

Introduction to World Religions

PHIL 2130-E01, Online, Summer 2018 Session I

About this Course

Course Description

This course revolves around two central questions: how has the world shaped religion(s), and how have religions shaped the world? As we move through an introductory survey of some of the world's major religious traditions, including indigenous religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and selected new religious movements, we will pay special attention to the ways in which these traditions have been shaped by historical, political, and geographical changes in the world—and will also consider how these traditions and their communities have influenced these changes. Over the course of the semester, we will seek both to understand the significance and relevance of religion in world history and to begin to grapple with some of the important philosophical questions addressed within religious communities as well as by those who study them.

Learning Objectives

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- define basic concepts of the discipline of religious studies.
- describe and compare the discourse, practices, communities, and institutions of selected religious traditions.
- provide examples of both diversity and continuity within religious communities and traditions.
- analyze historical and contemporary political issues around the world in terms of their connection to religious discourse, practice, communities, or institutions.

These course-specific learning outcomes contribute to the departmental learning outcomes of the Philosophy Program by enabling students better to:

- discuss the views of at least three major historical figures of philosophy; and
- critically analyze a philosophical issue in written communications.

These course-specific learning outcomes contribute to the Core Area E learning outcomes by enabling students better to:

- demonstrate understanding of political, social, and cultural dimensions of world history.
- demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts of a discipline examining the social world.

Instructor and Contact Information

Instructor: [Dr. Rosemary Kellison](#)

Email: rkelliso@westga.edu

Google Hangouts username (for instant-message or video chat): rkelliso@westga.edu

[Course Website on CourseDen](#)

English & Philosophy Department: 678.839.6512; TLC 2255

How to Get in Touch with Dr. Kellison

To get the fastest response, email me directly at rkelliso@westga.edu (not through the CourseDen email system). We can also talk through Google Hangouts after setting up an appointment. At our appointment time, go to hangouts.google.com and log in using your MyUWG email address and password. Click Video Call for a video chat or Message for instant-message; type in my username (rkelliso@westga.edu) to begin the chat.

How to Complete this Course

Modules and Assignments

Our CourseDen site is organized by module. To complete a module, click on the Content tab at the top of our course homepage, and then click on the module link on the left. Make sure you read and complete all assignments within that module's folder. Each module contains three sub-modules:

1. Slides and Other Readings. This folder contains two types of documents, which include all of our readings:
 - a. PDF slides: These slides contain the most basic and important information for the module. Read these slides carefully. In these slides, you will find references to other course readings and videos where you can find more in-depth information.
 - b. Other readings: These other short readings help you to gain a more in-depth perspective on some of the issues discussed in the slides. They are mostly short excerpts from scriptures or other primary sources or news articles about the topics under discussion.
2. Videos. Each video in this folder is referenced somewhere in the PDF slides. They are listed in order as found in the slides. There are two types of videos in this folder:
 - a. Dr. Kellison Explainers: In these videos, I provide a more in-depth explanation of the issues being discussed on that particular slide. There are no visuals in the videos, so feel free to listen without watching. I have added closed captioning to all of these videos, which you can use for accessibility purposes or if you prefer reading over listening. To see the captions, simply click the CC icon in the lower right-hand corner of the video.
 - b. Other videos: These videos are mostly news reports or primary-source videos that again provide a more in-depth look at the issues being discussed. They do include visuals, so I recommend watching and not merely listening to these videos. Again, to active closed captioning, click the CC icon in the lower right-hand corner of the video.
3. Assessments. You must complete two assessments (graded assignments) for each module. More information on the grading of these assignments can be found below in this syllabus.
 - a. Class discussion: Class discussion on the CourseDen discussion boards helps all of us to gain a more thorough understanding of the topics we are studying by learning from each other.
 - b. Module Assignment: After completing all of a module's readings and vides, and participating in class discussion, you will complete an open-note short-answer assignment.

Timing and Progression through the Course

On the course calendar, you will see that I have listed the dates I expect most people to be working on each module. For example, we will work on Module 2 on May 15, 16, and 17. You are welcome to work ahead or to use the weekends to work on modules as well, but note that:

- Each module does have a due date. By this date, you should have completed both assessments for that module.
- It is important that you are able to respond to classmates' discussion posts. Therefore, your posts for each module must be posted on at least two different dates, and at least one of those must be during the official dates for that module. For example, you can work ahead and make two of your Module 2 posts on May 14, but then your third post must be posted on either May 15, 16, or 17, so that everyone has a chance to respond to one another.
- Modules 3 and 4 will not be accessible until Saturday, May 19.

Technical Assistance and Accessibility

Make sure to use a computer to access course materials. Some functions of CourseDen may not function properly if accessed from a phone or tablet. Also, make sure that you have a reliable internet connection, and identify backup sources in case you have internet problems (like UWG computer labs, UWG libraries, or public libraries). Problems with computers or internet access are not an acceptable excuse for failure to complete course assignments on time. If you experience any technical difficulties with CourseDen, contact the UWG HelpDesk right away: call 678-839-6248, 1-855-933-8946, or (after hours) 1-855-772-0423. You can also email online@westga.edu or visit [D2L Help](#).

I have done my best to make all course documents accessible to text readers. If you encounter any difficulties accessing a course document, please let me know. If you need information on how to make any course tools accessible, please click the links below to visit the accessibility information for each of these tools at the following sites:

[Adobe PDFs](#) | [CourseDen](#) | [Google, Google Slides, and Google Hangouts](#) | [YouTube](#)

Time Needed to Succeed in this Course

In only 11 class days, we will be covering all the same material we would normally cover in a 15-week semester version of this course. So, you will need to invest a significant amount of time each day to succeed. Normally, in a Session I course, we would meet in person each day for 3.5 hours to go over the slides and have class discussion. Therefore, you should expect to spend about 3 hours each day reading the slides and participating in online class discussion. You should expect to spend a few additional hours each day on the activities that would always be completed outside of class: reading additional assigned readings and completing your assignments.

Assessment

Mandatory Day 1 Agreement and Introduction (0%)

By 9:00 am on Monday, May 14, all students must complete the Day 1 Agreements and introduce themselves to the class by posting on the Introductions Discussion Board. Later assignments will not be graded until these tasks are complete.

Module Assignments (12% each = 48%)

There is one open-book, open-note assignment for each module. These assignments help you learn and review the assigned material in a comprehensive and critical way. You should read through the module materials (slides, videos, readings, etc.) before completing your assignment. You must work alone on these assignments. If you get locked out of an assignment, email Dr. Kellison. If you encounter any other technical problem, contact the [UWG Help Desk](#).

Module Discussions (5% each = 20%)

Your participation in online discussions will be graded according to a rubric, available on CourseDen, that assesses: the frequency and timeliness of your posts, conduct and respect for others, critical thinking about the discussion question, and evidence that you have carefully read the assigned materials. You should plan to make at least 3 substantive, critical contributions to online discussion for each module. Your contributions for each module should be spread out over at least two different dates (including at least one that is during the scheduled period for that module) in order to give everyone the chance to respond to one another. Discussion on Modules 1 and 2 will be closed on the midterm exam due date.

Midterm and Final Exams (16% each)

The midterm and final exams are non-cumulative. These open-note, open-book exams will require you to answer several short-answer and essay questions. The midterm exam is due by 9 am on Monday, May 21. Late midterm exams will be penalized 25% immediately and an additional 25% per day late. The final exam is due by 9 am on Wednesday, May 30. Late final exams will not be accepted except in cases of documented, excused emergencies. You must work alone on both exams.

Grading Scale

90–100: A; 80–89: B; 70–79: C; 60–69: D; <59: F

Course Policies

For information on policies regarding Disability Services, the UWG email policy, the UWG credit hour policy, and the UWG honor code, please see [UWG Common Language for Course Syllabi](#). Some important points to note: 1) Friday, May 18, is the last day you can withdraw from this course with a grade of W. 2) For privacy and security reasons, you must email Dr. Kellison only from your MyUWG email account. It is your responsibility to check that account regularly. 3) If you require any sort of accommodation due to a disability, you must email Dr. Kellison your SAR at the beginning of the semester. 4) Any cases of

plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will result in a grade of 0 for the relevant assignment; second offenses will result in failing the entire course. Academic Honor Code violations will be reported.

Course Calendar (subject to change with advance notice)

First Day: Start Here!

Module Title:

Course Introduction

Assessment Due Dates:

Day 1 Agreement and Introductions due by 9 am on Monday, May 14

Topics Covered:

- Introduction
- Syllabus and course expectations
- Getting to know one another

Readings:

- Course syllabus

May 11 and May 14: Module 1

Module Title:

Indigenous Religious Traditions and the History of Religious Studies

Assessment Due Dates:

Discussion 1 and Assignment 1 due by 9 am on Tuesday, May 15

Topics Covered:

- The academic study of religion
- IRTs of Africa and North America
- Adaptation in religion

Readings:

- Module 1 Slides
- Russell McCutcheon, "What is the Academic Study of Religion?"
- David Chidester, "Animism"
- Johnny Flynn, "New Age Tragedy in Sedona"

May 15, May 16, and May 17: Module 2

Module Title:

Hindu Traditions and Buddhist Traditions

Assessment Due Dates:

Discussion 2 and Assignment 2 due by 9 am on Friday, May 18

Topics Covered:

- Hindu texts and worship
- The invention of "Hinduism"
- Hindu nationalism
- Origins of Buddhism
- Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana

- Tibet–China conflict

Readings:

- Module 2 Slides
- Selections from the Upanishads
- Selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*
- Pankaj Mishra, “How the British Invented Hinduism”
- “The Four Noble Truths” sutra
- Jeffrey Bartholet, “Aflame”

May 18: Midterm Exam

Exam Due Date:

Midterm exam due by 9 am on Monday, May 21

May 21, May 22, and May 23: Module 3

Module Title:

Jewish Traditions and Christian Traditions

Assessment Due Dates:

Discussion 3 and Assignment 3 due by 9 am on Thursday, May 24

Topics Covered:

- Hebrew Bible tradition
- Rabbinic Judaism
- Modern Judaism and Israel
- Early Christianity
- Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant
- Contemporary trends in worship

Readings:

- Module 3 Slides
- Genesis 12:1–9, 15, & 17 and 2 Maccabees 5:11–8:19
- Johann David Michaelis, “Arguments against Dohm”
- Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* excerpt
- Matthew 5–7
- “The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity” (secs. 3–10)
- Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian” excerpt
- Mac Margolis, “Father Marcelo Rossi, Brazil’s Celebrity Priest”

May 24 and May 25: Module 4

Module Title:

Islamic Traditions and New Religious Movements

Assessment Due Dates:

Discussion 4 and Assignment 4 due by 9 am on Monday, May 28

Topics Covered:

- Muhammad and early Islam
- Five pillars of Islam

- Modern Islam and Islamism
- NRM to be chosen by class vote

Readings:

- Module 4 Slides
- Daniel Brown, "The Life of Muhammad"
- Quran excerpts
- Noah Feldman, "Why Shariah?"
- Robin Wright, "A Short History of Islamism"
- NRM reading TBD

May 29: Final Exam

Exam Due Date:

Final exam due by 9 am on Wednesday, May 30