

University of North Texas
World Religions: PHIL 2070
Spring, 2026 (8wk, Mar 16-May 8)

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I. Rationale and course outline:

When studying a subject often designated in global terms such as “World Religions” it can become easy to assume that many if not most of the traditions studied will be far off, distant, or even exotic. While a key objective of this course is to raise your awareness and knowledge of these religions, another goal is to recognize that many of these religions are likely to be practiced not just by people in far off lands, but by neighbors. The face of religion has been changing in the US since 1965 when the Immigration and Nationality Act removed the quota system that had heavily favored immigration from largely Northern and Western European (predominantly Christian) nations. Since then, religious diversity in the US has increased exponentially so that the US is now one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. Rather than an exception to this trend, North Texas exemplifies it with significant and growing Muslim, Jain, and Hindu populations. This means that the study of world religions can no longer remain merely an intellectual exercise, but becomes a matter of ethics because it will inform how we interact with neighbors, co-workers, classmates, clients, friends, or family.

Studying even a single religion can fill a lifetime. Therefore, the material we examine will be necessarily cursory and selective. Nevertheless, it will include a span of material sufficient to engender an appreciation of the great variety of the forms of religious life that exist in the world. The variety of religions and religions expressions elicits a basic question of the definition of religion: what is religion, what does it mean to be religious, are there universal features of all religions, are human beings fundamentally religious creatures? These are just some of the questions that have occupied religious scholars for generations. We will start, then, with a critical analysis of the concept of “world religions” before diving into religious traditions from African Religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and new religious movements.

II. Course Objectives and Outcomes:

- Religious literacy: This course will cover Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, and Yoruba, among others.

- Historical and cultural literacy: This course will help you understand the development of religions over time, as they have interacted across different societies and cultures.
- Critical self-awareness: This course will encourage you to reflect on the category "religion" and the assumptions that shape perceptions of religion today.
- Textual engagement: This course will introduce you to key primary sources texts as well as secondary literature.
- Interfaith engagement: This course will prepare you to engage intelligently on issues of religious diversity outside the classroom.

III. Format and Procedures:

This is an online course so it will unfold in a series of modules on Canvas. Students should follow the modules in the order listed in Canvas. Each module will include assigned readings, reading responses/discussion topics, and other instructional content. Each week students will be responsible for assigned readings and other instructional content as well as a discussion post and response to at least one peer.

IV. Course Requirements:

1. Read course content as posted in modules by week
 - Required text:
 - Mary Pat Fisher and Robin Rinehart, *Living Religions* (10th ed.)
 - Other materials distributed digitally
2. Class discussion/participation
 - For each set of course content in a module you will be asked to respond to a reading and then respond to at least one of your classmates' posts. Initial posts are expected to be at least 300 words and should include at least one citation from the video/reading assigned. Response posts should be at least 100 words in length and must be substantive for full credit.
 - Online communication should follow the CLEAR "Online Communication Tips" available on the [CLEAR webpage](#).
 - Please also see the inclusivity statement below in section IX
3. Essays
 - You will be asked to write two essays (1-2 and 2-4 pages—Essay 1 has a part A and part B) that will be submitted to Canvas for a grade. You will be given instructions about what to write and how they will be graded in Canvas.
4. Quizzes
 - Each module will end with a quiz. They will be open book/open note, but must be your own work and may only reference class assigned sources.
5. Exam
 - The final exam will cover material from the entire semester and will take the form of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

In sum, final grades will consist of the following:

Class participation (Including reading/video responses and commenting on at least one classmate's response. See reading response and post grading rubric)	25%
Essays (2)	25%
Unit Quizzes	25%
Final exam	25%

V. Grading Policies and Procedures

Grading rubrics will be used to evaluate class participation, assignments, and exam essays.

GRADING SYSTEM:

A	90-100 %
B	80-89 %
C	70-79 %
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

All work is expected to be submitted by the designated due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% for each day late (2 days late: 10% deduction, 3 days late: 15% deduction, etc.) Therefore, late assignments should be emailed to the instructor as soon as they are completed in order to avoid further grade penalty.

* As with attendance, exceptions will only be made for emergency situations. In all cases, timely communication with your instructor is key.

VI. Academic Integrity

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty.

According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

- use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations;
- dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
- the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university;
- dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or
- any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.

The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to:

- the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and
- the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

AI policy

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework (other than general search tools—like Google which now has AI components—for quick reference or brainstorming) will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).

All essays, including drafts and revisions, should be written in google docs. If submitted work is suspected of being AI generated the student may be asked to submit their doc history as evidence that their work is their own.

VII. Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found on the [UNT webpage](#).

VIII. Accommodations for students with disabilities (ADA statement)

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access website](#). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

IX. Inclusivity, chosen names, and pronouns

UNT students represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. The professor is committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. Therefore, a portion of the student's participation grade will reflect their ability to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal nature

Chosen Names: A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know.

Pronouns: Pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) are a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction, both virtually and in-person. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's

pronouns. You can [add your pronouns to your Canvas account](#) so that they follow your name when posting to discussion boards, submitting assignments, etc.

[Texas Senate Bill 17](#), the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

X. Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Blackboard online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates on the [university website](#).

XI. Drop Information

Schedule available on the [university registrar webpage](#).

XII. Succeed at UNT

UNT endeavors to offer you a high-quality education and to provide a supportive environment to help you learn and grow. And, as a faculty member, I am committed to helping you be successful as a student. Here's how to succeed at UNT: Show up. Find Support. Get advised. Be prepared. Get involved. Stay focused. To learn more about campus resources and information on how you can achieve success, go to the [UNT Success webpage](#).

XIII. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETE)

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available at the end of the semester to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught.

XIV. Course Schedule

(May change to accommodate public health or other unanticipated events & student needs)

Class/date	Theme/topic	Reading	Assignment
Module 1	Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion		
Week 1 (3/16-20)	Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion	Ch. 1	• Essay 1, part A and B

	What are the “world religions”?	• Tomoko Masuzawa, “World Religions”	• Unit 1 quiz
Module 2	African religions		
Week 2 (3/23-25)	African religions	African Religions, ch. 1-2	
	African religions	African Religions, ch. 3, 5	• Unit 2 quiz
Module 3	Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism		
Week 2.5 (3/25-3/27)	Hinduism	Ch. 3	
	Hinduism	Ch. 3	• Reading response
Week 3 (3/30-4/3)	Jainism	Ch. 4	
	Jainism	Ch. 4	• Reading response
	Buddhism	Ch. 5, Video	• Reading response
	Buddhism	Ch. 5	• Unit 3 response
Module 4	Daoism and Confucianism		
Week 4 (4/6-10)	Daoism	Ch. 6	
	Daoism	Ch. 6	• Reading response
	Confucianism	Ch. 6	• Reading response
	Confucianism	Ch. 6	• Module 4 quiz
Module 5	Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism		
Week 5 (4/13-17)	Judaism	Ch. 8	

	Judaism	Ch. 8	• Reading response
	Christianity	Ch. 9	
	Christianity	Ch. 9	• Reading response
Week 6 (4/20-24)	Islam	Ch. 10	
	Islam	Ch. 10	• Reading response
	Sikhism	Ch. 11	
	Sikhism	Ch. 11	• Module 5 Quiz
Module 6	New Religious Movements		
Week 7 (4/27-5/1)	New Religious Movements	Ch. 12	
	New Religious Movements	Ch. 12	
	New Religious Movements	Ch. 12	• Essay 2
Finals week (5/4-8)			Final exams due midnight, 5/6