

PHIL 2640-070: World Religions

Pre-Fall 2024

Course Syllabus¹

Meeting dates: August 12-16

and November 18 from 6-8 PM via Zoom

Meeting times for August: 8 AM-5 PM

Location: Sandy 106

3 credit hours

Instructor: Landon McBrayer, Ph.D.

Email: landon.mcbrayer@utah.edu

Office hours: CTIHB 441 (by appointment)

Preferred Contact: Canvas email function or

Umail



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 issues (conflicts, interfaith relationships) and social issues (gender)
- Foster a dispassionate grasp of the core ideas and ideals that motivate people from diverse cultures

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.

Required texts:

- *Religion Matters*, by Stephen Prothero (Norton, 2020) Note: This text is provided through the U's "Inclusive Access" program. Each enrolled student should receive an email with instructions for accessing the Ebook.
- *On Religious Diversity*, by Robert McKim (Oxford University Press, 2012)

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

- **Pre-Work** (Work due *BEFORE* August 12th) - 30% of the final grade:
 - **InQuizitive Assignments + Readings:** To ensure that class time is effective during the week of meeting in person, students are expected to read the relevant chapters from both texts *before* that week. (See schedule below for readings.) For each assigned reading from the *Religion Matters* text, there is a corresponding InQuizitive assignment; the InQuizitive assignments may be found via either the 'Modules' or 'Assignments' tabs on our course Canvas page.
- **Class-Work** (Work due *DURING* our class week) - 25% of the final grade: Passive and active participation will be graded during the week of class. Passive participation involves attendance during the lecture period. Active participation during class will take place through various assignments, such as in-class discussions, discussion assignments via Canvas, etc.
 - **Religious Text Shallow Dives** (15% of the final grade): On four of the five days that we meet, the class will divide into small groups. In these groups, students will engage with primary religious texts and scriptures related to the religious tradition studied that day.
 - **Religion Discussion Posts** (10% of final grade): During our class week, a series of discussion questions will be posted to Canvas—one for each day that we cover a new religion (5 total). For these 5 discussion threads, each student must offer a thoughtful contribution in response; original contributions should be at least 150 words. Apart from your original contribution, feel free to further respond to other students' comments, to continue the dialogue, if desired.

- **Post-Work** (Work due *AFTER* August 16th) - 45% of the final grade
 - **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 exam will consist of a variety of question types, including fill-in-the-blank, matching, and multiple-choice. 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 the first week of September—by 9/7 at 11:59 PM. The exams can be found in Canvas under the 'Quizzes' tab; both exams are timed.
 - **Problem of Religious Diversity Discussion Posts** (5% of final grade): After our virtual Zoom class on 11/18, a series of discussion questions will be posted to Canvas— one for each position on the problem of religious diversity (3 total). For these 3 discussion threads, each student must offer a thoughtful contribution in response; original contributions should be at least 150 words. Apart from your original contribution, feel free to further respond to other students' comments, to continue the dialogue, if desired. The due date for these discussion posts will be the end of that week (Saturday, 11/23 at 11:59 PM)

[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). The lowest and highest two values in each range will constitute minus and plus grades, respectively.]

Note: For the sake of consistency and to keep all students on a level playing field in a large class, **all assignment due dates are hard deadlines**; that is, no late assignments or partial credit are accepted. (Exceptions can be made for documented severe illness/injury, a death in the family, etc.)

Schedule and Readings:

Day One (8/12)

- Course introduction - What is religion? What is philosophy? How can studying religion be doing philosophy? (Optional reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 1)
- Judaism (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 5)

Day Two (8/13)

- Christianity (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 6)
- Exclusivism (Background reading: McKim, Ch. 4)

Day Three (8/14)

- Islam (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 7)

Day Four (8/15)

- Hinduism (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 2)

Day Five (8/16)

- Buddhism (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 3)

Day Six (11/18 from 6-8 PM)

- Inclusivism (Background Reading: McKim, Ch. 5)
- Pluralism (Background reading: McKim, Ch. 6)

Ground Rules, University Policies and Recommendations, etc:

- COVID-19-related policies: the U's information and guidelines related to COVID-19 may be found [here](#).
- *Civility*: Some of the content of this course may be construed as controversial. Each student needs to do their best to be respectful of opposing viewpoints and the ethical, social, and religious convictions of others. Behavior that runs counter to civil discussion will not be tolerated.
- *Academic Honesty*: All student projects and papers submitted for this class must be the student's own work. Plagiarism of any kind will result in a failing grade for the assignment—no exceptions.
 - **Note: Key to demonstrating mastery of the course content is the showing of originality in course assignment submissions. As such, use of any generative AI (such as ChatGPT) in class assignments constitutes plagiarism and will be treated the same as "traditional" forms of plagiarism (e.g., copying the work of another without proper attribution). For details, see the Student Code linked below.**
- *Academic Code of Conduct*: More generally, all students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, as

spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) 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.

- *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. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.
- *Campus Safety:* The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.
- *Addressing Sexual Misconduct:* Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801- 581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).
- *Diversity/Inclusivity Statement:* It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that

students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

- *Veterans Center:* If you are a student veteran, the U of Utah has a Veterans Support Center located in Room 161 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5pm. Please visit their website for more information about what support they offer, a list of ongoing events, and links to outside resources: <http://veteranscenter.utah.edu/>. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.
- *Wellness Statement:* personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness at www.wellness.utah.edu or 801--581--7776.