

Course Syllabus

Edit

REL 3308: Studies in World Religions; Section UHAB

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Class Schedule: Tuesdays, 10:50 a.m.-2:10 p.m.

Course Description and Purpose

Ever since the beginning of humanity's existence on Earth, religion has been a singularly powerful influence on the lives of every human being, and it seems likely that it will remain so for 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 primary source of most of the hatred and violence in the world. Regardless of one's opinion on that issue, and even if one considers oneself to be an atheist, an agnostic, or simply a non-believer in any established religious tradition, the recorded history of humanity has shown incontrovertibly that humans have always sought to make sense of the world by asking most of the same existential questions: "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the ultimate source of all life?" "What happens when we die?" "To whom or what do we owe our existence and our ultimate loyalty?" Providing answers to those and many other profound questions about our life on this earth has been left largely to the field of religion.

Why should you care about religion?

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? Is God dead? God may be alive, but is he a woman? Is it good to wonder if religion is a force for good or evil to begin with? Can we be spiritual without being religious?

These are not just entertaining questions, but they are also 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.

How can this course help you advance in your career?

You do not need to be personally religious, majoring in Religious Studies, or in a field within humanities to benefit from this course. Whatever your academic field is, this course will train you to make important connections between your career and the world of the sacred and the

profane. You will be able to explore the variety of religious expressions and frameworks that shape societies around the world and the role religion plays in local and international affairs.

Religious literacy will greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study, such as philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, and gender studies, among others. This enhances your ability to think critically, communicate effectively, respond sensitively, collaborate with others and creatively resolve conflict.

Course Goals

- Analyze and interpret the universal dimensions of the sacred.
- Discover the relevance and practice of religion in everyday life.
- Recognize the academic impact of religion as an interdisciplinary field.
- Identify the role of religion as a transformational force for the individual as well as for society.
- Develop a critical and open-minded approach to religion that questions assumptions.
- Explore religion as a platform that can increase civic engagement and global awareness.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization.
2. Recognize the strength of utilizing different approaches, theories, and methodologies to better understand the universal forms of religious experience and expression, such as sacred symbols, rituals, myths, scriptures, ethics, and communities.
3. Identify religious themes and patterns that shape our everyday life.
4. Analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in individual, cultural, economic, and political contexts.
5. Critically engage the issue of religious diversity and dialogue in national and international context.
6. Reflect upon and enhance student's potential for moral agency and compassion.

Textbook

Title : Religions of the World, 13th edition

Authors : Lewis M. Hopfe, Mark R. Woodward, and Brett R. Hendrickson

Publisher : Pearson College Division, Dec-2014

Publish Date : Dec-2014

ISBN 10 : 0133793826

ISBN 13 : 9780133793826

Additional Notes :

Print or digital versions of the book may be used for REL3308: 10th, 11th or 12th editions are acceptable.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Important Information

Before starting this course, please review the following:

Academic Misconduct Statement

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 to 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.

Academic Misconduct includes:

Cheating – The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources; or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers or course materials, whether originally authorized or not.

Plagiarism – The use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student’s own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is responsible for plagiarism.

Learn more about the [academic integrity policies and procedures](#) as well as [student resources](#) that can help you prepare for a successful semester.

Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

If you are looking for help for yourself or a fellow classmate, Panthers Care encourages you to express any concerns you may come across as it relates to any personal behavior concerns or worries you have, for the classmate's well-being or yours; you are encouraged to share your concerns with [FIU's Panthers Care website](#).

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) offers free and confidential help for anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns that life brings. Professional counselors are available for same-day appointments. Don't wait to call (305) 348-2277 to set up a time to talk or visit the online self-help portal.

Course Detail:

Late Assignments

Late submissions will NOT be accepted, except in cases of genuine and documented emergencies.

Avoid leaving assignment/quiz submissions for the last minute before a deadline. "Heavy user traffic" during this time frame may cause delays and/or errors, which can lead to students missing crucial deadlines.

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus by means of Canvas Announcements or email messages, with ample time allowed for students to respond and adjust appropriately.

Assignment Submissions

All work has to be submitted through Canvas. Please note that Canvas does not allow instructors to submit on behalf of students. Therefore, please do not email your assignments to your instructor.

If you encounter errors or issues submitting an assignment, click on "Help" inside your Canvas Course (located on the left-hand panel inside the course) and select Chat with Canvas Support (student). A live chat with Canvas support can fix the issue immediately.

Quiz Resets

Please limit quiz reset requests to instances when technical issues compromised both quiz attempts. The second attempt is meant to be a "backup" attempt for situations where the first attempt was not completed successfully.

Reopening quizzes after the due date has passed will require verifiable documentation.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely stolen from another source;
2. Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
3. Paraphrasing from another source without proper referencing

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the [University Code of Academic Integrity](#).

Offenders will receive a grade of "F" for the plagiarized assignment -- and possibly, for the course.

**Students may not submit work from a previous semester or from another class for this assignment or any other assignment in this course. Doing so will be flagged for plagiarism by Turnitin.

Extra Credit

No Extra Credit work will be accepted in this course.

Assessments

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. It is your responsibility to make sure your computer meets the minimum [hardware requirements](#).

All assessments will auto-submit when (1) the timer runs out OR (2) the closing date/time is reached, **whichever happens first**. For example, if a quiz has a closing time of 5:00 pm, but the student begins the exam at 4:55 pm, the student will only have 5 minutes to complete the quiz.

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 Online Support Services](#).

Grading

Course Requirements	Grading Scheme	
	Number of Items	Weight
Research Paper	1	20%
Reflection Papers	3	15%

Course Requirements	Grading Scheme	
	Number of Items	Weight
Quizzes	5	10%
Exams	2	30%
Visit to Holocaust Monument	1	15%
Discussions	5	10%
Total	16	100%

Quizzes (10% of overall grade)

There will be five time-restricted, multiple-choice quizzes given. The questions in the quizzes will draw from the weekly course content, including lectures, videos and assigned readings.

Quiz Duration: Students will have 20 minutes to answer 10 multiple-choice questions.

Quiz Attempts: Quizzes may be attempted twice. The higher of the two attempts will count towards the student's final grade. (It is not mandatory to take each quiz twice.)

The correct answers for quizzes will be released to students after the due date.

Exams (30% of overall grade)

The Midterm Exam (15% of overall grade) will cover: African Religions, Hinduism, and Buddhism

The Final Exam (15% of overall grade) will cover: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity

The exams are online and time-restricted. Unlike the quizzes, students will have only **one attempt** to complete the Midterm and Final Exams. Please make note of this important difference.

Visit to Holocaust Monument (15% of overall grade)

For this assignment, you are to visit the Holocaust Memorial in Miami Beach (either in-person or virtually) and then write a 3-4 page assessment of your experience there. The following are what you are to include in your analysis:

In a brochure printed by the Memorial, its founders stated that one of the reasons for its creation was to provide, "a permanent reminder to future generations of Nazi persecution as well as a symbol of the world's indifference to genocide."

1. Do you think the Memorial has achieved that purpose? Why or why not?
2. Would you recommend this experience to everyone? Why or why not?
3. What aspect(s) of the Memorial affected you emotionally the most? Why?

4. What has the knowledge of the various genocides related to religious persecution (i.e., the African Slave Trade, the genocide in Tibet, and the Holocaust) I have discussed in class taught you about religious extremism (which continues to take place today)?
5. Do you think that people truly ARE indifferent to genocide? State some reasons for your answer.
6. From my lectures and your reading, what effects did the Holocaust have on modern Jewry?

Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach

Address: 1933-1945 Meridian Avenue, Miami Beach 33139

Telephone: 305-538-1663

Website: <http://holocaustmemorialmiamibeach.org/>

Reflection Papers (15% of overall grade)

These assignments require you to write a 1-2 page reflection on an assigned topic about the religion being taught in that particular module.

Discussion Boards (10% of overall grade)

Discussion assignments will require you to write a post and respond to at least two of your classmates' posts for full credit.

Research Paper (20% of overall grade)

Important Information

The term paper will be automatically checked for plagiarism using [Turnitin](#) via Canvas. It is not necessary to create an account on Turnitin.com to submit this assignment.

Students may not submit work from a previous semester or from another class for this assignment or any other assignment in this course. It will be flagged for plagiarism by Turnitin.

Keep electronic and paper copies of all written work. For your own protection, keep a copy of your Turnitin electronic receipt (confirmation of assignment submission) until you have received your final grade for the course.

Instructions for Students

Length: 1500-2000 words, not including a reference or works cited page

Formatting: Double-spaced, 12-pt font size, Arial or Times New Roman font

References: a minimum of 2 academic sources; preferably peer-reviewed publications and books. One of these must be a book reference. These academic sources are in addition to your textbook/weekly readings/lectures. Do not use Wikipedia as an Internet source.

The textbook and required readings will not have enough information about any of the topic questions above to formulate substantial responses. To succeed in this assignment, set aside sufficient time to research the chosen topic thoroughly.

Construct an argument to answer **one** of the following three questions:

1. Although Buddhism and Hinduism share similar beliefs, their approaches to the self, or the ‘soul’ are very different. Explain the metaphysical and practical distinctions between *anatman* and *atman*, and how these concepts tie into each religion’s unique approach to the sacred (god/gods) and the path to salvation. Make sure you specify which branches of Buddhism and Hinduism your analysis is tackling.
2. What is the meaning of the word *Jihad* in Islam? Select two distinct sects of Islam and explain key differences/similarities in the interpretation and practices of this term. What role, if any, does *Jihad* serve in the sects you have selected in today’s world? How has this role changed from previous historical time periods and/or how has it remained the same?
3. Select one religion – it must be a religion that you were neither brought up in nor one that you are currently practicing – and then, first, carefully research its history, ritual practices and beliefs. You must then attend at least one service/ceremony for your chosen religion and present both your academic research and your personal impressions and understanding of the religion. Follow the guidelines below,
 0. In the introduction of your paper, state which religion you have chosen to research and your reasons for choosing it.
 1. Also, in the introduction, provide the name and address of the house of worship you visited.
 2. How much – if anything – did you already know about the religion before researching it? What was it that you knew (or thought you knew)?
 3. Did you have any preconceptions, expectations, or reservations about the religion? About the way the service would be organized? About its practitioners? About whether you would be welcomed at the service? If so, what were they?
 4. How did your actual experience meet, or differ from, your expectations?
 5. How did attending the service make you **feel**?
 6. In about 3 pages, discuss the main beliefs and rituals of the religion.
 7. Does the religion you researched utilize a sacred text or texts? If so, which one(s)?
 8. Provide a detailed physical description of the house of worship and its external surroundings. That is, what did the building look like **on the outside**? What kind of neighborhood was it in?
 9. What did it look like **on the inside**? For example, was there artwork on the walls? If so, what did the artwork depict? Were there paintings? Stained glass windows? Flowers? Was there incense or candles burning?

10. Was there an altar? If so, what objects were on it?
11. **Provide a detailed description of what took place during the service.**
12. Was there music playing? If so, what kind?
13. Was there dancing? Singing?
14. Describe the way in which the service was organized. For example, were men and women seated together or apart?
15. How were the participants dressed? Why were they dressed in a particular way (assuming that they were)?
16. Did the practitioners get together after the service for refreshments or discussion? If so, what occurred? If not, how did the service end?

Grading Scheme

Grading Scale					
Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	95 or above	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 94	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: 6/20-6/26

Module 1:

Introduction to the course: course overview; review of course syllabus; defining religion; theories on the origin of religion; and overview of Basic religions

Assignments: Due Thursday, 6/23, 11:59 p.m.

Discussion #1: Read the list of definitions/assessments of the term “religion” (see Announcements section in Canvas) and choose 2 or 3 to discuss. Your discussion should include an explanation of why you chose them and how each is closest to – or furthest from – what you perceive to be a satisfactory definition.

Reflection #1: Watch part one, “On Religion,” of the film, *Zeitgeist* (part one is the first 41 minutes of the film). The link for it is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xM6LXDQXMUw>

Write a 1-2-page reflection paper answering the following questions: (1) Which of the theories on the *origin of religion* presented in class does the film express most clearly? (2) How did

watching the film make you **feel**? What is the film's main theme? Do you agree or disagree with its point of view? Why?

Reading Assignment: Religions of the World, Introduction and chapters 1, 2, and 3. Power points: Introduction to World Religions; the Papal Bulls; and the Transatlantic Slave Trade (all power points are found in the Canvas Announcements page).

Module 2:

African Spirituality

The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage

American Indian Spirituality

Assignments: Due Sunday, 6/26, 11:59 p.m.

Discussion #2: Discuss the similarities between the Native American and African traditional religions, in terms of their basic worldview, their relationship with nature, and their ideas about god/gods.

Films: Watch "The Middle Passage," by Steven Spielberg. The link for it is:

[\(694\) THE Middle Passage Documentary by Steven Spielberg - YouTube](#)

Also watch a clip from the HBO documentary "Middle Passage." The link:

[\(206\) The Middle Passage CLIP - YouTube](#)

Quiz #1: due 6/26, 11:59 p.m.

Reading Assignment for Week #2: Religions of the World, Chapter 4 (Hinduism) and Chapter 5 (Jainism)

WEEK 2: 6/27-7/3

Module 1:

Hinduism: The Classical Period

Assignments: Due Sunday 7/3, 11:59 p.m.

Reflection #2 – Watch the film "Mystic India"

The story in this film is based on the life of a real mystic who lived in the late-18th century and became the founder of a new sect of Hinduism. For this assignment, you are to write a 1-2-page reflection answering the following questions: (1) What did you think about Neelkanth's experiences? How believable are they? Why or why not? (2) In what way(s) does the story of Neelkanth and his journey help you to understand the Hindu mindset and the practices of asceticism and mysticism? Please give specific examples from the film. (3) Finally, what does the term "unity in diversity" say about the religion of Hinduism?

NOTE: The film is available on Amazon Prime. If you do not have Amazon Prime, you can rent the film there for \$1.99.

Module 2:

Hinduism: the Post Classical Period

Brief overview of Jainism

Quiz #2 – due 7/3, 11:59 p.m.

Reading Assignment: Hopfe, Chapter 6, Buddhism

WEEK 3: 7/4-7/10

Module 1:

Introduction to Buddhism and the Life of the Buddha

Assignment: Watch the following two excerpts from the film "*Little Buddha*"

Middle Way Scene: [\(694\) The Little Buddha : The stunning Middle Way scene. - YouTube](#)

Enlightenment Scene: [\(694\) Little Buddha - Enlightenment - YouTube](#)

Module 2:

Changes in Buddhism after the death of the Buddha: The Three Rafts – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana

Tibetan Buddhism (Vajrayana) and the Dalai Lama

Assignments:

Discussion #3: Due by 7/10, 11:59 p.m.

Compare and contrast the philosophical positions and practices of Vedanta Hinduism with those of Mahayana Buddhism.

Please cite any academic sources you use in your discussion. Use [FIU Library's online databases for academic research \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Try the [Religious Studies libguide \(Links to an external site.\)](#) for a more specific starting point.

Film: *Compassion in Exile: The Story of the 14th Dalai Lama* – this film can be rented for \$3.99 via the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/compassioninexile>

This film tells the life story of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet who, for over 60 years in exile, has waged a non-violent struggle to save the very unique culture and religion of the Tibetan people.

Discussion #4 – Due 6/10, by 11:59 p.m.

In your discussion, answer the following:

- (1) What does the film tell us about Tibet's culture and religion, both prior to and since the Chinese invasion of Tibet?
- (2) In what ways did the Chinese attempt to destroy the Tibetan religion?
- (3) Do you consider the Chinese actions in regard to the Tibetan people genocidal? Why or not? Explain your answer.
- (4) Throughout the Dalai Lama's time in exile, how has he shown himself to be the ultimate example of compassion?

Please cite any academic sources you use in your discussion. Use [FIU Library's online databases for academic research \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Try the [Religious Studies libguide \(Links to an external site.\)](#) for a more specific starting point.

Midterm Exam: Due Sunday, 7/10, 11:59 p.m.

Reading Assignment: Hopfe, Chapter 10 (Judaism)

WEEK 4: 7/11-7/17

Module 1:

Judaism

Film: A History of God, part 1

This film is divided into 3 parts: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For this week, please watch the first 47 minutes. The link for this is:

[A History of God \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Module 2:

Judaism – from the Middle Ages to the present

Assignment: Due 7/17, 11:59 p.m.

Reflection #3: Please watch both of videos listed below and then discuss the following:

- How would you assess the way in which this short film portrays the Jewish people?
- Do you think it gives an accurate picture of them and their history?
- Using specific examples from the film, why or why not?
- What do you think about the young man's commentary on the film?

Add any other observations on and/or reactions to either of the selections, both positive and negative, you may have.

[The Mystery of the Jews \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[The Mystery of the Jews REACTION \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Quiz #3 (Judaism) – due 7/17, 11:59 p.m.

Paper on Holocaust Memorial is due 7/24, 11:59 p.m.

Reading Assignment: Hopfe, Chapter 12 (Islam)

WEEK 5: 7/18-7/24

Module 1:

Islam: Introduction to Islam and the Life of Muhammad

Film: “*A History of God,*” *part 3* (this part begins at 1 hour and 10 minutes into the film and then watch it until the end of the film)

Term Paper is due by 7/24, 11:59 p.m.

Module 2:

Islam: Variations within Islam

Assignments:

Discussion #5: “Don’t Blame Wahhabism for Terrorism”

Read the following article: [Alyahya, M. \(2016, October 19\). Don’t Blame ‘Wahhabism’ for Terrorism. *New York Times*. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Summarize the author’s major claims in the article. Do you agree or disagree with the claims put forth in this article? Defend your position.

You may use academic sources to bolster your discussion. Use [FIU Library’s online databases for academic research \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Try the [Religious Studies libguide \(Links to an external site.\)](#) for a more specific starting point.

Quiz #4 – due 7/14, 11:59 p.m.

Reading Assignment: Hopfe, Chapter 11 (Christianity)

Week #6: 7/25-7/29

Module 1:

Introduction to Christianity and the Life and Teachings of Jesus

Film: *A History of God*, Part 2 (starts at approximately 47 minutes into film)

Module 2:

Christianity, part two

Quiz #5 -- due Thursday. 7/28

FINAL EXAM: DUE 7/29, 11:59 P.M.

