RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions  
Spring 2021  
Sections 03, 04

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher, PhD  
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Time: T/H 9:25-10:40; 12:15-1:30  
Office: Room 206, Religious Studies Department, 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 supposedly “secular” society like the United States. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical developments 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/Materials: 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 or purchase, 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 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. The first Learning Outcome will be assessed on paper four (Christianity), and the second Learning Outcome will be assessed on paper five (Islam).

**Course Expectations:** 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, we will meet weekly via Zoom with *synchronous* meetings at the regularly scheduled time—just as if we were meeting in the classroom. Meetings will not be recorded unless personal accommodations require it, and links to those recordings (if necessary) will be sent directly to the student. Pedagogically, given the online format, students should prepare themselves for a “lecture-forward” course, though they are also expected (and strongly encouraged!) to attend each class ready for critical discussion.

As we all know well, such preparation can be particularly challenging given the myriad of distractions that accompany distance education. Nevertheless, 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. To that end, assigned readings are to be completed prior to class meeting, and all questions and comments should be raised during class time. Despite meeting via Zoom, 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 though we are online, this is still 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.** Despite several semesters of distance education under our collective belts, there will inevitably be some hiccups. Together, we must be committed to remaining flexible and forgiving and, most importantly, committed to staying focused amongst potential changes.
- **Be ethical.** Together we must engage in discussion in a way that is affirmative, open, and above all, respectful. Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. **Period.** This “classroom” is a safe place to ask questions and express ideas, so if you have them, fire away! However, your words matter, and we are each
surrounded by individuals and experiences that are not identical to our own, so be sure to think carefully and thoughtfully before you speak.

**Course Requirements:** This class is assessed on a 230pt grading scale. In addition to attending class meetings and completing assigned readings, students will be required to complete 6 discussion posts throughout the semester. These posts will constitute your attendance and participation grade, and their combined score will constitute 30pts of your final grade. **Late posts will NOT be accepted.**

There will also be 6 graded papers. Each will be a minimum of 3-4 pages. The first paper will be a self-critical reflection paper worth 20pts, and the remaining 5 papers will be tradition-specific and worth 30pts/each. **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).)

There will also be a comprehensive final exam—open book, open note—worth 30pts.

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/SPN, 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, Jan 12: Introductions and Expectations
Thurs, Jan 14: Orientation: What is Religion? Why do we study it?

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

Tues, Jan 19: Situational Awareness: Selection from *Religion Matters* by Stephen Prothero:

“Why Religion Matters” pp. 3-21

Thurs, Jan 21: **No Zoom Meeting**—Film: “Sacred: Milestones of a Spiritual Life” (PBS 2016, 1:27) Available for free on Prime Video

**Discussion Post One due Sunday, Jan 24 at 11:59pm.**

Tues, Jan 26: Guiding Question #1: Is Religious Diversity or Difference a Problem?


Thurs, Jan 28: Guiding Question #2: Religious Pluralism and Interpretation: How do we determine what’s True?


**Paper One Assigned: Significant Encounter**

Tues, Feb 2: **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, Feb 4: Class, Caste, and Moksha: *URW* pp. 19-22; 33-39; 54-56

**Paper One Due Sunday, Feb 7 at 11:59 pm—Significant Encounter**

Tues, Feb 9: Hindu’s Epic tradition and the Shift to Devotional Worship:

*URW* pp. 22-28; 39-50

Thurs, Feb 11: **No Zoom Meeting**: Film: “Ganges: A Journey Through the Senses of Water” (2019, 1:15) Available for free on Amazon Prime.

**Paper Two Assigned: Hinduism**

**Discussion Post Two due Sunday, Feb 14 at 11:59pm.**
Tues, Feb 16: **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, Feb 18: The Four Noble Truths and the 8-Fold Path: *URW*, pp.67-70  
*Paper Two Due Sunday Feb 21 at 11:59--Hinduism*

Tues, Feb 23: Nirvana and internal emergences: Mahayana and Theraveda: *URW*, pp. 75-82; 108-110

Thurs, Feb 25: Special Topic: Sex in Western Buddhism: “What’s Wrong with Sex” from David R. Loy’s *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution.* pp.65-77 (OAKS)  
*Paper Three Assigned: Buddhism*  
Discussion Post Three due Sunday, Feb 28 at 11:59pm

Tues, Mar 2: **Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return**  
Situational Awareness: History and Covenant: *URW* pp. 269-282

Thurs, Mar 4: Covenant and Historical Developments: *URW* pp. 282-298  
*Paper Three Due Sunday, Mar 7 at 11:59pm--Buddhism*

Tues, Mar 9: **No Zoom Meeting:** Film: “We Shall Not Die Now” (2019, 150min) Available to rent online.

Thurs, Mar 11: Holocaust, Covenant, and Theodicy  
*Paper Four Assigned: Judaism*  
Discussion Post Four due Sunday, Mar 14 at 11:59pm

Tues, Mar 16: **Christianity: The Way of Salvation**  
Situational Awareness: Historical Development, Sin, and Jesus of Nazareth: *URW* pp. 325-333

Thurs, Mar 18: Christianity as Way of Life and Salvation  
*Paper Four Due Sunday, Mar 21 at 11:59pm--Judaism*


Thurs, Mar 25: **No Zoom Meeting:** Film: “Jesus Camp” (2006, 1:26min) Available to rent
Tues, Mar 30: **Islam: The Way of Submission**  
Situational Awareness: The Life of Muhammad and Central Teachings:  
*URW* pp. 389-398; pp. 417-419  
Thurs, Apr 1: The Five Pillars: *URW* pp. 419-426  
*Paper Five due Sunday, Apr 4 at 11:59pm—Christianity*

Tues, Apr 6: Special Topic: “Terrorism: Jihad Abused?” from Robert Spencer’s  
*Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West*

Thurs, Apr 8: **No Zoom Meeting:** Film: “Islam and the Future of Tolerance” (2018, 89min)  
Available to stream on Amazon Prime.  
*Paper Six Assigned—Islam*  
*Discussion Post Six due Sunday, Apr 11 at 11:59pm*

Tues, Apr 13: **Religion in America**  
Special Topic: Atheism in America: “Them’s Fightn’ Words: A Brief Look at New Atheism in America” by Erika Blair (OAKS)  
Thurs, Apr 15: Continued Discussion  
*Paper Six Due Sunday, Apr 18 at 11:59pm*

Tues, Apr 20: **Course Wrap-up and Evaluations**

Tues, Apr 27: **Final Exam:** Open book, open note comprehensive exam during scheduled exam hours.  
Section 03: 8am-10am (I am open to moving this time period if we all agree.)  
Section 04: 1pm-3pm