the information on that site. (You could set up a website that lists FIU as its origin, and purports that the Pope died last month and was replaced by a ringer!).

There will be some internet sources the reliability of which will be difficult to assess. Sometimes you must judge by the tone and range of an article. If it reads like a magazine or newspaper article and cites none of the sources it used, it is not scholarly. You should ask whether the article demonstrates balance: Does it attempt to tell all sides of the story? Does it ask critical questions of the material it covers? How well does its treatment accord with other treatments of the same material you have found? If you would really like to cite an internet article but have doubts about its acceptability, look up the institution or the author on the internet or in the library. Has the author or institution published other works? Have those been reviewed or cited by other scholars?

When you cite from the internet, you must list the entire address on the web where you found the information and the date you accessed it. When applicable you must also note any search terms needed within the website to find this particular article when these do not appear within the address.

The following are some bibliographic entries:

Musa, Edward, “The Art of the Maya.”

<http://www.unescape.org/pop/journal/v1onaal.htm>. 4/27/12.

Zarabozo, Jamaal, “Is Family Planning Allowed in Islam?”

<http://www.albany.edu/~ha4934/famplan.html>. 4/21/12.