

World Religions
MWF 14.00–16.50
Summer 2018 (June 20 – July 23)

Instructor: Dr. Cody Staton

Office: By appointment

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Course Communication: All emails should be sent to the addresses listed on the syllabus. Students may schedule appointments either before or after class.

Course Description: This course will introduce students to the major themes of prominent religions throughout the world. We will survey the basic principles of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and others in order to better understand the ways in which different cultures have derived meaning from them. Our primary goal will be to examine critical philosophical themes that run throughout each tradition. In addition, we will explore religious and philosophical problems that pertain to religion as a whole. Some themes include, but are not limited to: the problem of evil and suffering, the significance of death, the meaning of religious experience, etc.

We will investigate the ways in which myth and symbolism contribute to religious practices. Although we will mostly focus on the core principles of these religions, we will discuss their relation to modernity more generally. In particular, we will read Søren Kierkegaard, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and William James in an effort to explain how structures of meaning and belief continue to pervade modern life, and ask how science and philosophy should deal with our relation to religion.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- (1) To develop an understanding of the core values and principles of the major world religions
- (2) To differentiate the nature of philosophical questions from religious, scientific, and mundane ones
- (3) To develop the skill to write a philosophical essay
- (4) To incorporate philosophical perspectives into one's life
- (5) To develop an appreciation of the roles religions play in society

Course Outline

Lecture 1

Introduction to the Course and introduction to myth and symbolism in religious practice.

Reading: Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*, pp. 1–4.

Lectures 2 and 3

Religious traditions of India (Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism). **Reading:** Vedas, Upanisads, and Bhagavad-Gita (selections in *Sourcebook*)

Quiz #1

Lectures 4 and 5

Buddhism. **Reading:** *Sourcebook*, pp. 273–80; Selected early Buddhist discourses (online); Lévi-Strauss, pp. 4–14

Short Essay #1 due

Lectures 6 and 7

Traditions of China: Confucianism and Daoism. **Reading:** Confucius, *Analects* (selections); Laozi, *Daodejing* (selections)

Quiz #2

Lectures 8 and 9

Traditions of China continued. Traditions of Japan: Shintoism. **Reading:** Lévi-Strauss, pp. 15–24, James, *The Will to Believe* (selections)

Short Essay #2 due

Lectures 10 and 11

The Abrahamic Tradition: Judaism and Christianity. **Reading:** Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Lectures 12 and 13

The Abrahamic Tradition: Christianity and Islam. **Reading:** Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Quiz #3

Final Exam: July 23 — Comprehensive exam and short essay

Course Format: We begin each week by examining one of the world's classical religious traditions. Throughout the week, we will discuss modern texts that raise pertinent philosophical questions about our relation to these traditions in light of science, technology, art, modernity, etc.

Although this is a lecture course, I expect students to ask questions and engage in discussions. I do not give power point lectures, nor do I put lecture notes online. Students are expected to take notes in class. Notice that some weeks require more reading than

others. Students are expected to complete the reading assignments prior to class. I wholeheartedly welcome questions before and after class, or to arrange an appointment, if students would like to discuss any of the course material or aspect of the class.

Attendance: Participation and attendance are essential to success in this course. Students that attend class regularly always do better than students that miss classes. It is far better to follow the weekly readings and attend regularly than to try to catch up on missed classes and readings later. Should you miss more than 3 courses, your grade will decrease by a letter grade. Given the short span of time in which we will cover a semester's worth of material, it is critical that you do not miss class repeatedly.

Planned Assessment Tasks: Final grades are based on in-class quizzes, short writing assignments, and class participation. **Quizzes** will be given at the end of the week at the start of class. They will consist of short answer questions.

The **short writing assignments** are 1 pg. (max.). In them, you should write a synopsis of one of the religions that we have discussed thus far in the semester. This will facilitate your ability to write a clear essay on the final exam.

Attendance: 20%

Quizzes: 30%

Short Essays: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Readings:

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*

Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (selections)

Holder (ed.), *Early Buddhist Discourses* (selections)

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Laozi, *Daodejing* (selections)

Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (selections)

William James, *The Will to Believe* (selections)