RS 3310 Major World Religions

Course and Instructor Information
Course: RS 3310: Major World Religions, CRN 25136
Instructor: Dr. Ann Branan Horak

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. We 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.

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 and watch all videos on the course 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 assignment calendar to stay on track with all due dates - work will be 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.
- I will be available - contact me via email or set up a web conference appointment.
- I will grade assignments in a timely manner.
- I will respond in a timely manner to questions and class communications.
- I will inform the class if there are any changes to the syllabus or assignment calendar.
- I will remain respectful and open minded to the material and the students.

Course Communication
Email me any time using the email link inside Blackboard. You can also schedule a web conference appointment – send me an email giving me a couple of days/times when you will be available; we will chose a time that works for both of us. We’ll use the web conference link in Blackboard to talk in real time during our appointed time.
Course Materials
There is no textbook for this class but there will be readings and videos on the Blackboard in each week’s course materials. You are expected to read and view ALL of the materials on Blackboard. Log on to Blackboard frequently!

Course 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.

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 assignment calendar and in the learning modules. Reading Journals are turned in via the Reading 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 other’s Reading Journal posts and the questions you and your classmates ask around each religion we’re covering.

- You must response to AT LEAST TWO of your classmates’ Journal posts; feel free to respond to more.

- 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 assignment and in the Learning Modules. Journal Responses are turned in as discussion responses within each week’s Reading Journal assignment.

  ➢ 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 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 classmate’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 it in a face-to-face classroom discussion, do not post it in our online classroom discussion.

3. Experiencing Religions Report
• During this class, you need to attend one religious service and write a report on your experience. Try to 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. Your report should be attached to Blackboard as a Word file.
• An information sheet with addresses and websites for some of the 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 through Google, but I am happy to help you locate a place.
• The Experiencing Religions report due date is on the assignment calendar and the Blackboard; you are welcome to turn them in earlier than the due date.
• 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 culture 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. Major World Religions Book Chapter
For your final project, the class will work together to create a book on the world’s religions. Each of you will choose a religion to write a report about. These reports will be combined into chapters, one chapter per religion, and the chapters into an overall book. In addition to major beliefs, you will want to write about important people within the religion, holidays and traditions, food and celebrations,
sacred texts and architecture, music and literature – whatever you want to include to help others learn about the religion you are covering. You should also include plenty of images!

- Each student from the class will choose a religion to research and write about. You can choose any Indigenous religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Bahá’í, Wicca, or Zoroastrianism.
  - Sign up for the religion you want to cover by joining a group inside of Blackboard under the link Groups for MWR Book Project.
  - Two to three people may be working on the same religion, so you need to coordinate so that you each cover different individuals, holidays, traditions, teachings, etc… You can talk with each other inside of the group on Blackboard.
  - This is NOT a group project – you will be graded only on your own work – but in order to create a strong chapter full of good information on each religion, you should NOT repeat the same information. Discuss with each person in your group how to break up the info.

- You need to write about at least two people, at least two holidays, at least two important teachings or concepts, and at least two examples of art – visual arts, architecture, dance, music, etc… In addition to the required material, write about other important elements of your religion – their sacred texts, their history, traditions, food, how the religion has changed over time or influenced world culture, how the religion operates today, etc…

- Your report should be at least 2000 words long, but longer entries are welcome.

- Your report must be attached to Blackboard as a Word file so that I can save and combine each report into an overall chapter.

- I will use plagiarism software to ensure no plagiarized material appears in our final book. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarized material, I’ve included resources on the Blackboard and I’m always happy to talk with you via email or web conference. I’m also happy to read early drafts of your work to give feedback and check for any potential problems.

- The MWR Book Project due date is in the assignment calendar and on the Blackboard.

- Your report will be graded on the effort you put into it. This book should serve as an excellent resource for each of you to learn more about the religions we discuss in class so make your contribution meaningful. A rubric is provided on the Blackboard. The report is worth 100 points and 25% of your overall grade.

- **Learning Goals** –
  - Students will intellectually, creatively, and thoughtfully 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 particular religion and how to best represent a religion’s beliefs and cultural connections.
  - Students will contribute to the greater understanding of their classmates of the world’s religions and the diversity of our global village.