RS 3310 Major World Religions

Fall 2017

I. Course and Instructor Information
Course: RS 3310: Major World Religions, CRN 18273
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. 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.
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Syllabus and Assignment schedule - Click on this tab to access the syllabus or assignments sheet.

Experiencing Religions – The Experiencing Religions worksheet is here as well as the rubric.

Embodying Religions on Facebook – The assignment sheet and rubrics for this assignment is here.

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.
  - 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 short 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.

- Reading Journals due dates are on the syllabus 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 –
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- 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. Blog Posts and Blog Post Responses

- **Blog Posts** involve participating in online discussions by replying to a Blog Post prompt in the Blog section of the weekly Learning Module. You will also write at least two responses to at least two of your classmates Blog Posts. **Blog Post’s must be at least 200 words long and Blog Post Response’s must be at least 75 words long.** Shorter posts will receive lower grades.
- **Blog Post** due dates are on the syllabus and in the Learning Modules. Blog Posts and Blog Post Responses are turned in via the Blog Post link in each week’s Learning Module.
  - Please note: BP and BPRs will only be available for the week they are assigned.
- **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 Blog Post/Blog Post Response unit is worth 100 points and all Blog Posts/Blog Post Responses together are worth 25% 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!

- **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 class mates 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 presented 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 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 Sunday, December 10th 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 Response Paper or Blog Post 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 on Facebook –

- 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 Baha’i 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 Dali Lama, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr., Malala Yousafzai, or you may choose a less well known person.

- Each student will join the class Facebook group EmbodyingReligionsFall17 [https://www.facebook.com/groups/299022577246064/?source=create_flow](https://www.facebook.com/groups/299022577246064/?source=create_flow) as the person he or she is embodying. This Facebook group is a closed group so only members of our class will be able to see it.

- Students who already have a Facebook account will need to create a new Facebook profile page as the character they are portraying. Go to www.facebook.com to set up your new profile – just do the same thing you did to set up your first profile, but use a different email address or phone number. After you’ve created your new account, search for EmbodyingReligionsFall17, or click on this link [https://www.facebook.com/groups/299022577246064/?source=create_flow](https://www.facebook.com/groups/299022577246064/?source=create_flow) and ask to join the group.

- If you don’t not already have a Facebook account, you can go to www.facebook.com to sign up for an account. Once you have an account, search for EmbodyingReligionsFall17. You can cancel your account after this class is finished if you no longer wish to be a member of Facebook.

- Please note that Facebook will not allow you to set up a new account using a famous character’s name – like Jesus or Muhammad! Therefore, you must use your own first name as your character’s first name and then add your character’s name. For example, I could use Ann Jesus or Ann Buddha.

- Once you’ve set up your character’s Facebook profile, you can begin posting information - pictures, comments, articles, videos, music, books, recipes, art, prayers, and historical information – whatever will help bring your person to life. Post in the voice of the person you are embodying, and feel free to use material from that person’s own life as well as contemporary culture. For example, if you are portraying Moses, you could discuss both the Hebrew Bible and the animated movie Prince of Egypt. If you’re portraying Muhammad, you could discuss events in the Middle East during your lifetime, as well as current events in the Middle East.

- All characters need to be approved by me by Sunday, November 19th and up on the class Facebook page by Sunday, November 3rd by 10pm, but you are welcome to set your profile up and begin posting earlier than that. We will spend the last weeks of the class interacting with each other on Facebook in character.

- All Embodying Religions personas must be approved by me and no two students can do the same person. Let me know by who you want to represent in the Embodying Religions class Facebook Group. 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 on Facebook 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

X. Assignment Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Week and Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Reading Journal</th>
<th>Blog Posts</th>
<th>Blog Post Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1 Oct 23-29 Understanding Religion</td>
<td>Blackboard Learning Module and Videos on Understanding Religion</td>
<td>No Reading Journal this week.</td>
<td>Due by 10pm Wed Oct 25 Blog Post #1</td>
<td>Due by 10pm Fri Oct 27 2 Blog Post Responses to Blog #1</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Oct 30-Nov 5</td>
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<td>Indigenous Sacred Ways and Hinduism</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Indigenous Sacred Ways</em>.</td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Tue Oct 31 Reading Journal #1 on <em>Indigenous Sacred Ways</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm W Nov 1 Blog Post #2 on <em>Indigenous Sacred Ways</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Thu Nov 2 2 Blog Post Responses to Blog #2</td>
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<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Nov 6-12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhism and Daoism and Confucianism</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Buddhism</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Tue Nov 7 Reading Journal #3 on <em>Buddhism</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Wed Nov 8 Blog Post #4 on <em>Buddhism</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Thu Nov 9 2 Blog Post Responses to Blog #4</td>
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<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Nov 13-19</th>
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<td>Shinto and Judaism</td>
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<td>Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on <em>Shinto</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Tues 14 Reading Journal # 5 on <em>Shinto</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Wed Nov 15 Blog Post # 6 on <em>Shinto</em></td>
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<td>Due by 10pm Thu Nov 16 2 Blog Post Responses to Blog #6</td>
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<td>Week</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
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| Week 7  
Dec 4-10  
Alternative Religions and Religion in 21st Century America | Blackboard Learning Module, Primary Readings, and Videos on Alternative Religions | Due by 10pm  
Fri Dec 1  
Reading Journal #9 on Sikhism | Due by 10pm  
Sat Dec 2  
Blog Post #10 on Sikhism | Due by 10pm  
Sun Dec 3  
2 Blog Post Responses to Blog #10 Embodying Religions character on Facebook |
|---|---|---|---|---|
Sun, Dec 10  
Experiencing Religions Report  
Embodying Religions postings on Facebook  
All extra credit work |