

RELS 105-03: Introduction to World Religions
Fall 2023

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher, PhD

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Time/Location: 10am-10:50am; Education Center Room 116

Office: 206 Religious Studies Department, 4 Glebe St

Office Hours: MWF 2pm-4pm; and by appointment (best option)

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to five of the world's major religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical development of each tradition and pay special attention to the myths, texts, rites, rituals, and narratives that are considered essential to qualifying each as a “lived” religious tradition. There is no prerequisite for this class.

Required Texts: 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. Through comparative, historical, and dialogical analysis, students will 1) learn to appreciate the significance of each religious tradition as a unique system of meaning; 2) learn to identify how religious adherents articulate (some of) 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.

SLO 1 will be assessed in the first writing assignment—Film: “Sacred: Milestones of a Spiritual Life.” SLO 2 will be assessed on the final exam.

Course Expectations and Technology Policy: Now that Covid restrictions are behind us, we will meet weekly, face-to-face, in the classroom. Students are expected to attend each class prepared for critical discussion—or suffer the consequences of a pure lecture format. The readings listed on the schedule below are to be completed for that day’s class meeting. Whether by actively listening or by actively contributing to discussion, students are expected *to be present*. For this reason, cell phones and laptop computers are not permitted unless otherwise approved.

Classroom Etiquette and Protocols: The Covid-19 pandemic required students (and faculty alike) to adjust on the fly. Fortunately, university planning and easing restrictions have made it possible for us to get refamiliarized with face-to-face instruction and classroom protocols.

As we begin this semester, then, let’s try to keep a few important things in mind. Firstly, flexibility is key. The purpose of this class is to introduce students to new ideas and cultural practices—most of which may be quite foreign. Developing a clear understanding of these ideas and practices requires time and effort and may require that we amend the schedule as listed below. Your continual attendance and participation are key to keeping you up to date and informed on any changes that are made.

Secondly, a university education requires that we inquire and engage course material with an inquisitive and open mind, and moreover, that we do this *critically*—that is, that we take the time and care to analyze these traditions (as well as our thoughts and/or beliefs about them) in ways that may run counter to what we’ve previously accepted. Be that as it may, you will be expected to be *ethical*—treating each other with dignity and respect. Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. **Period.** My classroom is a safe place to explore ideas and ask questions, so if you have them, fire away! However, your words and actions matter. The simple truth is that we are all surrounded by individuals whose experiences and beliefs are not identical to our own, so be sure to think carefully and thoughtfully before you engage.

Finally, you will be expected to be professional—attending class, actively participating, and completing assignments on time and without excuse. Accommodation can be provided, if possible, but it cannot be guaranteed. This is especially true when it comes to exams. If you foresee any problems fulfilling the requirements listed below, please speak to me ahead of time. Do not simply assume that you can make up a missed assignment or exam. Proper justification, documentation, and verification will be required for all missed assignments and/or exams.

Course Requirements: This class is assessed on a 200pt grading scale. In addition to attending class meetings and completing assigned readings, students will be required to complete 5 exams throughout the semester—one on each tradition covered. Each exam will be in-class (with the exception of the final exam, which will be a take-home exam) and worth 35pts. All exams will be based on material discussed in class and will be open-note. In addition, students will be required to write one critical assessment paper worth 25pts. Late papers will NOT be accepted.

Lying, cheating, attempting cheating and/or plagiarism (including the use of AI/ChatGPT programs) 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 and dealt with appropriately. 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.

Extra Credit: Students will have the opportunity to craft a critical assessment on a film related to each tradition covered. Papers are to be 2-3 pages in length and will be worth up to 10pts each. Papers will be due one week after the scheduled exam for each section.

Hinduism: “Ganges: A Journey Through the Senses of Water” (2019, 1:15)

Buddhism: “The Buddha” (PBS, 2010, narrated by Richard Gere)

Judaism: “We Shall Not Die Now” (2019, 150min)

Christianity: “Jesus Camp” (2006, 1:26min)

Islam: “The Future of Tolerance” (Podcast discussion between former Islamic radical Maajid Nawaz and American “New Atheist” Sam Harris.)

Course Schedule, Readings, and Assignments

(The following is NOT set in stone. Instructor reserves the right to make any changes as necessary.)

Weds, Jan 10: Introductions and Expectations

Friday, Jan 12: Orientation: What is Religion? Why do we study it?

URW: pp. 2-6; “Why Study Religion?”: CofC Department of Religious Studies website.

Mon, Jan 15: NO CLASS: MLK Jr. Day

Weds, Jan 17: Continued Discussion: Orientation

Fri, Jan 19: Situational Awareness: Excerpt from *Religion Matters* by Stephen Prothero: “Why Religion Matters” pp. 3-21 (Available on OAKS)

Mon, Jan 22: Continued Discussion: “Why Religion Matters”

Weds, Jan 24: Guiding Questions: Is Religious Diversity a Problem? How do we determine what’s *True*?

Reading from *A Magic Still Dwells* by Diana L. Eck: “Dialogue and Method: Reconstructing the Study of Religion” pp. 131-149

Fri, Jan 26: Continued Discussion

Paper One Assigned—SLO #1: Film: “Sacred: Milestones of a Spiritual Life”
(PBS 2016,1:27—Available for free on Prime Video.)

Mon, Jan 29: **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

Weds, Jan 3: Continued Discussion

Fri, Feb 2: Orientational Shifts and Effects: Samsara, Karma, and Reincarnation: pp. 18-20

Mon, Feb 5: Class, Caste, and Moksha: *URW* pp. 19-22; 33-39; 54-56

Paper One due beginning of class

Weds, Feb 7: Hindu’s Epic tradition and the Shift to Devotional Worship:

URW pp. 22-28; 39-50

Fri, Feb 9: Continued Discussion

Mon, Feb 12: **Exam One: Hinduism**

Weds, Feb 14: **Buddhism: The Way of Awakening**

Situational Awareness: A Shift in Methodology

Fri, Feb 16: Continued Discussion

Mon, Feb 19: The Life of the Buddha: *URW*, pp. 61-66

Weds, Feb 21: The Four Noble Truths and the 8-Fold Path: *URW*, pp.67-70

Fri, Feb 23: Continued Discussion

Mon, Feb 26: Nirvana and internal emergences: Mahayana and

Theravada: *URW*, pp. 75-82; 108-110

Weds, Feb 28: Continued Discussion

Fri, Mar 1: Special Topic: Sex in Western Buddhism: Reading from David Loy's *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution*: "What's Wrong with Sex" pp.65-77

Mon, Mar 4: Spring Break

Weds, Mar 6: Spring Break

Fri, Mar 8: Spring Break

Mon, Mar 11: **Exam Two: Buddhism**

Weds, Mar 13: **Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return**

Situational Awareness: History and Covenant: *URW* pp. 269-282

Fri, Mar 15: Continued Discussion

Mon, Mar 18: Covenant and Historical Developments: *URW* pp. 282-298

Weds, Mar 20: Continued Discussion

Fri, Mar 22: Holocaust, Covenant, and Theodicy

Reading from *God's Presence in History* by Emil Fackenheim. "The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz" pp. 67-98

Mon, Mar 25: Continued Discussion

Weds, Mar 27: **Exam Three: Judaism**

Fri, Mar 29: **Christianity: The Way of Salvation**

Situational Awareness: Historical Development, Sin, and Jesus of Nazareth:
URW pp. 325-333

Mon, Apr 1: Continued Discussion

Weds, Apr 3: Christianity as Way of Life and Salvation

Fri, Apr 5: Continued Discussion

Mon, Apr 8: Development and Diversions: Paul, Constantine, and Luther: *URW* pp. 333-340;
pp. 347-351

Weds, Apr 10: Continued Discussion

Fri, Apr 12: **Exam Four: Christianity**

Mon, Apr 15: **Islam: The Way of Submission**

Situational Awareness: The Life of Muhammad and Central Teachings:

URW pp. 389-398; pp. 417-419

Weds, Apr 17: Continued Discussion

Fri, Apr 19: The Five Pillars: *URW* pp. 419-426

Mon, Apr 22: Continued Discussion

Weds, Apr 24: Continued Discussion

Mon, Apr 29: **Take-Home Final Exam—Islam: Due 12pm (noon)**