

University of North Texas
World Religions: PHIL 2070
Summer, 2020

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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 historical problems with the ways the Western academic tradition has defined religion and articulate what those problems might mean for practitioners of lesser known or non-Western religions
- Define pluralism by comparing and contrasting with religious diversity, tolerance, exclusivism, and relativism.
- 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, East Asian religions, and Judaism in America. In particular, you should be able to identify: 1) significant experiences of discrimination, 2) ways encounter with American society is changing the shape of this religion, and 3) conversely ways these religions might be changing the shape of American society.

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. In the semester course, each module will also conclude with a quiz so you can get feedback on your reading/listening comprehension. In the summer version, since each module will only last a day or two, quizzes will be weekly and will cover the modules from that week.

IV. Course Requirements:

1. Read or watch course content
 - Required text:
 - Mary Pat Fisher and Robin Rinehart, *Living Religions* (10th ed.)
 - Recommended text:
 - Diana Eck, *A New Religious America*

- Each module includes readings and/or video material. You should take close notes to help your reading/listening comprehension and engage this material thoughtfully. Bring questions, comments, and connections to class discussion.

2. Class discussion/participation/posts

- For each set of course content in a module you will be asked to respond to a reading/listening reflection question and then respond to at least one of your classmates' posts. Your participation grade will reflect the quality, not just quantity of your posts (see grading rubric at the end of this document). Also, keep in mind the course netiquette policy (below—VII) as well as the inclusivity statement (VIII) for the course indicating that thoughtful disagreements and differences are welcome, but disrespectful interactions will affect your participation grade and may result in further disciplinary measures.

3. Essays

- You will be asked to write two short essays (1-2 and 2-4 pages) that will be submitted for a grade. These are different than posts and are separate from your participation grade. You will be given instructions about what to write and how they will be graded in the modules.

4. Quizzes

- Five quizzes will be given to encourage and gauge your reading/listening comprehension. These quizzes will be open book/open note, but will be timed.

5. Exam

- The final exam will cover material from the entire semester and will take the form of multiple choice and short answer 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%
Quizzes (5)	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%
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LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

All work is expected to be submitted by the designated due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% for each day late. Therefore, late assignments should be emailed to the instructor as soon as they are completed in order to avoid further grade penalty. If a student is absent from a class when an assignment is due, the student must email the assignment to the instructor the same day it is due in order to avoid 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.

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 [or online discussion room] 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>.

Online course tips, netiquette and guidelines

- Your posts are a college level writing assignment—not a text or Instagram post. Therefore, your posts should have correct spelling and grammar (no “u” for “you,” etc.) and be written in clear, concise language. Review and edit your posts before sending.
- Similarly, avoid the use of slang and emojis or emoticons
- Use standard, easy to read fonts like Times New Roman in a 12 or 14 pt. Font
- Avoid using all caps—it’s the online version of yelling
- Make sure your posts and following discussion stay on topic and within the scope of course material.
- Avoid short generic replies like, “I agree.” Always include a reason why you agree or disagree.
- Be deliberate about your tone. We don’t have the benefit of reading body language so be conscious of your tone. Diversity of thought and disagreements are expected and even welcomed in this classroom. These differences of opinion and belief can and should always be articulated in a tone of respect and consideration for your classmates. Likewise, we likely don’t know your sense of humor so be cautious about your use of humor and sarcasm.
- Personal or insulting remarks are prohibited and will affect your participation grade. If the comments continue or are of a serious nature you may be asked to refrain from posting for a period of time. This will affect your participation grade.
- Give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source. Use MLA style for in text citation.
- Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying

VIII. Inclusivity Statement

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 her/his 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

XI. Accommodations for students with disabilities (ADA statement)

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time,

however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided by the fourth week of class. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://disability.unt.edu>. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

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. 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/>.

XII. 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.

XIII. Course Schedule

Week / Date	Theme	Readings to be discussed	Assignment due
class 1 6/1	Introductions	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”• Essay 1, part A due (6/2)

Module 1 6/3	Religious Responses: An Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion	Ch. 1 (1-17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay 1, part B due
Module 2 6/4	Differentiating and defining pluralism, assimilation, exclusivism, and tolerance	Eck (1-6, 41-77)* *access through digital library reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading response post
Module 3 6/5	Indigenous Sacred Ways	Ch. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading response post • Quiz 1
Module 4 6/9	Hinduism and Hinduism in America	Ch. 3 Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post
Module 5 6/10	Jainism	ch. 4 (119-133)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post
Module 6 6/12	Buddhism and Buddhism in America	Ch. 5 Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post • Quiz 2
Module 7 6/16	Daoism and Confucianism	Ch. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post
Module 8 6/17	Zoroastrianism	ch. 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz 3
Module 9 6/22	Judaism and Judaism in America	ch. 8 Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post
Module 10 6/25	Christianity and Christianity in America	ch. 9 Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post • Quiz 4
Module 11 6/29	Islam and Islam in America	ch. 10 Readings from Pluralism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/ listening response post

Module 12 6/30	Sikhism	ch. 11	• Quiz 5
Module 13 7/2	New Religious Movements	ch. 12	• Reading/ listening response post • Essay 2
7/3			Final Exam