REL 105: Introduction to World Religions  
Fall 2020  
Section 04  

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher, PhD  
Email: jfisher@cofc.edu  
Time/Location: T/H 3:05pm-4:20pm: Zoom/ECTR 115  
Office: Religious Studies Department, 2nd Floor, 4 Glebe St.  
Office Hours: By appointment only (Zoom or face-to-face)  

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to five of the world’s major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well the role that religion plays in a secular society like the United States. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical development of each tradition and pay special attention to the various concepts of divinity as well as the sacred texts, rites, rituals, myths, and narratives that are considered essential to qualifying each as a “lived” religious tradition. There is no prerequisite for this class.  

Required Text: Will Deming, ed. Understanding the Religions of the World (URW)  
A digital copy of this text is available for FREE to all CofC students. While there is a limit on what you can DOWNLOAD, students can READ the text in its entirety online by using their CofC credentials and login: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cofc/detail.action?docID=2009831  
Selected readings uploaded to Oaks. Films/documentaries available online. (Some may require you to rent, depending on your streaming services.)  

Course Objectives: The primary goal of this course is the development of a critical approach to the academic study of religion. I find that this development is best achieved through a combination of lecture and active discussion and so this course is designed primarily to facilitate and encourage open dialogue. Through comparative, historical, and dialogical analysis, students will 1) learn to appreciate the significance of each religious tradition as an unique system of meaning; 2) learn to identify how religious adherents articulate the central features of their respective religious systems; 3) learn to actively listen to the variety of voices within those traditions; and 4) learn to give critical voice to their own religious or non-religious views.  
This course satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Student Learning Outcomes: 1) students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture, and 2) students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the
material in writing assignments. These two learning outcomes will be assessed on the third paper, which will ask students to analyze primary sources in terms of their religious ideas.

Course Expectations: Due to social distancing requirements, this class will include a variety of online and technology enhanced components aimed at reinforcing continuity of learning for all enrolled students. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan outlined below matches their own circumstances. Accommodations can be made if possible, however, they cannot be guaranteed.

Logistically, this class is designed as a hybrid of synchronous Zoom sessions with in-class meetings. However, given the unpredictable nature of present circumstances, your professor reserves the right to hold ALL class meetings online and students should prepare for that eventuality. That said, students are expected to attend each Zoom session at the regularly scheduled time, just as if we were meeting on campus. In-class meetings (if possible) will be scheduled in advance and in accordance with the college’s policy regarding room capacity and social distancing requirements. More information will be provided as necessary.

Pedagogically, students are expected to attend each class prepared for critical discussion. Such preparation can be particularly challenging given the myriad of distractions that accompany distance education. However, while an online format may present us with some different communication challenges, it need not prevent us from fostering an active and interactive “in-class” experience. Assigned readings are to be completed prior to class meeting, and all questions and comments should be raised during class time. Whether in Zoom meetings or in person, students are expected to be present—a presence which may require a bit more concentrated discipline on the student’s part.

“Netiquette” and Protocols: Because online communication often lacks the body language and nonverbal cues we’re used to in a normal face-to-face courses, it is important that we abide by the following practices:

- Be professional. Even if we’re online, this is a class and we should all act like it. When you attend a Zoom session, please try to join from a quiet place where you are less likely to be disturbed. Be sure to dress appropriately and be aware of your surroundings. Remember, whatever your webcam sees, EVERYONE sees! If you foresee any difficulties accessing our Zoom meetings, please let me know ASAP!
- Be patient. This is my first (nearly-fully) online course. It may be yours too. I have had training and read research on online education, but inevitably, there will be some hiccups. Together, we must be flexible and forgiving and stay focused!
- Be ethical. Should we return to the classroom, mask requirements and social distancing protocols will be enforced according to college policy. Whether face-to-face or online, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. Period.
Students are expected to be respectful to one another and open to new ideas, critiques, and/or challenges.

**Course Requirements:** This class is assessed on a 150pt grading scale. In addition to attending class meetings and completing assigned readings, students will be required to complete 10 (out of a total of 14) discussion posts throughout the semester. (One per week, 5pts/ea.) The combined score on these posts will constitute 50pts of your final grade. Late posts will NOT be accepted.

There will also be three graded papers, each increasing in length and point value. The first is a minimum of 3 pages and worth 20pts, the second is a minimum of 6 pages and worth 35pts, and the third is a minimum of 8 pages and worth 45pts. (100pts total) Each will be prompted and offer a number of questions from which to answer. Late papers will be accepted, with a 5pt/day penalty. I strongly encourage each of you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning. Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses, and they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. To work with a consultant, visit [http://csl.cofc.edu](http://csl.cofc.edu).

Lying, cheating, attempting cheating and/or plagiarism are violations of the student Honor Code (complete version and all related processes can be found in the online Student Handbook) which, when identified, will be investigated. Any student found responsible by the Honor Board will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure for academic dishonesty.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:  

- A = 100-92; A- = 91-89
- B+ = 88-86; B = 85-82; B- = 81-79; C+ = 78-76; C = 75-72; C- =71-69; D+ = 68-66; D = 65-62; D- = 61-59; F = 58 and below

The College of Charleston abides by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see an administrator at the Center of Disability Services/SNAP, 843.953.1431 and contact me ASAP so that such accommodation may be arranged.

**Course Schedule, Readings, and Assignments:**  
(Instructor reserves the right to amend as necessary.)

- **Tues, Aug 25:** Introductions and Expectations
- **Thurs, Aug 27:** Orientation: What is Religion? Why do we study it?  
  - URW: pp. 2-6; CofC Department of Religious Studies website: “Why study Religion?”

Thurs, Sept 3: *No Zoom Meeting*—Film: “Sacred: Milestones of a Spiritual Life” (PBS 2016, 1:27) Available for free on Prime Video

--Discussion Post One due Friday, Sept 4 at 5pm.

Tues, Sept 8: Guiding Question #1: Is Religious Diversity or Difference a Problem?

Thurs, Sept 10: Guiding Question #2: Religious Pluralism and Interpretation: How do we determine what’s *True*?

--Discussion Post Two due Fri, Sept 11 at 5pm.

Tues, Sept 15: **Hinduism: The Way of Devotion**
Situational Awareness: From Vedic to Classical: Proto-Hinduism as Way of Action to Hinduism as Way of Wisdom: *URW* pp. 9-17

Oriental Shifts and Effects: Samsara, Karma, and Reincarnation: pp. 18-20

Thurs, Sept 17: Class, Caste, and Moksha: *URW* pp. 19-22; 33-39; 54-56

*Paper One Due: Significant Encounter*

--Discussion Post Three due Fri, Sept 18 at 5pm.

Tues, Sept 22: Hindu’s Epic tradition and the Shift to Devotional Worship:
*URW* pp. 22-28; 39-50


--Discussion Post Four due Fri, Sept 25 at 5pm.

Tues, Sept 29: **Buddhism: The Way of Awakening**

--Prior to class, please watch the documentary: “The Buddha” (PBS, 2010, narrated by Richard Gere)

Situational Awareness: The Life of the Buddha: *URW*, pp. 61-66

Thurs, Oct 1: The Four Noble Truths and the 8-Fold Path: *URW*, pp.67-70

--Discussion Post Five due Fri, Oct 2 at 5pm.
Tues, Oct 6: Nirvana and internal emergences: Mahayana and Theraveda: \textit{URW}, pp. 75-82; 108-110

Thurs, Oct 8: Special Topic: Sex in Western Buddhism: “What’s Wrong with Sex” from David R. Loy’s \textit{Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution}. pp.65-77 (OAKS)
--Discussion Post Six due Fri, Oct 9 at 5pm.

Tues, Oct 13: \textbf{Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return}
Situational Awareness: History and Covenant: \textit{URW} pp. 269-282
Thurs, Oct 15: Covenant and Historical Developments: \textit{URW} pp. 282-298
--Discussion Post Seven due Fri, Oct 16 at 5pm.

Tues, Oct 20: \textbf{No Zoom Meeting:} Film: “We Shall Not Die Now” (2019, 150min)
Available to rent online.
Thurs, Oct 22: Holocaust, Covenant, and Theodicy (Reading TBD)
\textit{Paper Two Due: Hinduism and Buddhism}
--Discussion Post Eight due Fri, Oct 23 at 5pm.

Tues, Oct 27: \textbf{Christianity: The Way of Salvation}
Situational Awareness: Historical Development, Sin, and Jesus of Nazareth:
\textit{URW} pp. 325-333
Thurs, Oct 29: Christianity as Way of Life and Salvation
--Discussion Post Nine due Fri, Oct 30 at 5pm.

Tues, Nov 3: NO CLASS—“Civic Duty Day” (i.e. Election Day) Go Vote!
--Discussion Post Ten due Fri, Nov 6 at 5pm.

Thurs, Nov 12: \textbf{No Zoom Meeting:} Film: “Jesus Camp”: (2006, 1:24) Available to rent online or free with various media subscriptions
--Discussion Post Eleven due Fri, Nov 13 at 5pm.
Tues, Nov 17: **Islam: The Way of Submission**  
Situational Awareness: The Life of Muhammad and Central Teachings:  
*URW* pp. 389-398; pp. 417-419

Thurs, Nov 12: The Five Pillars: *URW* pp. 419-426  
--Discussion Post Twelve due Fri, Nov 13, at 5pm.

Tues, Nov 17: **No Zoom Meeting:** Film: “Jihad: A Story of the Others” (2015, 50min) Available online

Thurs, Nov 19: Continued Discussion: Readings TBD  
--Discussion Post Thirteen due Fri, Nov 20 at 5pm.

Tues, Nov 24-Thurs, Nov 26: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break

Tues, Dec 1: **Religion in America**  
The First Amendment and the Establishment Clause  
[https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html](https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html)

--Discussion post Fourteen due Fri, Dec 4 by 5pm.

*Paper Three: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Due Tue, Dec 8 at 5pm.*