

PHIL 2640-090: World Religions

Course Syllabus¹

Spring 2025; January 6 - April 30

This is an **online** class administered through Canvas

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Office hours: via Zoom by appointment

Preferred Contact: Canvas messaging 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 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 thoughts and behavior on key global issues (e.g., conflicts, interfaith relationships) and social issues (e.g., marriage, race, gender)
- Foster a dispassionate grasp of the core ideas and ideals that motivate people from diverse cultures

Required texts:

-*Religion Matters* (Second Edition) by Stephen Prothero (Norton, 2024) (*note: students can purchase the Ebook + InQuizitive via the U's Inclusive Access program. You should be emailed about this by the Campus Bookstore.)

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

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.

Evaluation and Grading: This class is divided topically into six Blocks—with each Block devoted to a different religious tradition or problem. For each Block, there are three types of assignments:

- **InQuizitive Content quizzes** (30% of final grade): Completion of the assigned readings is crucial for success in this class; students are expected to enter each Block prepared by having done the assigned readings for that Block (listed below in the schedule). For each Block's assigned reading, there is a corresponding InQuizitive assignment; the InQuizitive assignments may be found via either the 'Modules' or 'Assignments' tabs on our course Canvas page. ****The InQuizitives for each Block must be completed by the final Sunday at 11:59 PM****
- **Video Quizzes and Exit Tickets** (30% of the final grade): For each Block, a series of video lectures will be posted on that Block's religion. Embedded in each of these video lectures will be a few multiple-choice questions about the content and an occasional 'Exit Ticket' question at the end asking for your view on something discussed in the lecture. The purpose of this assignment is to incentivize students to watch the video lectures in full and critically engage with their content. ****For each Block, the video quizzes must be completed by the final Sunday at 11:59 PM.****
- **Religion Discussion Posts** (10% of final grade): Over the length of the course, a series of discussion questions will be posted to Canvas—one for each Block we cover a new religion (5 total) plus one for each lecture on the problem of religious diversity (3 total). For these 8 discussion questions, 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 respond further to other students' comments, to continue the dialogue, if desired. ****For each Block, the discussion posts must be submitted by the final Sunday at 11:59 PM.****

Additionally, there will be two exams during the semester:

- **Exams** (15% of final grade, each): There will be a midterm exam (Block Four) and a final exam (Final Exam Period). 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. For each exam, a study guide will be posted in the 'files' tab of our Canvas page. 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. No makeup tests will be given, barring serious circumstances (illness, family emergency, etc.). In such circumstances, legitimate documentation detailing the reason for the absence must be provided in order to make up the test. ****The midterm exam must be completed by 11:59 PM on the final Sunday of Block Four (3/8); The Final exam must be completed by 11:59 PM on the last day of the final exam period (4/30). The exams will be timed.****

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 = E). The lowest and highest two values in each range will constitute minus and plus grades, respectively (for example, 80 and 81 are B-grades, 82-87 are B grades, and 88 to 89 are B+ grades).

Schedule:

Block One (1/6 - 1/25): JUDAISM + Course Intro

- (Reading: Prothero, ch. 5 (Part II intro optional))

Block Two (1/26 - 2/8): CHRISTIANITY

- (Reading: Prothero, ch. 6)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day (1/30)

Block Three (2/9 - 2/22): ISLAM

- (Reading: Prothero, ch. 7)
- Presidents Day holiday (2/17)

Block Four (2/23 - 3/8): HINDUISM

- (Reading: Prothero, ch. 2 (Part I intro optional))
- ★ **MIDTERM EXAM** - on Canvas

Spring Break! (3/9 - 3/16): no course content; enjoy the break!

Block Five (3/16 - 3/29): BUDDHISM

- (Reading: Prothero, ch. 3)

Block Six (3/30 - 4/12): The Problem of Religious Diversity

- Religious Exclusivism (Reading: McKim, chs. 1 and 4)
- Religious Inclusivism (Reading: McKim, ch. 5)
- Religious Pluralism (Reading: McKim, ch. 6)

Course Wrap-up (4/13 - 4/22): What did we just do?

Final Exam Period (4/24 - 4/30)

- ★ **FINAL EXAM** - on Canvas

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](#).