Major World Religions
RS 3310 (CRN – 25803)
University of Texas at El Paso
Religious Studies Program
Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench
Time: Online
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Course Description and Objectives:
This introductory course will guide students in an exploration of the diverse social institutions around the world classified as "religions". Major World Religions courses and textbooks are often limited to learning about only the most salient religious traditions. This course strives to include various new religious movements and indigenous religious traditions to fill the gap in the traditional 'World Religions' course.

Required Texts:
Brodd, J. et. al. *An Invitation to World Religions*. 4th Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021 – ISBN 978-0197543788

Grade Distribution:
20% Participation (Group Discussions)
20% Quizzes
20% Research Essay
20% Midterm Examination
20% Final Examination

Assignment Notes:
Participation: Participation points are earned by actively participating in the group discussions for each religious tradition we will cover. There will be a total of 15 group discussions over the semester. The grading rubric for the group discussions is in the syllabus folder. All group discussion assignments must be completed before midnight on Sunday of each week. If in doubt about when a group discussion is due, make sure to check the due date on the assignment itself. **Note**: We are all still learning to use Blackboard Ultra. The group discussion feature is quite different than in the previous version. Please be patient with each other (and with me!) as we navigate this new tool together.
Quizzes: There will be an open book/open note quiz for each religious tradition we study in the course. Quizzes must be taken before Sunday at midnight each week.
Research Essay: Students are required to submit a 2-3 page research essay assignment following these instructions: (1) choose a topic from the Research Essay Topics document in the Research Essay course content folder; (2) write a 2-3 page essay that contains the following; a) a clear and concise research question; b) a clear and concise thesis statement (i.e., reform your research question into a thesis statement); c) an introduction that includes your thesis statement and a brief summary of the facts/evidence behind why you are taking the position you are taking; d) a paper body that explains and justifies the facts/evidence stated in the introduction; e) a conclusion that summarizes and restates the facts/evidence supporting the position you've taken. (3) You must use the Chicago Manual of Style. (4) You are also required to *use **at least two** academic/peer-reviewed sources* (not including the textbook) in your paper. (5) For questions about the structure of the Research Essay, review the sample essay and Research Essay Rubric in the Research Essay folder.
Midterm Exam: The midterm examination will be taken on Blackboard using Respondus LockDown Browser. The questions will be based on the course content from the first half of the semester. It will contain 30-40 multiple choice questions and one short essay question.
Final Exam: The final examination will be taken on Blackboard using Respondus LockDown Browser. The questions will be based on the course content from the second half of the semester. It will contain 30-40 multiple choice

questions and one short essay question.

Course Schedule/Outline

The following schedule/outline is tentative. Time constraints, unforeseen events, and class interest may result in slight alterations.

Week 1 - Introduction	**Topic**	**Readings**
Jan 20th – 23rd	Lecture 1 – Introduction and Invitation to World Religions	Chapter 1 "An Invitation to World Religions"
Week 2 – Indigenous Religions		
Jan 26th – 30th	Lecture 2 - Indigenous Religions of North America	Chapter 2 "Indigenous Religions of North America"
Week 3 – Indigenous Religions		
Feb 2nd – 6th	Lecture 3 - Indigenous Religions of Africa	Chapter 3 "Indigenous Religions of Africa"
Week 4 - Hinduism		
Feb 9th – 13th	Lecture 4 - Eastern Religions: Hinduism	Chapter 4 "Hinduism"
Week 5 - Buddhism		
Feb 16th – 20th	Lecture 5 - Eastern Religions: Buddhism	Chapter 5 "Buddhism"
Week 6 - Jainism		
Feb 23rd – 27th	Lecture 6 - Eastern Religions: Jainism	Chapter 6 "Jainism"
Week 7 - Sikhism		
March 2nd – 6th	Lecture 7 - Eastern Religions: Sikhism	Chapter 7 "Sikhism"
Week 8 – Midterm Examination		
March 9th -13th	**Midterm Examination – Due 3/15 before midnight** *Respondus Lockdown Browser Required	Midterm Examination Review Guide
Week 9 – Spring Break		
March 16th – 20th	**Spring Break – No Class**	
Week 10 – Chinese Religions		
March 23rd – 27th	Lecture 8 - Eastern Religions: Confucianism and Daoism	Chapter 8 "Chinese Religions: Confucianism and Daoism"
Week 11 - Shinto		
March 31st – April 2nd	Lecture 9 - Eastern Religions: Shinto	Chapter 9 "Shinto"
Week 12 - Zoroastrianism		
April 6th – 10th	Lecture 10 - Zoroastrianism	Chapter 10 "Zoroastrianism"
Week 13 - Judaism		
April 13th – 17th	Lecture 11 - Western/Abrahamic Religions: Judaism Lecture	Chapter 11 "Judaism"
Week 14 - Christianity		
April 20th – 24th	12 - Western/Abrahamic Religions: Christianity	Chapter 12 "Christianity"
Week 15 - Islam		
April 28th – 30th	Lecture 13 - Western/Abrahamic Religions: Islam	Chapter 13 "Islam"
Week 16 – Final Examination		
May 4th – 8th	**Final Examination – due 5/10 before midnight**	**Research Essay – due 5/10 before midnight**

	*Respondus Lockdown Browser Required	

Grading:
Marks for assignments, tests, and exams are given in percentages, to which letter grades are also assigned, according to the table below. The percentage mark resulting from the entire term work and examination then produces the final letter grade for the course.

Grading Scale

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Points
90-100%	A	4.0
80-89%	B	3.0
70-79%	C	2.0
60-69%	D	1.0
0-59%	F	0.0

Academic Standing and Integrity:
"Academic Integrity**:** The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards."
"Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the **Handbook of Operating Procedures** (HOP) (available through the **Dean of Students Office**) may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others." ("Academic Standing," for more information, please visit http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=61879&submenuheader=1)

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is prohibited in this course
Use of AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, is ***not allowed*** for assignments in this class. Each student is expected to use critical and creative thinking skills to complete tasks and not rely on computer-generated ideas. Any direct use of AI-generated materials submitted as your own work will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

Special Needs
The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008. Students who become pregnant or have parenting responsibilities may also request reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. The UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) will process requests for accommodations based on a disability, pregnancy, or parenting. Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.