

PHIL 3640-003: World Religions

Course Syllabus

Meeting dates: August 13-17, 2018

Meeting times: 8 AM - 5 PM

Location: SANDY 110

3 credit hours

Instructor: Landon McBrayer, Ph.D.

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Office hours: CTIHB 441 (by appointment)



Course Description: This course primarily serves as an introduction to the vast diversity of the world's great religious traditions. More specifically, we will examine the core teachings, history, major schools, and contemporary practice of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Becoming acquainted with such diversity naturally presents one with the philosophical problem of how best to deal with the facts that (i) the world is a very religious place and (ii) the major religions of the world apparently make conflicting claims about what is true. This problem, or set of problems, will be explored alongside our study of the world's religions.

Learning objectives:

- Develop critical thinking and analysis of religious ideas, concepts and texts
- Develop effective communication skills through writing and discussion
- Foster an understanding of core beliefs and lived experiences of the traditions studied
- Foster a comparative approach to understanding religious traditions and the cultures that arise within religious communities
- Foster an awareness of how religious tradition influences people's thought and behavior on key global (conflicts, interfaith relationships) and social issues (gender)
- Foster a dispassionate grasp of the core ideas and ideals that motivate people from diverse cultures

Required texts:

-*Living Religions* (ninth/tenth edition), ed. Mary Pat Fisher (Prentice Hall, 2014/2016)

-*On Religious Diversity*, by Robert McKim (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Evaluation and Grading: final grades will be determined by the following: Pre-Work, Class-Work, Post-Work:

- **Pre-Work** (Work due BEFORE August 13th) - 20% of the final grade: This class is reading intensive. To ensure that class time is effective during the week we meet, students are expected to read the relevant chapters from both texts *before* that week. (See schedule below for readings.) To help ensure the readings are completed, two quizzes will be posted for each religion (10 quizzes total). These quizzes will cover the basic doctrines/beliefs, figures, and history of the religion covered in the readings. If you do the readings, you should do well on the quizzes. The quizzes may be taken on the course Canvas page under the 'quizzes' tab, and they are timed. Again, the quizzes must be completed before August 14; no makeup quizzes will be given.
- **Class-Work** (Work due DURING class) - 20% of the final grade: Passive and active participation will be graded during the week of class. Passive participation involves attendance and presence during the lecture period. Active participation during class will take place through various assignments, such as small group and partnership discussions. In small groups, students will engage with primary text and scripture related to the tradition studied that day. Students may be asked to do in-class writing assignments as part of class, at the instructor's discretion. This participation grade is typically based on completion; students earn credit for doing the work.
- **Post-Work** (Work due AFTER August 17th)
 - **Exams** - 20% of final grade, each: There will be two exams. One will cover the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and the other will cover Hinduism and Buddhism. These exams cover the key concepts and teachings, historical figures, practices, and timelines/demographics of each religion covered. Each test will consist of a variety of question types, including short answer, fill-in-the-blank, matching, multiple-choice, and definitions. Study guides for each exam will be posted in Canvas before the week of class meetings. The study guides will exhaust the material on the tests; as such, one's level of mastery of the study guides should correspond to one's success on the tests. The exams will be available after the week of class meetings, and must be completed by the end of August 2018. The exams can be found in Canvas under the 'quizzes' tab; both exams are timed.
 - **Scholarly Article Reviews** - 20% of final grade: There will be a series of side-lectures, scattered throughout the week, on the so-called problem of religious diversity (see McKim text). We will examine the three main responses to that problem: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In lieu of a course research paper, you will be required to write three two-page reviews of scholarly articles defending those positions. Here is what I mean: you will need to search a scholarly database (Philosophers Index, for

example) through the Marriott Library to find essays that defend exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. For each of those three essays you find, you will write a two-page review wherein you summarize the argument in the essay and offer a point of critical evaluation. **These reviews may be turned in at any time after August 17 and through the first week of September 2018. Reviews will be submitted via turnitin.com (details to follow).**

[A standard grading scale will be used—including + and – grades (90's = A range; 80's = B range; 70's = C range; 60's = D range; <60 = F).]

Ground Rules, Policies, etc.:¹

- Student Registration Status: This class is offered for both credit and noncredit students. Students not taking the class for credit are welcome to do as much coursework (or as little) as they feel necessary. All students, credit or noncredit, are held to the same standards regarding course policies.
- Civility: Some of the content of this course may be viewed as controversial. In a sense, the topics covered will not be new to any of us; everybody has an opinion of some kind on religion—its source, content, truth, etc. As such, in-class discussions will have the potential to be emotionally charged and even heated. To avoid this, each student needs to do their best to be respectful of opposing viewpoints and the religious convictions of others. Behavior that runs counter to civil discussion will not be tolerated.
- Academic Honesty: All student essays submitted for this class must be the student's own work. Plagiarism of any kind will result in a grade of zero for the assignment—no exceptions. Likewise, cheating on tests/quizzes will result in a zero for the assignment (see next item).
- All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights as detailed in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). The Code also specifies conduct that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content.

¹ Note: The syllabus is not a binding legal contract. It may be modified by the instructor when the student is given reasonable notice of the modification.

- **ADA statement:** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.
- **Attendance / Effective Time Management:** Attendance is mandatory. This class only meets for 5 days, and each day is crucial for proper retention of material. Missing even part of a class is a major problem. Absences must be related to a satisfactory reason: severe illness, hospitalization, jury duty, court summons or death in the family. All absences require (depending on circumstances) satisfactory prior notice. The students are highly recommended to inform the instructor of any absence ahead of time, regardless of the reason for the absence. This course is time-intensive; each class day will run for 9 hours (with a lunch break, and other small breaks).

Schedule and Reading List:

Day One (8/13)

- Course introduction - What is religion? What is philosophy? How can studying religion be doing philosophy?
- Judaism (Background reading: Fisher, Ch. 8)

Day Two (8/14)

- Christianity (Background reading: Fisher, Ch. 9)
- Exclusivism (Background reading: McKim, Ch. 4)

Day Three (8/15)

- Islam (Background reading: Fisher, Ch. 10)
- Inclusivism (Background Reading: McKim, Ch. 5)

Day Four (8/16)

- Hinduism (Background reading: Fisher, Ch. 3)

Day Five (8/17)

- Buddhism (Background reading: Fisher, Ch. 5)
- Pluralism (Background reading: McKim, Ch. 6)