



## RELS 105.02 Intro to World Religions

Dr. Brennan Keegan

MW 14-5:15

Ed. Center 219

### Course Description

One way to understand religion is as a system of stories, and there is no better way to engage with the world's religions than through the stories that animate their beliefs and practices.

Through the exploration of these ancient stories and contemporary practices, this course will explore the role of religion in our world and help you develop greater religious literacy and empathy. As we explore these traditions, we will keep in mind that religions are internally diverse, evolve and change through time, and are deeply interwoven within their historical, cultural, and political contexts.

### What's in this syllabus

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### Required Text:

Stephen Prothero. *Religion Matters: An Introduction to the World's Religions*. (WW Norton: 2020). Ebook, textbook or loose leaf are acceptable (can be a used copy). \*All other course materials will be available on our OAKS course page.

### Course Objectives

- Gain literacy and appreciation for many of the dominant religious traditions in the world;
- Recognize and discuss how religions and religious practices shape and are shaped by their cultural contexts;
- Distinguish diverse practices within a particular religious worldview;
- Improve ability to write and think analytically and comparatively about broad themes and historical moments, as well as specific texts and case studies.

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture, evaluated in three response papers;
- Students will examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments, evaluated in the “religion in the news” reflection paper and in-class primary source analysis assignments.

## Course Assignments

Participation in Class	200 pts.
Reflection Posts	200 pts.
Quizzes	200 pts.
Two Reflection Papers	200 pts.
Final Exam	200 pts.

## RELS 105 – Section 2

**Dr. Brennan Keegan**

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**Office hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays  
2-4pm & by appointment

## #Coronavirus Content

For now, this is a 100% in-person class. We do not have excessive space in our classroom and therefore cannot fully socially distance. **You must be wearing a mask at all times** and are *strongly encouraged* to get vaccinated to protect yourself and your classmates. You will not be allowed to eat in class and if you must take a drink, do so and very quickly put

your mask back on. Even if you have had COVID in the past, vaccinations are the only way that we are going to fully move away from this pandemic. Vaccinations are available for free twice a week on campus: [learn more here](#). Only students quarantining due to a COVID positive test will be allowed to join class via Zoom. If you have been exposed to COVID, get tested. “I might have COVID” is not the same as “I have COVID.” Please do not take advantage of the pandemic to simply not come to class. In-person attendance is required, this is not a hybrid course. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances.

Due to the reality of COVID, we may be required to change tactics and move the course fully online. This may include a shift in course requirements and due dates, but we will do what we need to ensure the safety of students and instructor and you will be given all necessary information in a timely fashion. We will remain flexible and vigilant—we got this!

## #Reflection Posts (200 points)

**Pre-class task.** It is very important that you not only **read the assigned material**, but that you **critically examine and interrogate it**. You should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to class. To ensure that you complete and are critically evaluating the readings, you will be required to post reflection posts to the OAKS Forum, a minimum of 10 times, noon before class. You will have 18 opportunities, thus 8 skips. These should be 200-300 words and include the following:

1. Very briefly summarize what you read. What did you learn?
2. Critically reflect on the material. What did you find puzzling, thought provoking, challenging or interesting? What are your thoughts about the topics covered? What about these readings resonated with you? Why? What material from other classes or experiences can you share that will expand the conversation on this topic?
3. Pose one question for in-class discussion. These questions can be drawn directly from the text or can be the result of thoughts you had by relating this specific text with previous readings or experiences.

You do NOT need to respond to the posts of your peers, these posts are to grade your own comprehension and analysis. Is it clear that you read the material? Do you offer direct evidence from the text? Thoughtful reflection? Is the answer to your question not easily found within the reading (these should be *discussion questions*)? For example: *How do the Five Pillars of Islam contribute to Muslim identity? or Can religious believers recognize multiple traditions as legitimate and not lose their faith?*

will compile these questions before class in order to address content confusion and guide in-class discussion. **Due on OAKS noon before class (10 times).**

### #Participation in class (225 points)

**In-class task.** Active student participation is crucial for the success of this course and the development of your individual learning. We learn best when we learn together. Throughout this course, we'll spend considerable time laying a foundation conducive to respectful but challenging discussion through which we can all grow. We will grapple with complicated, emotional, and thought-provoking topics as a community. In this endeavor, we will seek to be supportive of each other and to actively reflect on our own assumptions. Attendance is mandatory, as is participation in class discussions and work performed in groups. In discussion, aim for substantial contributions over quantity of comments. That is, comments should respond to those made by others—listen to each other, move the discussion forward, and pose new questions for consideration. You have two, no questions asked absences. For every additional absence, 2% will be subtracted from your grade. At 7 absences (1/3 of classes) you will automatically receive an F for the course.

I trust you to tell me directly any time you are going to miss class due to health issues and in turn, I will trust that the explanation you give for your absence is honest and truthful. If you miss class, make up activities will be assigned. If you are sick for a prolonged period of time, we will work together to determine a plan of action that will benefit your learning.

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof. Please let me know at least a week before the religious holiday so I might make appropriate changes to group work.

### #Quizzes (175 points)

At the end of each unit you will be quizzed on content to ensure you are keeping up with the readings and course material. Careful marginalia (those notes you make on your readings) and clearly structured in-class notes will serve you well. The quiz questions are pulled directly from your textbook and will be reinforced through in-class instruction. Worth 25 points each.

### #Reflection Papers (200 points)

**Task:** Reinforce and critically apply readings, class discussions, classroom exercises, and any other materials that we discussed in class in a 500 to 750-word paper (2-3 pages). Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. Upload a digital copy to OAKs before class begins.

**Paper 1: What is religion and why should we study it?** For this essay, answer the following questions in a cohesive (not in numbered short answers or stand-alone paragraphs) analytical paper: Provide a definition of what you think "religion" means. Discuss the elements of your definition and explain why you chose them. Then, explain why it is important to study religion. What do you hope to gain by studying world religions? What are different ways people study religion and how should we do so at CofC? What do you hope to achieve by studying religion? You must make direct reference to at least one of the VoiceThreads *and* Chapter One of the textbook.

**Paper 2: Religious Problems and Solutions.** Two weeks into the course, you have been introduced to Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these religious traditions understand the problem of the world to be different and have associated solutions. For example, wherein Christians believe the human problem is sin, Muslims believe the human problem is pride. Christians believe the solution to the problem is salvation, just as Hindus believe the solution is release. What do you think these distinctions mean? Can you point to specific beliefs and practices in each tradition that suggest why they believe in each problem and solution? *Focus on two or three traditions and compare and contrast the problems and solutions with direct references to specific practices and beliefs.* Be sure to cite all information you pull from the texts.

**Grading Criteria (100 Points Each):** *25 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *35 Points:* Engagement with sources and course material (Does the paper use appropriate sources to respond to the prompt? Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Does the paper use the sources to develop and support a larger argument?) *40 Points:* Development of a thesis/argument (Is there a clear thesis statement? Was the thesis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does the thesis answer the prompt? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage with the material?)

### #Final Exam (200 points)

Your final exam will consist of multiple choice, identification, short answer questions, which will cover the religious practices, beliefs, and objects of the religious traditions studied, as well as a short essay asking you to reflect on the study of religion more broadly. Many of your quiz questions throughout the semester will be literally reproduced on this exam. My suggestion is to review these quizzes as a study tool, create shared worksheets with your classmates with details of the traditions, and review reflection posts and terms at the end of each textbook chapter.

### Course Schedule (\*indicates pdf available on OAKS)

Date	Topic	What to Read/Watch/Do	What's Due
<b>Unit 1: Introduction to Religious Studies</b>			
1/10	Introduction to the Course	Read the syllabus. Post any questions or confusions to the "Course Lounge"	
1/12	Studying Religion	<b>Read before class:</b> Introduction: "Why Religion Matters" to "A four-part model," 3-21.	Reflection Post 1
1/17	<b>No class. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.</b>		
1/19	How to study Religion	<b>No in person Class – Dr. Keegan at conference.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Watch "Defining Religion" VoiceThread <b>(+2 Comments)</b> (1.1)</li> <li>○ Watch "How and Why Study Religion" VT (1.2)</li> <li>○ Watch "Religious Literacy" VT (1.3)</li> <li>○ Take Religious Literacy Survey</li> <li>○ Post to the discussion forum: how and why should we study religion?</li> </ul>	Online Discussion

<b>Unit 2: Hinduism</b>			
1/24	Intro to Hinduism	Hinduism: "Religions of Release" to "Hindu History: Epics," 26-55. Martian Anthropologist exercise	Reflection Post 2
1/26	Lived Hinduism	"Hindu History: The Bhakti Tradition" to "Contemporary Controversy," 55-75.	RP 3
1/31	Ramayana	Watch: <i>Sita Sings the Blues</i>	Paper 1
2/2	Yoga	*Andrea Jain, "Is Downward Dog the Path to Hell?" Yoga debate	Unit 2 Quiz
<b>Unit 3: Buddhism</b>			
2/7	Intro to Buddhism	Buddhism: "The Way of Awakening" to "Mainstream Buddhism," 79-98.	RP 4
2/9	Buddhist Techniques	"Mahayana Buddhism" to "Buddhism in the Modern World," 99-112. * <i>The Dhammapada</i> , chapters 1-3 In-class meditation debate and exercise	RP 5
2/14	Lived Buddhism	"Buddhism in the United States" to "Contemporary Controversy," 112-126.	Unit 3 Quiz
<b>Unit 4: Judaism</b>			
2/16	Intro to Judaism	Judaism: "Religions of Repair" to "Judaism 101," 170-189.	RP 6
2/21	Jewish Texts	*Selections from the Talmud Talmud activity	RP 7
2/23	Jewish History	"Jewish History," 189-206.	RP 8
2/28	Lived Judaism	"Judaism in the United States" to "Contemporary Controversy," 206-222.	Unit 4 Quiz
<b>Unit 5: Christianity</b>			
3/2	Intro to Christianity	Christianity: "The Way of Salvation" to "Mystics and Philosophers," 225-249.	RP 9
<b>March 7-11 no classes - Spring Break</b>			
3/14	Christian History	"Christian History: The Protestant Reformation," to "Modern Christianities." 249-267.	RP 10
3/16	American Christianity	"Christianity in the United States" 260-281. *John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)	RP 11
3/21	Christianity & Race	"Lived Christianity" to "Contemporary Controversy," 281-9. *Frederick Douglass, "Appendix," to <i>Life of an American Slave</i> . *Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 502-513.	Unit 5 Quiz
<b>Unit 6: Islam</b>			
3/23	Intro to Islam	Islam: "The Way of Submission" to "Islam 101," 293-307.	RP 12
3/28	Islamic History	"Islamic History," 307-325.	RP 13
3/30	Lived Islam	"Islam in the US" to "Contemporary Controversy," 326-337. *Warren Penn interview with Malcolm X, 1964.	RP 14

4/4	Sonic Religion	In class case study, the Call to Prayer	Paper 2 Due & Unit 6 Quiz
<b>Unit 7: Daoism</b>			
4/6	Intro to Daoism	Daoism: "The Way of Flourishing" to "Daoism 101," 391-407.	RP 15
4/11	Daoist History	"Daoist History," 407-426.	RP 16
4/13	Lived Daoism	"Lived Daoism" to "Birth and Death" 433-6 *Daodeching, chapters 1-5, 42, 43, 47, 48 *Zhuangzi, "The Secret of Caring for Life"	Unit 7 Quiz
<b>Unit 8: Navajo Religion</b>			
4/18	Intro to Indigenous Traditions	Navajo Religion: "The Way of Beauty" to "Navajo Religion 101," 441-461.	RP 17
4/20	Navajo History	"Navajo Religious History," 462-472.	RP 18
4/25	Lived Navajo Religion	"Lived Religion in Navajoland" to "Contemporary Controversy," 472-487.	Unit 8 Quiz
		Final exam	

**The Fine Print.** Oaks: OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. **Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73- 76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below. **Late Policy:** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class unless otherwise noted. Any assignment turned in after the deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10%) for each day the assignment is late, up to a week. After a week, I will not accept the assignment. **Regarding plagiarism:** Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>. **Technology Use in Class:** We will be busy in every class session and we don't need any electronic distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If it rings, I reserve the right to answer it. Laptops are allowed unless it becomes clear that students are misusing them. **Center for Student Learning:** The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. The services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu>. **Mental & Physical Wellbeing:** At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3<sup>rd</sup> Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863,

visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health. **Diversity Statement:** Consistent with College of Charleston's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus. **Accommodations:** We all learn in different ways. If you know or believe that you need additional help, the College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>. **Email etiquette:** I am happy to communicate with you via email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours during the week. If it's 3 AM and you're feeling panicked, angry, frustrated, or annoyed, that most likely is NOT a good time to send an email. Ever. To me or anyone else. Take this as an important life lesson. It will serve you well. If you are sure that your questions or comments are professional and appropriate, be sure to include these professional courtesies: 1. In the subject line please indicate the content of the email and 2. Begin your message in the following manner: Dear Professor Keegan... And finish with sincerely, best, thanks, etc. followed by your full name. Do the same for every professor you're in contact with! Professionalism goes a long way.