

PHIL 2640-070: World Religions

Pre-Spring 2025

Course Syllabus¹

Meeting dates: In-person January 2-4 (Thurs to Sat), January 11th, and January 25th,

and January 29 from 6-8 PM via Zoom

Meeting times for in-person Dates: 8 AM-5 PM

Location: Sandy 202

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, 2024) 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* January 2nd) - 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 meeting days) - 25% of the final grade: Passive and active participation will be graded during in-person meeting days. 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): On our in-person meeting days, 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* January 25th) - 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 February—by Sunday, 2/9 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 1/29, 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 (Sunday, 2/2 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 (1/2)

- 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 (1/3)

- Christianity (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 6)

Day Three (1/4)

- Islam (Background reading: *Religion Matters*, chapter 7)
- Exclusivism (Background reading: McKim, Ch. 4)

Day Four (1/11)

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

Day Five (1/25)

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

Day Six (1/29 from 6-8 PM)

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

Ground Rules, University Policies and Recommendations, etc:

- *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 to the ethical, social, and religious convictions of others. Behavior that runs counter to civil discussion will not be tolerated.
- *Academic Honesty and Code of Conduct*:
 - It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: [Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct](#).
 - Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code:

- *“...Includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one’s work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information...It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.”*
- For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

- *All other University of Utah mandatory institutional policies for syllabi:*
 - The U’s general policies are regularly updated and can be viewed [HERE](#).