

Gods, Gurus and Guns: Introduction to World Religions

FYE RLGS 105

Prof. Wakoh Shannon Hickey
Alfred University Fall 2011

Class Meets: 11:15 a.m.-12:45 p.m. Tue., Wed., Fri.
421 Science Center

Dr. Hickey's Office: 2nd floor Kanakadea Hall, last office on left.

Office Hours: Drop-in, Thursdays, 10-noon, except first Thursday of the month, when hours are 10:30-noon. **By appointment:** 9-10:30 a.m. Tues.-Fri.

How to Make an Appointment: Sign up outside my office door, then e-mail.

Worst time to stop by: Immediately before class.

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Peer leader: Nick Walker, nrw1@alfred.edu

OVERVIEW, GOALS

Together we will think about how people in different cultures, religious traditions, and eras have understood things like “religion,” God or gods, the forces of nature, our relationship to the divine, time and space, the meanings of life and death, social relationships and rules, the roots of problems such as illness, misfortune, war, death, evil, and injustice.

We will see how religions help people to orient themselves in time, space, and place, to “make homes and cross boundaries”; how they intensify joy and confront – as well as cause – suffering; how they interact with politics, economics, law, power, privilege, gender relations; how they can encourage violence; and how, at their best, they teach adherents to overcome greed and self-centeredness.

We will study basic doctrines, texts, and practices, and learn about key people and events, in a number of different religious traditions, including indigenous traditions, four religions of India (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism), and the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). We will think about how religions function in the 21st century, including the problem of religious violence and terrorism. We will think comparatively across religious traditions, to understand how they are related, similar, and different.

In the process, you will learn how to read and write more efficiently, effectively, and critically. You will engage in respectful dialogue, self-assessment, evaluation, and teamwork.

You are expected to arrive prepared for every class meeting. This means having read the assigned material, taken notes on it, thought about it, developed questions about it, and brought text and notes to class, so that you can participate actively in large- and small-group tasks.

Why This Course Matters

Religion fuels conflict, violence, and war around the globe. It also fuels some of humanity's greatest acts of selfless service. Religion lies at the heart of many American legal, political, educational, artistic, and even scientific debates — past and present. “If religion is this important, we ought to know something about it, particularly in a democracy, in which political power is vested in voters,” says religion scholar Stephen Prothero in *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — and Doesn't*. I agree.

Understanding the basic histories, principles, and practices of the major world religions — and some smaller ones — can help you make sense of the world around you and the people you encounter daily. It can help you understand the relationship between religion and culture; the role of religion in public life; some roots of current religious conflicts; and the worldviews of people in your own family and communities. It can help you to clarify your own beliefs and opinions, and help you to understand and work more effectively with people who differ from you. The learning skills you develop here will serve you throughout your academic and professional life.

Learning Outcomes for the Course:

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain key terms, doctrines, and practices in each of the traditions we study.
- Describe the major texts, sub-groups, rituals, festivals, and/or observances in each tradition.
- Compare the traditions we study, explaining how they are similar, different, and related.
- Apply theories of religion, such as Albanese's 4 Cs, or Tweed's definition of religions, to particular cases.
- Assess and evaluate their own ability to read and write effectively, and do the same for their peers, identifying strengths, areas for improvement, and next steps.
- Synthesize what they have learned in creative projects.
- Work more effectively in teams, finding ways to resolve problems when they arise.

Relationship to the Goals of A.U. General Education and FYE:

In keeping with the AU College of Liberal Arts and Sciences draft General Education Learning Outcomes, this course will help students to:

- Explore human cultures, by introducing them to a variety of religious traditions around the world;
- Communicate as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and artists, by asking them to produce essays and other creative projects, and to participate in large- and small-group discussions;
- Respond to problems and/or opportunities creatively, by asking them to solve a variety of intellectual and practical problems related to course material;
- Practice personal and social awareness through engagement with local and global communities, by asking students to reflect on how their social location shapes the

assumptions, attitudes, and blind spots they bring to the study of religion, and by asking students to work in teams; and

- Apply knowledge and skills by thinking comparatively; analyzing theories to see how they do and don't fit particular cases; improving skills in critical reading, writing, and thinking; and asking and answering questions at different levels of difficulty.

The goals of the AU FYE program are to:

- Help students produce high-quality college-level work and develop a positive work ethic.
- Encourage students to form “learning communities” in which students share responsibilities and support one another in their academic endeavors.
- Give first-year students an opportunity to participate in a small, seminar-style class in which concentrated attention can be paid to each student, and close working relationships between students and instructors can develop.
- Encourage students to become fully integrated into the University community by introducing students to and encouraging participation in a wide variety of extracurricular activities.

Methods

The course will employ a variety of methods: lecture, discussion, video, audio, reading and writing assignments, self-assessment, peer evaluation, and teamwork. Students will study a course textbook and some primary sources, and will reflect on course material in a four-stage writing process that includes: pre-writing, drafting, response and revision, and editing/polishing. Students will also explore and write about a variety of campus resources and activities.

GRADING

Grades will be based on the following:

- **A summary of the AU Academic Dishonesty Policy**, graded with a check, check-plus, or check-minus, worth 5 percent of the final grade.
- **Two comparative papers**: one on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; and one on the three Abrahamic traditions and Sikhism, each worth 15 percent of the final grade.
- **Two short essays**: one on the film “Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations,” and one on a Buddhist precept. Each is worth 10 percent of the final grade.
- **Four blog posts**: one on privilege, one on spiritual disciplines, and two on films shown in class. Each is worth 5 percent of the final grade. These are graded with a check, check-plus, or check-minus.
- **A minimum of five journal entries** about different campus activities you attend. Choose from the following list, and write *no more than one entry per type of activity*: An athletic event; a Bergren Forum; a Women’s Studies Roundtable; a Global Awareness Roundtable; an Environmental Studies Forum; a student club meeting; a religious activity; a performance (live music, dance, theater, comedy); an art exhibit; or a volunteer service. Each is worth 1

percent of the final grade. You are responsible for identifying, attending, and writing about these events on your own time. These journal entries will be included in your portfolio.

- **Preparation and participation in class meetings**, 10 percent of final grade. This includes both attendance (see policy below) and the professor’s assessment of how attentive you are during class and how actively you participate in class discussions. If you are shy about speaking in a large group, you can participate by asking questions or making comments over e-mail, or by bringing to class news, music, or other items related to the religious traditions we study.
- **A portfolio**, which will be evaluated at mid-semester and at the end of the semester. As a representation of your work as a whole, it is worth 10 percent of the final grade. In other words, the individual assignments will be graded, and the portfolio as a whole will be graded. The final version will include:
 - ___ A cover letter introducing the contents of the portfolio and explaining what you learned this semester;
 - ___ Your final Academic Dishonesty paper;
 - ___ At least one of the two comparative projects, with study guides/pre-writing, drafts, feedback, and revisions;
 - ___ At least one of the two short essays, with notes, drafts, feedback, and revisions;
 - ___ At least three of the four blog posts;
 - ___ At least five journal entries on different campus activities; and
 - ___ All self-assessments and peer evaluations of your writing.

You’ll be working on the portfolio all semester, gathering materials that represent your achievements as a writer and as a member of the classroom community. You will submit the portfolio to Dr. Hickey, but it will also be read by others, including the directors of the FYE program. Its purpose is to show what the “first year experience” is at Alfred – how this class has approached the goals of the FYE program and how you’ve grown over the course of your first semester at AU. It will demonstrate that you’ve completed the FYE requirement for graduation.

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D
96-100	91-95	86-90	81-85	76-80	71-75	66-70	61-65	56-60	51-55
10	9.5	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5

COURSE POLICIES

Disability: If you have a disability and need an accommodation to help you succeed in class, please let Dr. Hickey know right away. Alfred University is committed to upholding and all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you are a student with a disability and want to request accommodations, please contact Dr. Aubrey Elmore at the Office of Special Academic Services located in Crandall Hall: (607) 871-2148. Information regarding your disability will remain confidential. Many accommodations require early planning, so make requests for accommodations as early as possible.

Tutor Services/Requests: The office of Special Academic Services also offers personalized help in the form of individual and group tutoring. Please contact Beth Niles at (607) 871-2148 for more information. Also, contact your instructor for additional support.

Religious Concerns: Students who need to miss class in order to participate in the religious observances of their own traditions may do so, but they must make arrangements with the professor *in advance* to make up any required work.

Athletes: Students who must miss class to participate in athletic events must notify the professor at the beginning of the semester *and* by e-mail at least one week before each class to be missed, and must make arrangements to get notes from class, contribute to class teamwork, and submit assignments timely.

Academic or Other Difficulties: If you are having academic or other difficulties that affect your ability to do your work, or you want information about support services available on campus, please see the professor right away. She will help you find appropriate resources. If you are struggling with the course work – you're not confident about your analytical reading or writing skills, or you're having trouble meeting deadlines, or you're concerned about grades, or you're having problems with attendance, or for any reason you think you'd benefit from a one-on-one conversation – please schedule an appointment with Dr. Hickey sooner rather than later.

Other resources are available to you, as well. Free help with all stages of the writing process, from developing ideas to editing your final draft, is available at the **Writing Center**. To sign up for an appointment, go to www.rich75.com/alfred (you can get here from my.alfred.edu / Academics / Writing Center). The first time you visit the site, you'll need to register with your name and email; on later visits, you can just log in to schedule an appointment.

Your **FYE Peer Leader** will be happy to work with you too, and can also advise you on other matters, both academic and non-academic.

Lateness and Absences: You are expected to arrive in class on time and attend all class meetings. If unforeseen circumstances will make you late, please make every effort to notify the professor before class, or ask a fellow student to do so. After the first week of class, you will be allowed **two** unexcused absences. After that, each unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by one increment, from a B+ to a B. *It is possible to do all the work and still fail the*

course because of unexcused absences. If you know in advance that you must miss a class, notify the professor by phone or e-mail at least 48 hours in advance. Prearranged absences will not affect your grade (unless you fail to inform yourself about class and team discussions and complete the assigned work timely).

Mobile Phones and Pagers: Turn them *off* before class begins. If you send text messages during class, the professor will collect and hold your phone until the end of class, or you may be asked to leave.

Conduct/Misconduct: People in this class hold a wide variety of religious, moral, and political beliefs. Human knowledge and community depend upon our ability to engage in civil conversation about these differences. You are encouraged to question or disagree with one another frankly, and you are expected to do so respectfully. Insulting remarks about other's religious/moral/political beliefs or practices are not acceptable.

Because personal integrity is fundamental to both good scholarship and to good citizenship, you are also expected to uphold the university's standards for academic and personal integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, or harassment of any kind *will not be tolerated*.

First violations of the Academic Dishonesty policy will result in disciplinary action ranging from a failing grade on an assignment to a failing grade in the course, and a written report of the misconduct to your dean and the University Provost, which will become part of your permanent academic record (unless you appeal and are exonerated by a Judicial Council). Second violations will result in dismissal from the university. *You are expected to inform yourself about and abide by school policies regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and harassment.* If you have questions about these policies, ask the professor right away.

Alfred's Student Code of Conduct may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/student_policies.code_of_conduct_0708.cfm

Alfred's policy on Academic Dishonesty may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/academic_policies.academic_regulation Ug.cfm#700

Other campus policies and resources can be found here:

<http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/policies.menu.cfm>

REQUIRED TEXT

Customized version of *Living Religions, 8th ed.*

By Mary Pat Fisher

Available at the AU Bookstore. A copy of the 7th edition of *Living Religions* will be available on reserve in the library.

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	In Class	Read for Next Class	Assignment
Week 1 Introductions, the writing process			
Tue	30-Aug Intros, syllabus, high school v. college, levels of learning	Buy the textbook. Find & read AU Undergrad Academic Dishonesty policy online	Summarize policy: typed, 1-2 pp. double-spaced
Wed	31-Aug Policy Summary due. Writing Process: 4 stages. Responding.	"Anxiety, Doom, Judgment, Guilt" (maybe)	Revise policy summary
Fri	2-Sep Writing Process: edit & proofread. Theisms.	Read Text, Chapter 1	Edit & proofread summary
Week 2 What is "Religion"? Is there any such thing?			
Tue	6-Sep Revised Summary due. Evaluations. Self-assessment.	Self-Finish reading Chapter 1	Prepare to answer Ch. 1 Review & Discussion questions in class.
Wed	7-Sep Discuss Ch. 1 Questions. "Religion": Definitions		
Fri	9-Sep Religions: Tweed	Start reading Chapter 2	Make a list of common features of indigenous traditions.
Week 3 Indigenous Traditions, Colonial Origins of Religious Studies			
Tue	13-Sep Common features. Colonialism & Religious Studies. Film: "Wiping Tears"		Using notes from film, pre-write "Wiping Tears" paper.

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Wed	14-Sep	Discuss film. Social location. Af. religions?	Draft "Wiping Tears" paper
Fri	16-Sep	Draft "Wiping Tears" paper due. Responses. Privilege.	Post response to class discussion of privilege on class blog.
			Revise, edit, proofread "Wiping Tears" paper. Read Official Kwanzaa Website, take notes.
Week 4 Test Case: Kwanzaa – Religion? Start Hinduism			
Tue	20-Sep	Kwanzaa Quiz. Kwanzaa: Religion?	Start reading Chapter 3.
Wed	21-Sep	"Wiping Tears" paper due. Hinduism: Aryans, Vedas, homa	Edit & proof "Wiping Tears" paper
Fri	23-Sep	Samsara, Varnas, 4 stages	Work on Ch. 3 Review Q's 1-3 & Discussion Q 1 to pre-write Indian Reigs paper
Week 5 Hinduism			
Tue	27-Sep	Yogas	Post entry on class blog re: spiritual disciplines
Wed	28-Sep	Puja, epics	
Fri	30-Sep	Film: "Song of God"	Start reading Chapter 4 Finish Ch. 3 questions
Week 6 Hinduism, Jainism			
Tue	4-Oct	Jainism	Draft answers to Ch. 4 Review Questions 1-3
Wed	5-Oct	Forgiveness	Start reading Chapter 5 Prepare portfolio
Fri	7-Oct	Portfolio Check Meditation	Prepare answer to Ch. 5 Review Question 1

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Week 7 Buddhism		
Tue	11-Oct	Life of Buddha, 4NT 8fold Path.
Wed	12-Oct	Cultivation: precepts, virtues, ethics. Continue reading Ch. 5
		Pre-write for Precept paper.
Fri	14-Oct	Film
		Draft 1-3 page reflection on one precept.
Week 8 Buddhism		
Tue	18-Oct	No Class: Fall Break
		Revise, edit precept paper.
Wed	19-Oct	Precept paper due. 3 Vehicles
		Prepare answers to Ch 5 Review Question 2, Discussion Question 1
Fri	21-Oct	Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren
		Draft Indian Rlgns paper
Week 9 Finish Indian Religions, Judaism		
		Indian Rlgns draft
Tue	25-Oct	due. Responses. Women.
		Revise paper.
Wed	26-Oct	Film: Judaism
		Begin reading Ch. 6
Fri	28-Oct	Patriarchs, Torah
		Read Genesis Chs. 1 & 2
		Note differences in 2 accounts. Edit & proofread paper

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Week 10 Judaism			
Tue	1-Nov	Indian Relgs. Final Project due. Evaluate, assess. Genesis 1 & 2, JEPDR	Draft answers to Ch. 6 Review Questions 1-2
Wed	2-Nov	Life cycle rituals	
Fri	4-Nov	Ritual calendar, Movements	Draft answers to Ch. 6 Review Question 3, Discussion Question 1
Week 11 Christianity			
Tue	8-Nov	Discuss Judaism questions. Jesus, Gospels	Begin reading Chapter 7 Read assigned commentary on Samaritan story. Write 1-pg summary
Wed	9-Nov	Samaritan commentary summary due	
Fri	11-Nov	Paul, Constantine, NT	Draft answers to Ch. 7 Review Question 2 and 4, Discussion Questions 1-2
Week 12 Christianity			
Tue	15-Nov	Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant	Draft Answer to Ch. 7 Review Question 3
Wed	16-Nov	Evangelicalism, Fundamantalism	
Fri	18-Nov	(AAR) Film: Jesus Camp	Post blog entry on response to film, Begin reading Chapter 8

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Week 13 Islam			
Tue	22-Nov	(AAR) Film: For the Bible Tells Me So?	Post blog entry on response to film
Wed-Fri	23-Nov	No Class: Thanksgiving	Continue reading Chapter 8
Week 14 Islam, Sikhism			
Tue	29-Nov	Mohammad, Qur'an	Ch. 8 Review Question 1, 3
Wed	30-Nov	5 Pillars, Hajj	Ch. 8 Review Question 2
Fri	2-Dec	Sikhism	Read Chapter 9 Prewrite: Ch. 8 Discussion Question 1, Draft Abrahamic Religions Paper
Week 15 Religious Violence, Religions in 21st Century			
Tue	6-Dec	Draft Abrahamic Religions paper due. Responses. Film: Road to 9/11	
Wed	7-Dec	Discuss film. Religious violence	Revise, polish paper
Fri	9-Dec	Abrahamic Religions Paper Due. Evaluation. Self-Assessment. Rel. in 21st c.	Complete Portfolio Due Tuesday, Dec. 13 at 10:15 a.m.