RS 3310 Major World Religions

I. Course and Instructor Information
Course: RS 3310: Major World Religions, CRN 27737
        WS 3383 Women’s Studies Special Topics, CRN 24877
        MW 1:30-2:50 Liberal Arts 106
Instructor: Dr. Ann Branan Horak
Office: Worrell 210
Office Hours: MW 12:30-1:30, and by appointment
Contact Info: Students can contact me at any time by phone 915-747-5519 or by email at abhorak@utep.edu.
When you email me, please include your full name and student ID number.

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 and in our border region. 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. This course is cross listed with Women’s Studies and will be covering issues of women and gender within world religions.

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 BEFORE class. Come to class ready to discuss the material and/or be quizzed on it.
- Complete all course assignments on time – some of the assignments for this class cannot be made up so DO NOT fall behind.
- Participate fully in all class activities – we will be doing a lot of talking in this class and engaging in active learning activities and I expect everyone to get involved.
- 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.
- Remain respectful and open minded to the material, to me, and to your fellow students.

Within the discipline of Religious Studies, belief systems are analyzed historically, culturally, philosophically, and 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 office hours, email, or telephone – contact me at any time!
- I will grade all assignments in a timely manner.
- 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 and border region.
- 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.
  
  *Liberal Arts Honors Criteria #2 Advanced Readings*

- **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.
  
  *Liberal Arts Honors Criteria #3 Intensive Writing and #4 Intensive Research*

- **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.
  
  *Liberal Arts Honors Criteria #9 Critical Thinking*

- **Campus and community engagement** – Students will be encouraged to participate in campus and community events related to the religions being studied and to participate in events organized by Religious Studies and its affiliated student organizations. The final project for this class, World Religions Fair, will be presented in a community setting.
  
  *Liberal Arts Honors Criteria #6 Campus Resources and #7 Community Based Experiences*

- **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.
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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. Each week, a list of additional materials for further study will be provided for those wanting to do further research.

VI. Required Technology
You will be required to use the UTEP Blackboard system for this class so check Blackboard frequently!

- **Blackboard** - You can access Blackboard by logging in to 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.
  
  o Learning Modules – This is where the readings, assignments, and blogs for each week can be found.
  o Announcements - Check Blackboard often, even when you don’t have an assignment due, for class announcements.
  o Syllabus and Assignment schedule - Click on this tab to access the syllabus or assignments sheet.
  o Response Papers – The Response Paper assignment sheet is here as well as the rubric.
  o Blog Posts – You will access the Blog Posts here.
  o Experiencing Religions – The Experiencing Religion worksheet is here as well as the rubric.
  o Embodying Religions Paper and World Religions Fair – The assignment sheets and rubrics for these assignments are here as well as a sample paper.
  o Email – The Blackboard email link will send a message to my email abhorak@utep.edu. Please identify yourself as a student in the Major World Religions class.
  o Blackboard Help – This link takes you to an online blackboard help site. You can also call the UTEP HELP desk at 915-747-5257.

- **UTEP email account** - Please use your UTEP email account to email me at abhorak@utep.edu.
  
  o **Students must use proper email etiquette**
  o Write a clear, concise message using Standard English with proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation
  o Provide all necessary information – for example, your name, student ID, which class you’re in, etc…
  o 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, or visit their office located in the UTEP Union East, Room 106. 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 visit the Military Student Success Center in the UTEP University Library Room 205 for help with benefits, registration, and tips for being successful at UTEP. You can also call them 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 the UTEP Union West, Room 202, or contact them at 747-5302, or visit their website http://sa.utep.edu/counsel/. They provide one-on-one counseling as well as many helpful workshops.

- **Liberal Arts Honors Program** - This class has been designated as a Liberal Arts Honors Program [LAHP] course. It has received this designation because it features at least five of the Liberal Arts Honors course criteria. If you are not a member of the LAHP, and are interested in the program, please visit the LAHP website at http://academics.utep.edu/lahp.

- **FHAR** – This Foster, Homeless, and Adopted Resources center can provide counseling and resources to students who have been a part of one of these communities. They are located in the Academic Advising Center. http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=63904

VIII. Course Assignments

1. Response Papers (RP)

- **RPs** are short written responses to questions about the readings and religions being studied. 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.

- **RPs** are due at the beginning of the class when they are assigned. They should be typed, but can be legibly hand written if necessary.

  Please note: If you miss class the day a RP is due, you must turn in your RP by the next class period to receive partial credit.

- **RPs** will be graded based on the effort you put into them. Your answers to the questions must demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the material. The RP assignment sheet and rubric is available on Blackboard. Each RP is worth 100 points and all 11 RPs together are worth 20% 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.
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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. Blog Posts (BPs) and Blog Post Responses (BPRs) –

- Blog Posts involve participating in online discussions by replying to a Blog Post prompt in the Blog section of the class Blackboard. You will also write at least two responses to at least two of your classmates Blog Posts. BP’s must be at least 200 words long and BPR’s must be at least 75 words long. Shorter posts will receive lower grades. The BP prompts, posts, and responses will be found within each week’s Learning Module.

- BPs are due by Thursday at midnight of the week they’re assigned. BPRs are due by Sunday at midnight of the week they’re assigned.

- Please note: BP and BPRs will only be available for the week they are assigned. If you do not post or respond to your classmates posts during that week, you cannot make up the grade but will have to attend extra credit activities to earn points to replace the zero you will receive.

- 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.

- BPs and BPRs will be graded based on the effort you put into them. Your BPs should demonstrate substantial interaction with the questions being asked and the material being discussed. What you write in your BPRs 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 BP/BPR unit is worth 100 points and all 11 together are worth 20% of your overall grade.

  - BPs and BPRs are graded as a unit so if you write a wonderful BP, but don’t respond to your classmates’ posts, you will get a lower grade. You must write your own BP and respond to at least two classmates to get full credit for the assignment.

  - 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!

Liberal Arts Honors Criteria #3 Intensive Writing and #9 Critical Thinking

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.
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- 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). 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 the semester, 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.
- 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. Throughout the semester, I will also post information about religious events that can be used to fulfill this requirement in the Announcements tab on Blackboard.
- The Experiencing Religions report is due in class **Monday, April 25th**, 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 20% 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.

**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 Paper –

- The class will be divided into groups based on the religions we’re studying in class: Indigenous Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Alternative Religions. Students will pick their top
three choices for which group they’d like to be a part of. Once assigned to a group, each class member will research a person who follows that religion.

- You need to choose a real person, though your person can be living or dead, so that you can do adequate research and find images of that person.
- You may choose a famous person like Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Gandhi, the Dali Lama, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Junior, Malcolm X, or you may chose a less well known person.
- You can chose a person of any gender, but you will be appearing as that person at the World Religion Fair.
- Each student will write a paper in the voice of the person he or she is representing. The paper should include both biographical and historical information as well as analysis of your character’s role and contributions to the religion he or she is a member of. The paper should also include images of the person you are representing. Outside research is necessary for this paper – at least 3 sources must be used.

All Embodying Religions personas must be approved by me and no two students can do the same person.

- The Embodying Religions project allows you to identify with the religious tradition you are studying, and embody a member of that religion, as you carefully consider how to shape your persona and which essential elements of the overall religion to present to the rest of the class. The creative, active learning in this project will help you think imaginatively and critically about religious belief systems.

- 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.

- Embodying Religions Papers will be due on Monday, May 2nd. You may turn in a hard copy in class or email it to abhorak@utep.edu. Your paper should be at least 1000 words (double or single spaced is fine, longer is fine) with one inch margins and a standard font size. All sources must be cited correctly and all images cited correctly. The paper should also include images of the person you are representing. Images do not count in the required word length. Embodying Religions Papers will be graded on the effort you put into them and on how fully you investigate and then embody the person and the religion you are presenting. An Embodying Religions Rubric can be found on the Blackboard under the Rubrics tab. The Embodying Religions Paper is worth 100 points and 20% of your total grade.

- Wednesday, January 27th all students will bring to class a paper with their name and their top three choices for which religion or group they’d like to be placed into. You can also write ANY and I’ll choose a group for you. Once the groups are announced, students can then begin submitting – in writing - via email or in class which person they would like to be. First come first served! If the person you would like to be has already been taken, you will need to choose another character. I must approve all Embodying Religions characters.
Each group will work together to present a display on the religion or group to which they belong: Indigenous Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, or Alternative Paths.

On **Wednesday, May 11th from 4:00pm to 6:30pm (our final exam time)** each group will present their group display at Mesita Elementary School (3307 North Stanton) at our class World Religions Fair.

- Each class member will come as their Embodying Religions character. Each student will adopt the dress, speech, attitudes, beliefs, interactions with others, etc… of his or her character for the entire World Religions Fair.
- Each group will create a display on their religion as a whole, incorporating the characters each group member has created and including a wide variety of elements from the religion you are representing.

World Religions Fair projects will be graded on the effort you put into them and on how fully you embody the religion you are presenting. All group members may not receive the same grade. Projects will be graded on the depth of analysis shown in the group’s work and on how creatively it is presented. A World Religions Fair Rubric can be found on the Blackboard under the Rubrics tab. The World Religions Fair Project is worth 100 points and 30% of your overall grade.

**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 practice presentation skills as they interact with the professor and their peers in the guise of the character they have developed.
- Students will develop better skills when working within a group and better communication strategies within a group.

**Course grades:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Response Papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Blog Post/Blog Post Responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiencing Religions Report</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embodying Religions Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Religions Fair Project</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Extra credit:**

Extra Credit opportunities exist for you to gain more exposure to the ideas we’re learning about in class. Extra Credit is not meant to regularly take the place of class assignments. You can earn up to 30 extra credit points.

- **Experiencing Religions Worksheets** – attend a service and fill out an Experiencing Religions worksheet over and above the worksheet required for the course and receive 10 extra credit points.
- **Religion in the Community** - Attend any “religiously themed” event in the community (concert, movie, art showing, lecture, book talk, etc…); bring me proof of your attendance (ticket stub, program, photos); write a brief paragraph about the event, and I will give you 5 extra credit points for every event attended.
IX. Course Policies:

- Attendance: Each student gets 3 unexcused absences – that means you can miss class 3 times without having to tell me why.
  - After 3 absences, you will lose points off your final grade for every class you miss.
  - If you have a VERY valid excuse for missing class, you must inform me of that excuse and provide documentation.
  - University sanctioned absences are always excused, but if you miss class for University related reasons, you must provide documentation.

- Laptops may only be used for class related note taking. If you abuse this privilege, you will no longer be allowed to bring your laptop to class. Cell phones are never allowed. If you need to leave the class to take a call, please do so quietly. If you’re regularly texting in class, you will be asked to leave.

- **Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.**
  - This course utilizes plagiarism detection software. If you turn in plagiarized work, I will report you to the 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://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html)
  - [http://libraryweb.utep.edu/research/plagiarism.php](http://libraryweb.utep.edu/research/plagiarism.php)

- Students with excessive absences or missing multiple assignments may be dropped from this class on or before the Course Drop Deadline of **Friday, April 1st**. This policy will only be revisited under extreme, well documented circumstances.

- Students must treat each other with respect & courtesy & should expect the same from me. Disruptive and/or disrespectful students will be asked to leave class and will need to meet with me before gaining reentry into class. No disrespectful, inappropriate or harassing posts will be tolerated on the class Blackboard.

X. Assignment Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings – to be completed before class</th>
<th>Due in Class</th>
<th>Blog Posts</th>
<th>Other Assignments</th>
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<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Intro to the Course</td>
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<td>W Jan 20</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Perception</td>
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<td>Blog Post #1 due Jan 28 by midnight. Two Blog Post Responses due Jan 31 by midnight.</td>
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<td>M Jan 25</td>
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<td>Three choices for Embodying Religion and</td>
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<td>W Jan 27</td>
<td>Perception cont...</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>M Feb 1</td>
<td>Understanding Religion</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module on <em>Understanding Religion</em></td>
<td>World Religions Fair due today. Come to class ready to write on a piece of paper your name and your three top religion choices or the word ANY.</td>
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<td>W Feb 10</td>
<td>NO CLASS!</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>M Feb 15</td>
<td>World Religions Fair Workshop – in class activity – Don't Miss Class!</td>
<td>No Response Papers.</td>
<td>No Blog Posts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W Feb 17</td>
<td>NO CLASS!</td>
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<td>W Feb 24</td>
<td>Hinduism cont…</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>M Feb 29</td>
<td>Buddhism cont…</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module on <em>Buddhism</em></td>
<td>Response Paper #3 on</td>
<td>Blog Post #4 due Mar 3 by midnight. Two Blog</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>W Mar 2</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Meet in the Lhakhang – the Bhutanese structure in Centennial Plaza</td>
<td>Buddhism, Post Responses due Mar 6 by midnight.</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>M Mar 7</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Spring Break</td>
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<td>W Mar 9</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Spring Break</td>
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<td>W Mar 16</td>
<td>Daoism</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module on Daoism, Response Paper #5 on Daoism</td>
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<td>W Mar 23</td>
<td>Shinto</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module on Shinto, Response Paper #7 on Shinto</td>
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<td>W Mar 30</td>
<td>Judaism cont...</td>
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<td>F Apr 1</td>
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<td>COURSE DROP DEADLINE – STUDENTS WITH EXCESSIVE ABSENCES OR MISSED WORK SHOULD DROP</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>M Apr 4</td>
<td>World Religions Fair Workshop – in class activity – Don't Miss Class!</td>
<td>No Response Paper, Blog Post #8 due Apr 7 by midnight. Two Blog Post Responses due</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module on Christianity</td>
<td>Response Paper #9 on Christianity</td>
<td>Blog Post #9 due Apr 14 by midnight. Two Blog Post Responses due Apr 17 by midnight.</td>
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