

PHIL 3640-070: World Religions

Course Syllabus

Meeting dates: March 9 - 13, 2020

Meeting times: 8 AM - 5 PM

Location: Sandy 110

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

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 categories of assignments: Pre-Work, Class-Work, Post-Work:

- **Pre-Work** (Work due BEFORE March 9th) - 20% of the final grade: This class is moderately 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 from February 24 to March 9th and in accordance with the quiz schedule on Canvas; 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 March 13th)
 - **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 March 2020. 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 two 2-3 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 March 13 and through the first week of April 2020. Reviews will be submitted via Canvas (see 'assignments' tab).*

[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.

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 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.
- *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.
- *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 session means missing out on a lot of condensed content. Absences must be related to a satisfactory reason: severe illness, hospitalization, jury duty, court summons, death in the family, etc.

Schedule and Readings:

Day One (3/9)

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

Day Two (3/10)

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

Day Three (3/11)

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

Day Four (3/12)

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

Day Five (3/13)

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

