I. Course and Instructor Information

Course: RS 3310: Major World Religions, CRN 28468
Instructor: Dr. Ann Branan Horak
Contact Info: abhorak@utep.edu

II. Course Description

Major World Religions explores a wide variety of religions that have shaped human cultures and continue to influence human behavior across the globe. This course will consider these religions in terms of their histories, their practices, their belief systems, their organizational structure, their social and political philosophies, their treatment of Others, and their current expressions around the world. As students learn about unfamiliar religions, they will be encouraged to analyze their own beliefs, practices, and experiences. Students will also have opportunities to synthesize the knowledge they are gaining about world religions through the course assignments. This course is required of all Religious Studies Minors and is an excellent interdisciplinary introduction to global cultures.

III. Course Expectations

I expect every student in this class to be fully engaged with the subject matter and with their peers. To do that you must:

- Read all assigned material from the book and the Blackboard.
- Complete all course assignments on time – some of the assignments for this class cannot be made up so DO NOT fall behind.
- Follow the syllabus and course calendar to stay on track with all due dates – the syllabus and calendar are available on Blackboard so check them regularly. There will be work due almost every day of this class.
- Remain respectful and open minded to the material, to me, and to your fellow students.

Within the discipline of Religious Studies, all belief systems are analyzed historically, culturally, philosophically, and practically - how they are lived by their followers. No one belief system is assumed to be correct or true. You are not being asked to give up your personal beliefs, but to remain aware that others may not share your beliefs and to approach this class with a respectful open mind.

Do not attempt to convert or proselytize a classmate to your own religion beliefs. Do not insult or belittle your classmates beliefs (religious or not). Engaging in this type of behavior will result in lower grades and may be grounds for removal from the class. Remember, the purpose of this class is the academic study of religion.

Do not take this class if you cannot meet these expectations.

What you can expect from me: Every student in this class can expect that I will be fully engaged with the subject matter of this class, with each of you, and with the class as a whole.

- I will be available via email or telephone – contact me at any time!
- I will grade all assignments in a timely manner.
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- I will respond in a timely manner to all questions and class communications.
- I will inform the class if there are any changes to the syllabus or course calendar.
- I will remain respectful and open minded to the material and the students.

IV. Learning Goals and Outcomes

With full participation, after completing this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate basic familiarity with the beliefs and practices of the world religions covered.
- Appreciate the rich religious diversity and heritage of our global village.
- Analyze the positive and negative contributions of world religions to self-identity and the creation of identities based on social class, gender, race, and sexual orientation.
- Evaluate claims of absolute truth and discuss the assumptions and perspectives underlying such claims.
- Interact with persons of differing religions and belief systems in a way that is respectful and promotes mutual understanding.

With full participation, after completing this course, students will have improved their skills in:

- **Reading** – Students will become critical and careful readers of both primary and secondary source material and learn to synthesize what they are reading by responding to it in writing and in class discussion.
- **Writing** – Students will write responses to the material being covered. Students will learn to develop and support an argument through their writing and incorporate the arguments and thoughts of others.
- **Critical thinking** – Students will be asked to critically evaluate texts, the perspectives articulated in those texts, and the assumptions underlying the arguments being made. Students should become comfortable with differences of opinion and confident in expressing their own point of view.
- **Lifelong learning** – Students should feel motivated and confident in seeking out new and unfamiliar religious and cultural experiences with the goal of learning more about themselves and their world.

V. Textbook

There is no textbook for this class, but there will be weekly readings and videos on Blackboard. You are expected to read and view ALL of the materials on Blackboard each week, including that week’s learning module, primary source readings, and videos.

VI. Required Technology

You will be required to use the UTEP Blackboard system for this class. You should check Blackboard frequently!

- **Blackboard** - You can access Blackboard by logging in to [www.my.utep.edu](http://www.my.utep.edu). Once you are on the home page, click on the Blackboard link then look for our Major World Religions class. On the right hand side is a column entitled Course Tools. We will use many of these tools.
  - Learning Modules – This is where the readings, assignments, and blogs for each week can be found.
  - Announcements - Check Blackboard often, even when you don’t have an assignment due, for class announcements.
UTEP email account - Please use your UTEP email account to email me at abhorak@utep.edu.
  - Students must use proper email etiquette
    - Write a clear, concise message using Standard English with proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation
    - Provide all necessary information – for example, your name, student ID, which class you're in, etc…
    - Provide all necessary contact information – email, phone number, etc….
  - Technical Support: UTEP offers technical assistance at http://issweb.utep.edu/techsupport or call the UTEP HELP desk at 915-747-5257. UTEP also partners with an outside vendor, Presidium, to provide technical support for Blackboard. Their 24/7 Help Desk number is 1-877-382-0491.

VII. UTEP Resources

- CASS (Center for Accommodations and Support Services) – If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass
- Military Student Success Center – If you are active military, a veteran, or a family member of military personnel, please contact the Military Student Success Center at UTEP at 747-5342, or visit their website at http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?alias=academics.utep.edu/militaryservicesoffice
- University Counseling Center – If you are having a difficult time with personal relationships or with college life, please visit the University Counseling Center at 747-5302, or visit their website http://sa.utep.edu/counsel/. They provide one-on-one counseling as well as many helpful workshops.

VIII. Course Assignments

1. Reading Journals
   - Reading Journals are written responses to questions about the religions being studied and the readings and videos provided on each religion. The questions are designed to help you go further into the readings, make interesting connections, identify main ideas about the religions we’re studying, and provide a place to ask questions.
   - Journals must be at least 500 words long, with longer responses welcome. Shorter journals will receive lower grades.
   - Due dates are on the syllabus and in the learning modules. Reading Journals are turned in via the Journal link in each week’s Learning Module.
   - Please note: Reading Journals will only be available for the week they are assigned.
   - Reading Journals will be graded based on the effort you put into them. Your answers to the questions must demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the material. The Response Paper assignment sheet and rubric is available on Blackboard. Each Response Paper is worth 100 points and all RPs together are worth 25% of your overall grade.
Learning Goals –
- Students will become more active readers by looking for and appreciating meaningful material, recognizing information they don’t understand or want to discuss, and linking new information they’re gaining to what they already know and have experienced.
- Students will gain practice in discussing the material they’re reading and sharing their thoughts.
- Students will learn to listen and appreciate the reactions, questions, and thoughts of others.
- Students will become comfortable with not knowing all the answers and be willing to engage in further research and learning.

2. Journal Responses
- Journal responses are your opportunity to become co-teachers and co-learners as you discuss each others’ journal posts and the questions you and your classmates ask around each religion we’re covering.
- You must response to TWO of your classmates’ Journal posts.
- Each Journal response must be at least 200 words long, with longer responses welcome. Shorter responses will receive lower grades.
- Due dates are on the syllabus and in the Learning Modules. Journal Responses are turned in via the Journal link in each week’s Learning Module.
- Please note: Journal responses will only be available for the week they are assigned.
- Journal Responses will be graded based on the effort you put into them. Your response should demonstrate substantial interaction with the questions being asked and the material being discussed. What you write must demonstrate thoughtful interaction with your classmates and go beyond simple agreement with what is being said. An assignment sheet and rubric is available on Blackboard. Each Journal Response is worth 100 points and all together are worth 25% of your overall grade.
- Disrespectful or rude language – towards students or their beliefs - or any attempts at proselytizing fellow students will cause you to lose all points for that week’s discussion!
- Learning Goals –
  - Students will practice thinking about and then writing about sensitive or challenging issues.
  - Students will become comfortable discussing these issues with others who may or may not share their beliefs.
  - Students will develop appreciation for the viewpoints of others even if they do not agree with them.
  - Students will be able to engage with others of differing belief systems and cultural practices in a manner that is non-judgmental, respectful, and looking for mutually beneficial opportunities to appreciate these differences.

All students must observe proper online “Netiquette”
- Always consider your audience – your classmates and I will be reading your posts.
- You must be respectful in your responses to all posts. You don’t have to agree with each other, and lively discussion is encouraged, but you can never be rude.
- No inappropriate or harassing posts will be tolerated.
- All posts must be written in Standard English and edited for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
Inappropriate language, shortened “texting” words, or all caps posts will not be allowed.

- Read through all the posts before adding your response. Don’t repeat what someone else has said or ask a question that has already been answered. Add something new to the discussion!

- When responding to a class mate’s post, be sure to respond to the ideas and perspectives being presenting and not to the person. **Do not engage in personal judgments or attacks.**

- **Do not attempt to convert or proselytize a classmate to your own religious or cultural beliefs.** Do not insult or belittle your classmates beliefs (religious or not). Engaging in this type of behavior will result in lower grades, a conference with the professor, and may be grounds for removal from the class. Remember, the purpose of this class is the academic study of religion.

- A good rule of thumb to keep in mind is that, if you would not say in it in a face-to-face classroom discussion, do not post it in our online classroom discussion.

3. Experiencing Religions Report

- During the course of this class, you need to attend one religious service and write a report on your experience. You should attend a service from a religious tradition with which you are unfamiliar.

- The assignment sheet for the Experiencing Religions report and the Experiencing Religions rubric are on the Blackboard under the **Experiencing Religions link**. Your report should be at least 1000 words (single or double spaced is fine, longer is fine) with one inch margins and a standard font size. You can either type your report straight into Blackboard or type it on your computer and then attach the file on Blackboard.

- An information sheet with addresses and websites for a number of religious institutions in the El Paso area can be found under the Experiencing Religions Report link. You are not limited to visiting these sites. For those of you who do not live in the El Paso area, places to visit are usually easy to find, but I am happy to help you locate a place to visit if you need me to.

- The Experiencing Religions report is due on the **Experiencing Religions link** on Blackboard by **Monday April 22nd at 10pm**, but you are welcome to turn them in earlier. The Experiencing Religions report is graded on the effort you put into it and on the depth of your insights and analysis. Go beyond easy observations. Think of yourself as a social scientist studying a unique social group and give careful attention to experience. The Experiencing Religions report is worth 100 points and 25% of your total grade.

  - You may attend additional services and write additional Experiencing Religions reports for extra credit. You will receive 10 points of extra credit for each additional Experiencing Religions report up to 30 points. These points can be used to replace a Reading Journal or Journal Response grade.

**Learning Goals**

- Students will gain practice encountering new and different situations and interacting with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar settings.

- Students will become more observant of their surroundings and more thoughtful about how the setting, behaviors, rituals, worship etc… of a group demonstrates the values and beliefs of that group.

- Students will be able to engage with others of differing belief systems and cultural practices in a manner that is non-judgmental, respectful, and looking for mutually beneficial opportunities to appreciate these differences.
4. Embodying Religions Project –

- Your final project for this class will require you to take on the persona of a person from another religion. Each student from the class will be chosen a religion and a person from within that religion. You can choose an Indigenous religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or an alternative religion (such as Bahá’í or Wicca). You need to choose a real person, though your person can be living or dead, human or divine. You may choose a famous person - Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Junior, Malala Yousafzai, – or you may choose a less well known person.

  ➢ All Embodying Religions personas must be approved by me and no two students can do the same person. First come, first served!

- The Embodying Religions Project is graded on the effort you put into it and on how fully you embody the religion you are presenting. Embodying Religions is worth 100 points and 25% of your overall grade. Projects will be graded on the depth of analysis shown and on how creatively they are presented.
  
  ➢ A Rubric with a detailed breakdown of what is expected from the project can be found on the class Blackboard.

- Learning Goals –
  
  ➢ Students will creatively, thoughtfully, and experientially immerse themselves in a religious belief system about which they want to learn more.
  
  ➢ Students will research and actively think through the many elements of a person’s belief system and how it affects every aspect of their behavior.
  
  ➢ Students will develop communication skills as they interact with one another in their characters.

IX. Course Policies:

  ➢ Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.

  ➢ If you turn in plagiarized work, I will report you to the UTEP Dean of Students. You will receive an F on the plagiarized assignment and may likely fail the course. You may also be subject to other academic penalties including suspension from UTEP and notation of your academic dishonesty on your permanent record.

  ➢ The sites below explain what constitutes academic dishonesty and UTEP’s policy on plagiarism.

  ➢ http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html

  ➢ http://libraryweb.utep.edu/research/plagiarism.php
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week and Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Journal Responses</th>
<th>Other Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mar 18-24</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module and Videos on <em>Understanding Religion</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Fri Mar 22nd&lt;br&gt;Journal #1: Introduction</td>
<td>Due by 10pm Sun Mar 24th&lt;br&gt;Responses to Journal #1</td>
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<td><em>Understanding Religion</em></td>
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<td><strong>Week 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mar 25-31</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Indigenous Sacred Ways.</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Fri Mar 29th&lt;br&gt;Journal #2: <em>Indigenous Sacred Ways</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Sun Mar 31st&lt;br&gt;Responses to Journal #2</td>
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<td><em>Indigenous Sacred Ways</em></td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Apr 1-7</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Hinduism</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Tues Apr 2nd&lt;br&gt;Journal #3: on <em>Hinduism</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Thur Apr 4th&lt;br&gt;Responses to Journal #3</td>
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<td><em>Hinduism and Buddhism</em></td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Buddhism</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Fri Apr 5th&lt;br&gt;Journal #4: <em>Buddhism</em></td>
<td>Due by 10pm Sun Apr 7th&lt;br&gt;Responses to Journal #4</td>
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<td>Week</td>
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<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Apr 8-14</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Daoism and Confucianism</td>
<td>Tue Apr 9th</td>
<td>Journal #5: Daoism &amp; Confucianism</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Shinto</td>
<td>Fri Apr 12th</td>
<td>Journal #6: Shinto</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Apr 15-21</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Judaism</td>
<td>Tue Apr 16th</td>
<td>Journal #7: Judaism</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Christianity</td>
<td>Fri, Apr 19th</td>
<td>Journal #8: Christianity</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Apr 22-28</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Islam</td>
<td>Tue Apr 23rd</td>
<td>Reading Journal #9: Islam</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Sikhism</td>
<td>Fri Apr 26th</td>
<td>Reading Journal #10: Sikhism</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Apr 29-May 5</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Alternative Religions</td>
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<td>No Reading Journal or Responses this week.</td>
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Due by 10pm Mon Apr 22nd
Experiencing Religions Report

Due by 10pm Mon May 6th
Embodying Religions
I'm always available via email. Contact me - abhorak@utep.edu