

University of North Texas
World Religions: PHIL 2070
Fall, 2023

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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 America 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 and Asian religious (Jainism and Hinduism in particular) 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. To reflect the reality of religious pluralism in the US, introductory readings on many of the religions we study will be supplemented with readings about the history of particular religion in America.

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 the basic problem of defining religion and some of the ethical implications of settling on a particular definition.

After introducing the academic study of religion/s we will begin studying religions that are simultaneously the most ancient and still current in the sense that many are still living and evolving traditions. These indigenous religions or sacred lifeways are incredibly diverse and represent locations and populations from all around the world. We will then turn to Asian

religions starting with the oldest, Hinduism, followed by Jainism and Buddhism which began as movements in Hinduism. East Asian religions—Daoism and Confucianism—will follow. Our study of Zoroastrianism will begin a shift to the three major monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—since this lesser known religion had a significant influence on what are also known as the Abrahamic faiths. Sikhism will be the last major religion we cover before turning to a study of some more recent or emerging religious movements.

II. Course Outcomes:

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Identify key features of the religions studied, especially: beginnings (where relevant), important beliefs, practices, sacred texts (where relevant), historically significant figures or events, and unique or characteristic features.
- Summarize key moments in the history of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism in America.
- Corresponding with the UNT Core objectives students will:
 - Demonstrate the ability to think critically about the ways religion has been delineated and defined in academic and popular discourses.
 - Communicate clearly and effectively develop ideas orally and in written text
 - Demonstrate the ability to identify ethical problems and make ethical decisions in religiously or culturally diverse situations.
 - Demonstrate intercultural competence and the ability to effectively and respectfully engage diverse religious and cultural communities.

III. Format and Procedures:

This is an online course so it will unfold in a series of modules on Canvas. You should follow the modules in the order listed in Canvas. Each module will include assigned readings, reading responses/discussion topics, and often video content. Each module will also conclude with a quiz so you can get feedback on your reading/listening comprehension.

IV. Course Requirements:

1. Read or watch course content
 - Required text:
 - Mary Pat Fisher and Robin Rinehart, *Living Religions* (10th ed.)
2. Class attendance/discussion/participation
 - For each set of course content in a module you will be asked to respond to a reading and/or video reflection question 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 at: <https://clear.unt.edu/online-communication-tips>
- 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:

- a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations;
- b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
- c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university;
- d. 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
- e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.

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

- a. 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
- b. 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.

*Note in particular that using ChatGPT or other AI content generator without citing it as a source (whether you are summarizing or quoting directly) constitutes plagiarism. In this course, ChatGPT and other AI content generators will not be counted as a citable source.

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 at <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu>.

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 at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. 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.

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 at the following link: <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/ferpa.html>

XI. Drop Information

Schedule available here: <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html>

XII. Succeed at UNT

UNT endeavors to offer you a high-quality education and to provide a supportive environment to help you learn and grown. 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 <http://success.unt.edu/>.

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)

Week / Date	Theme	Readings to be discussed	Assignment due
Module 1	Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion		
Class 1 T(8/22)	Introductions, orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions to one another and the theme of the course including an overview of the syllabus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Syllabus "quiz"

Class 2 R(8/24)	Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video • Ch. 1 (1-27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay 1, part A due
Class 3 T(8/29)		Ch. 1 (1-27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay 1, part B due
Class 4 R(8/31)	Differentiating and defining pluralism, assimilation, exclusivism, and tolerance	Eck (1-6, 41-77)	
Class 5 T(9/5)		Eck (1-6, 41-77)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 1 quiz
Module 2	Indigenous Lifeways		
Class 6 R(9/7)	Indigenous Sacred Ways	Ch. 2, video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video and reading response post
Class 7 T(9/12)		Ch. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 2 quiz
Module 3	Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism		
Class 8 R(9/14)	Hinduism	Ch. 3, video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video post due
Class 9 T(9/19)		Ch. 3	
Class 10 R(9/21)	Hinduism in America	Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading response post
Class 11 T(9/26)	Jainism	Ch. 4 (119-133)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading response
Class 12 R(9/28)	Buddhism	Ch. 5, Video	
Class 13 T(10/3)		Ch. 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video/Reading response post
Class 14 R(10/5)	Buddhism in America	Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 3 quiz

Unit 4	Daoism and Confucianism		
Class 15 T(10/10)	Daoism and Confucianism	Ch. 6	• Reading response post
Class 16 R(10/12)		Ch. 6	• Module 4 Quiz
Unit 5	Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam		
Class 17 T(10/17)	Zoroastrianism	Ch. 7	• Reading response
Class 18 R(10/19)	Judaism	Ch. 8, Video	• Video response post
Class 19 T(10/24)		Ch. 8	• Reading response post
Class 20 R(10/26)	Judaism in America	Readings from Pluralism Project	
Class 21 T(10/31)	Christianity	Ch. 9	• Reading response post
Class 22 R(11/2)		Ch. 9, video	• Video response post
Class 23 T(11/7)	Islam	Ch. 10	
Class 24 R(11/9)	Islam in America	Ch. 10, Readings from Pluralism Project, video	• Reading and video response
Class 25 T(11/14)			• Module 5 Quiz
Module 6	Sikhism		
Class 26 R(11/16)	Sikhism	Ch. 11, video	• Reading response post
(11/20-24)	Happy Thanksgiving!	No class	
Class 27 T(11/28)		Ch. 11	• Module 6 Quiz

Module 7 New Religious Movements			
Class 28 R(11/30)	New Religious Movements	Ch. 12	• Read ch. 12
Class 29 T(12/5)		Ch. 12	• Essay 2
Class 30 R(12/7)	University designated "no new content day"		• Review
Finals week 12/9-15			Final exams due midnight, 12/12

Online Discussion Posting Evaluation Rubric

	5 points	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point
Grammar & Writing Skills	The student displays good grammar and writing skills	Most of the time the student displays good grammar and writing skills.	Occasionally the student displays good grammar and writing skills.	The student has a tendency to neglect good grammar and writing skills.	The student is negligent in providing good grammar and writing skills.
The student participates in the discussion in timely ways	The student posts to the online discussion (with initial response and then at least one reply to a classmate) in a timely fashion (on the day designated for the module)	Satisfactory	Average	Could use improvement	The student has not participated in ways that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted questions.
The student participates in the discussion in substantive ways	The student posts are exemplarily on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted questions.	Satisfactory	Average	Could use improvement	The student has not participated in the discussion in substantive ways

In posting, the student demonstrates a substantial knowledge base from the assigned readings, presentations, and course content.	The student's posts are clearly built on familiarity with and comprehension of assigned materials displaying higher levels of learning (analysis, synthesis).	Satisfactory	Average	Could use improvement	The student has not posted or posted with no evidence of familiarity with and comprehension of the assigned materials
The student has posted a substantial, thoughtful, and timely response to the post of a classmate	The student has excellently posted a substantial, thoughtful, and timely response to the post of a classmate	Satisfactory	Average	Could use improvement	The student has not posted, it has not been substantial, or it was too late to contribute meaningfully to discussion

¹ Adapted from Mark A. Maddix, "Generating and Facilitating Effective Online Discussion," (ed. Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E. Lowe; Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2012), p. 119.