

# Philosophy 151- Introduction to World Religions



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**Office Hours:** M-F by appointment

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**Class Time:** T/TH 9:30 am to 10:45 am

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## Course Description:

Philosophy 151 is an introductory survey course designed to expose students to the teachings and traditions of a wide variety of faiths. These include, but are not limited to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hindu traditions, indigenous religious practices, and emerging faiths. In addition to foundational information about each tradition, we will be focusing on a number of themes: defining "religion", theory vs. practice, moral codes, gender roles, asceticism, science and religion, and contemporary issues related to religious expression. The eclectic and ecumenical approach we will be using, combining anthropological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives, should allow us to investigate all of these issues in some depth. Students will have the opportunity to explore their own cosmologies and cosmogonies in any way they feel to be appropriate. The goal of the course is not to discredit or judge any belief system, but rather to provide an understanding of each in context.

The two philosophical ideas below are also VERY important in terms of how you approach this course.

### World religion is a VERY broad area

This is an introductory course in world religions, so we will only be scratching the surface of some of the major, enduring traditions around the world as well as some that are perhaps less well known. Because the scope of the course is VERY broad, I will be using ideas from a number of academic fields to help clarify the discussion on particular traditions and their unique features. Some weeks, our discussions might seem more sociological; other weeks, the themes might have a more historical or anthropological tone. Just be prepared for this kind of approach.

### Religious studies is NOT theology

One of the key distinctions I like to make at the start of the course is the difference between the fields of religious studies and theology. In a nutshell, a religious studies perspective attempts to look at all religious systems as being internally cohesive and viable; they work for the participants in a given tradition regardless of how that tradition appears to outsiders. For example, if I was an adherent of an Asatru kindred group (a type of neo-pagan movement), I could argue that there is nothing inherently less valid about *my* religious perspective in comparison to a more established religion like Judaism. I could make the same claim about other common comparisons: Christianity vs. Islam; Buddhism vs. Scientology, etc... An individual outside any of those traditions could take the position that some of those belief systems seem to have more easily verified components, but that does not invalidate a particular belief or viewpoint. ***We will try to look at all traditions with an equal amount of skepticism and acceptance.***

The religious studies viewpoint is not about “proving” or “disproving” any particular perspective on divinity, morality, or human nature. It is more focused on the similarities or universals amongst traditions in terms of common metaphors, orientations, rituals, symbols, or other facets of religious experience.

Theology, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that divinity exists (i.e. God is real) and then focuses on the systematic analysis of the belief structure that springs up around that reality. For example, Christian theology concerns itself with discussions of the attributes of God, the true message of the Gospels, how to lead a redeeming Christian life, etc... Islamic theology would concern itself with the same general ideas but within the context of the Quran and the precedent of Islamic scholarship internal to that tradition.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of global religious practice
- Interpret and analyze primary source religious literature from the historical-critical perspective
- Demonstrate understanding of the relationships between specific texts produced by different religious traditions and the teachings that arise from them.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between religious studies and other fields of academic endeavor (i.e. sociology, anthropology, history, etc...)
- Collaborate with others on presenting specific religious studies topics from a phenomenological perspective
- Use various critical thinking strategies to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources (i.e. primary texts, secondary texts, multi-media presentations, experiential learning, etc...)

**Required Text/Stuff:**

Religion Today: A Critical Thinking Approach to Religious Studies, most recent edition, by Ross Aden  
World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored and Explained, most recent edition, by John Bowker  
Ability to access a computer/the Internet semi-regularly during the course of the term

**Attendance:**

I will be checking attendance for the first couple of meetings, but after that, it is up to you to attend regularly. We will also be doing in-class writings just about every meeting; I will use those to determine participation grades. One missed class will probably not result in any kind of huge deficit, but excessive absences (two or more) will most likely impact your work negatively. If you miss a session, please check out Blackboard course site for archived materials.

**Grading:**

The grading for this course is flexible and will be decided during the first day of class. The weight that is assigned to each one is up to the class as a whole. There are only five limitations: 1) the point total for exams is not changeable, 2) no category can be worth less than 100 points, 3) fractional totals or those not rounded to the nearest ten points are not acceptable, 4) the group wiki project can't be worth more than 200 points, and 5) the total number of points must equal 1000. Please remember that if one category is given fewer points, then another category must be weighted more heavily.

Mid-term and final exams (250 points each) -----	500	points
Weekly quizzes (12)-----	___	points
Response papers (5) -----	___	points
In-class writings and discussion -----	___	points
Group wiki page project -----	___	points

Letter grades are then generated at the end of the term based on a strict percentage scale. Grades with an attached "+" or "-" will be given for those point totals which fall within the top or bottom 2% of each grade category (there is no "A+"). For example, a student with 860 points would receive a straight "B" grade. A different student, who had accumulated only 820 points, would receive a "B-" (820= the lowest 2% of the "B" category or .82x1000=820).

A=	900-1000 points
B=	800-899 points
C=	700-799 points
D=	600-699 points
F=	below 600 points

### Due Dates:

Due dates are included in the syllabus and are not generally flexible. Late papers will *not* be accepted unless a student is experiencing/has experienced a personal tragedy, emergency, or some other *extreme* situation. In such cases, try to speak to me privately as soon as possible.

***Please remember: It is your responsibility to keep up with assigned readings and paper due dates as presented in the syllabus. Check with me or a classmate to keep up with syllabus changes. Many resources (i.e. lecture slides, handouts, etc...) will be available on the class Blackboard page.***

### Writing Papers:

Write papers for this class as if you were submitting them for an English course. Grammatically sound language and an academic tone will be expected of all out-of-class assignments. Any exceptions to that will be made explicit when writing tasks are assigned.

MLA format- All out of class assignments must be typed and double-spaced with realistic margins according to MLA format. I will outline this format in class prior to your first written assignment. Any up-to-date English/writing reference will have a section on how to use this set of writing conventions. These are two of the best online resources to use:

The Purdue Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Bedford/ St. Martin's Writing: [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rewriting2e/#t\\_526483](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rewriting2e/#t_526483)

Paper submission- Please submit electronic copies of all out of class papers by attaching them as readable files and sending to my TRCC e-mail address. Acceptable file formats are.doc, .docx, .txt, .rtf, and .odt. Making documents accessible through cloud storage sites is not an alternative; I will not log in to Google Docs or other similar sites to read papers.

Returned Papers- All graded copies of papers will usually be returned one week after the due date. Sometimes that doesn't happen due to circumstances beyond my control, so please be patient. I try to include both content and style comments on returned papers for you to use as suggestions for future assignments.

Computers- It is *strongly recommended* that you use a computer or tablet in the writing process, as it will greatly reduce the time you spend on revision. Try to get into the habit of using MS Word or another document generation program when you initially compose your work and save it to a separate flash drive, cloud storage, or other medium frequently. It will make revisions more convenient, and it will also give you experience using the technology. All papers should be proofed thoroughly by a human. Computer spell-checks and grammar checks are notoriously fallible. You can also take advantage of the writing tutors in TASC/Writing Center by making a face-to-face appointment or submitting a paper via e-mail at [TRWritingCenter@trcc.comnet.edu](mailto:TRWritingCenter@trcc.comnet.edu)

### Campus Policies:

Plagiarism- Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words or ideas in your writing. Conscious plagiarism is an unacceptable academic behavior that will result in a "0" for the plagiarized assignment, with no

re-write possibilities. Any repeat offense will result in a failing grade in the course. Plagiarism by omission or “unconscious” plagiarism will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. To review definitions of plagiarism and strategies of how to avoid it, I recommend these resources:

*Purdue OWL Plagiarism Tutorial:* <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>  
University of Southern Mississippi: <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>

*Withdrawal policy-* A student who finds it necessary to discontinue a course once class has met must provide written notice to the registrar. Withdrawal forms are available at the Registrar’s office. No punitive “W” grades are assigned to any withdrawal requested before the unrestricted withdrawal deadline for the semester. Withdrawal requests received after this deadline must bear the signature of the instructor. No withdrawals are permitted after the last class preceding the final exam. Those who do not obtain an official withdrawal, but simply stop attending classes, run the risk of receiving an “F” grade for the course

*Students with disabilities-* If you have a disability that may affect your progress in this course, please meet with a Disability Service Provider (DSP) as soon as possible. You can make an appointment with a DSP by calling (860) 215-9016. Please note: 1.) For academic adjustments, you will have to provide documentation of your disability to the DSP. 2.) Instructors cannot provide adjustments until you have delivered written authorization (from a DSP) to the instructor. 3.) Adjustments take effect when you deliver your written authorization to the instructor in person (provided there is adequate time for the instructor to make necessary arrangements). 4.) Adjustments do not apply to tests/assignments that were due prior to your delivering written authorization to your instructor in person.

*Cancelled classes-* There is a possibility that class might be cancelled unexpectedly due to weather or another unforeseen circumstance. In such cases, check the college web site for official closing notifications. I will also post updates on Blackboard or through the e-mail. All electronic correspondence of that nature will be done through your official campus e-mail; I strongly recommend that you set that up to forward to another address if you don’t check your campus e-mail frequently.

*Digication-* All students are required to maintain an online learning portfolio in Digication that uses the college template. Through this electronic tool students will have the opportunity to monitor their own growth in college-wide learning. The student will keep his/her learning portfolio and may continue to use the Digication account after graduation. A Three Rivers General Education Assessment Team will select and review random works to improve the college experience for all. Student work reviewed for assessment purposes will not include names and all student work will remain private and anonymous for college improvement purposes. Students will have the ability to integrate learning from the classroom, college, and life in general, which will provide additional learning opportunities. If desired, students will have the option to create multiple portfolios.

### **Revisions to Syllabus:**

The information contained in the syllabus is subject to revision at my discretion. I will inform the class of any changes that are made. If you miss a class, contact me or talk to a classmate upon your return to verify that you have the most up-to-date information.



### Reading and Assignment Schedule for Philosophy 151

Items in bold are written assignments, quizzes or other work that is due at the end of the week indicated.

#### **Week 1- 9/1 and 9/3**

##### Readings/ Assignments Due

###### *Religion Today*

Chapter 3, pp 77-104- Would you Believe!?

###### *World Religions*

What is religion, ancient religions, pp 6-17

##### **Take week one quiz**

##### In Class

Introduction to the course, active reading strategies, writing responses, syllabus quiz, themes, course ground rules, what is religion?, the “hand” of religious studies

#### **Week 2- 9/8 and 9/10**

##### Readings/ Assignments Due

###### *Religion Today*

Chapter 3, pp 77-104- Would you Believe!?

###### *World Religions*

None

##### **Reader Response #1 due by the end of the week- your Belief-O-Matic results**

##### **Take week two quiz**

##### In Class

Ways of studying religion, materialistic, functional and faith perspectives, ultimate reality, exploring the “big questions”, group assignment detailed

#### **Week 3- 9/15 and 9/17**

##### Readings/ Assignments Due

###### *Religion Today*

None

###### *World Religions*

Native religions, pp 196-206

##### **Take week three quiz**

##### In Class

Animism, Native American traditions, modern borrowings by other movements

#### **Week 4- 9/22 and 9/24**

##### Readings/ Assignments Due

###### *Religion Today*

Chapter 1- Introducing a Critical Thinking Approach to Religious Studies

###### *World Religions*

Judaism, pp. 122-147

##### **Take week four quiz**

In Class

Moral codes and behavioral codes, Biblical conflicts, literal vs. metaphorical interpretations, video, foundations of Christianity, modern Judaism

**Week 5- 9/29 and 10/1**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 1- Introducing a Critical Thinking Approach to Religious Studies

*World Religions*

Christianity, pp. 148-172

**Take week five quiz**

In Class

History of church, perspectives on Christianity, differing view on the virtuous life, proselytizing, impact on western civilization, Christ imagery, NT interpretation

**Week 6- 10/6 and 10/8**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 6, pp. 243-270, pp. 286-293- Trouble in the Global Village

*World Religions*

Islam, pp. 176-195

**Reader Response #2 due by the end of the week- selections from the Quran**

**Take week six quiz**

In Class

“Pillars of Islam”, women’s roles, tradition vs. teaching, Sheehan article discussion, modern Islam, introduction to matrix use

**Week 7- 10/13 and 10/15**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 5, pp. 183-217, pp.227-241- Inside the Religious Brain

*World Religions*

Buddhism, pp. 58-81

**Take week seven quiz**

In Class

Asceticism, mysticism, meditation practice, Buddhist tenets, schisms/branches of Buddhism, PP slides; making the midterm

**Week 8- 10/20 and 10/22**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

None

*World Religions*

None

**Take midterm exam**

In Class

Midterm exam over two days

**Week 9- 10/27 and 10/29**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 4, pp. 125-162, pp. 173-182- The Right to Sacred Things  
*World Religions*

Chinese and Japanese religions, pp. 96-121

**Take week nine quiz**

In Class

Symbolism and balance, ascetic ideals, “environmental” religion, Buddhist connections, PP slides

**Week 10- 11/3 and 11/5**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 4, pp. 125-162, pp. 173-182- The Right to Sacred Things

*World Religions*

Chinese and Japanese religions, pp. 96-121

**Reader Response #3 due by the end of the week- verse/ theme from the *Tao Te Ching***

**Take week ten quiz**

In Class

Analects discussion, “filial piety”, incorporation of multiple traditions in China, animistic religious traditions, Shinto/Buddhist multiplex, review midterm, Shinto ceremony video

**Week 11- 11/10 and 11/12**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 2, pp. 20-50, pp. 62- 76

*World Religions*

Hinduism, pp. 20-43

**Take week eleven quiz**

In Class

Variations of “Hinduism”, polytheistic monotheism, Brahman/atman, timeline, sources of teachings, main terminology, more ascetic traditions, yoga

**Week 12- 11/17 and 11/19**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

No readings

*World Religions*

Jains and Sikhs, pp. 44-57 and pp. 82-95

**Reader Response #4 due by the end of the week- designing your own religious tradition**

**Take week twelve quiz**

In Class

Jain, Sikh, and Hindu/Islamic connections, the guru tradition, practice and traditions

**Week 13- 11/24 and 11/26 (Thanksgiving break- no class meetings)**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

None

*World Religions*

None

In Class

None- use break to work on group project

**Week 14- 12/1 and 12/3**

Readings/ Assignments Due

SR- New Movements handout

**Reader Response #5 due by end of the week- reflections on the course**

**Take week fourteen quiz**

In Class

New directions in religious pluralism, scientology, Raelians, Yoda, other faiths; an interview with a founder

**Week 15- 12/8 and 12/10**

Readings/ Assignments Due

*Religion Today*

Chapter 7, pp. 295-333 and pp344-349- Making It After All: The Future of Religion

*World Religions*

The Golden Rule, pp. 208-209

In Class

Make final exam; project presentations

**Week 16- 12/15 and 12/17**

Readings/ Assignments Due

Study for Final exam

In Class

Final exam over two days

**Any and all remaining pieces of work are due by 3pm  
on Friday, 12/18/2015.**

