

Living Religions of the World



Instructor: Justin C. Maaia
Office: Hearst 314

Phone: 202-537-6367
E-mail: jmaaia@cathedral.org

Texts, Materials, and Resources:

- *World Religions*, a course packet containing articles and primary source documents. Available in the classroom.
- A composition book or other notebook. This will be your interactive notebook and experiential journal.

Course Description:

Created in response to the wonders and problems of human existence, religions have permeated every human culture. This course promotes cultural intelligence and religious literacy as students discover some of the rituals, stories, beliefs, ethics, social structures, art, and experiences of five of the world's great wisdom traditions. Alongside traditional academic study, students engage in experiential activities designed to give them glimpses into the spirit of each religion, and a fieldwork project that enables them to learn in depth about one local religious community. Together, these three approaches provide starting points for the understanding of other cultures while also encouraging students to discern and claim their own beliefs and practices. It has been our experience that this work can help students with the development of their worldview, their consciousness, and their sense of personhood. It is our hope that this course will be both an exploration of the self through a study of the world's religions and an exploration of the world's religions through a study of one's self.

Diversity Statement:

Diversity makes learning possible. The differences of opinion and perspective provided by diversity in all its forms make for a richer educational experience for everyone. There is thorough documentation of the cognitive development that occurs when we engage in dialogue with someone who is different from us. Without difference, there would be no learning. For this reason, diversity in all its forms is accepted and encouraged in this class.

Enduring Understandings:

In the Religious Studies Department, we seek to be aware of the academic and spiritual assumptions that influence our study and teaching of religion. We do not assume that you agree with or also hold these enduring understandings, but instead propose them as a starting place for our conversations.

- Human beings are intrinsically spiritual creatures, who are either consciously or unconsciously struggling with the existential issues of life. This is a life-long journey.
- Throughout human existence, communities have developed religious rituals, stories, and beliefs that help to explain suffering, goodness, creativity, and the purpose of life.
- By examining the beliefs of others, people are able to become clearer and more articulate about their own beliefs and values.

Essential Questions:

- What are the unifying elements and diversifying elements within each religious tradition?
- How have religions served as the repositories of wisdom, the bearers of culture, the foundations of social order, and the sources of inspiration throughout history?
- How should I live? (Who am I? What do I stand for? What am I working toward? What is the human potential?)
- Why do we suffer? Is there a way out of suffering?
- What happens when I die?
- How should society be organized?
- Why and how do human beings search beyond "this world" for answers to questions of meaning?
- What makes something sacred?
- What is the relationship between humanity and the sacred?
- What does it mean to be faithful, spiritual, religious, atheist, agnostic?
- How do people interpret religion differently across the spectrum of fundamentalism to liberalism?

Course Requirements:

Upperclass students are expected to actively learn and to participate in their education, which means:

- **Notetaking:** Students are responsible for knowing everything the instructor says during class time. If you are absent

from class for any reason, make sure you get notes from a classmate.

- **Participation:** Class time will be divided between lecture, discussion, and other activities. Students are expected to make contributions to discussions and activities by providing questions, answers, comments, and reading aloud from texts when called upon by the teacher. Students are expected to bring copies of the assigned reading with them to class. Part of the course grade will be based on these forms of participation. Students and teacher will engage in dialogue kindly and respectfully, and will maintain the classroom as a safe space that is conducive to thinking and learning.
- **Assessments:** Students are expected to complete assignments on-time unless an extension has been granted in advance of due date. Late submissions are reduced by 1/3 letter grade for each 24 hours. The lowest grade for any acceptable paper turned in before the end of the last class of the course is 50%.
- Students are responsible for following the standards of academic conduct as set forth in the NCS Honor Code.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, it is our hope that students will be able to:

- Live more mindfully.
- Succeed in college- and graduate-level humanities courses.
- Engage in phenomenology (i.e., self-reflect and then examine the world with awareness of our pre-judgements).
- Name and Describe some of the unifying and diversifying elements of five of the world's most widely-practiced religious traditions
- Describe each religion's answers to the questions: Why do we suffer? How should I live? What happens when I die? How should society be organized?
- Define vocabulary and concepts central to the academic study of religion.
- Interpret religious myths, rituals, practices, and doctrines on a variety of levels.
- Assess the validity and soundness of articles, including obvious and inherent biases and perspectives of the authors.
- Present personal ideas, perspectives, and analyses publicly for discussion and dialogue.
- Demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively in small groups on both daily and on long-term projects.
- Organize, plan and complete a fieldwork research project with all of the best practices that accompany this endeavor.
- Journal as a way of exploring, analyzing, solidifying, and/or bringing to awareness one's own thoughts.
- Think synthetically across disciplines and life experiences.
- Other skills: Contemplation, self-reflection, meditation.

Evaluation and Assessments:

- **Concept Tests** assess knowledge and understanding. They are cumulative, in order to facilitate comparisons among religions. (6 Tests = 40% of semester grade)
- **The Sacred Beltway Fieldwork Project** is a multi-year study of religious diversity in the greater Washington metropolitan area. Each student works with a partner to study a religious community in depth. This project offers students the opportunity to explore a religion of interest in a way that enables them to show innovative understanding while making a valuable contribution to knowledge in the field. (4 assignments = 40% of semester grade)
- **Experiential Journal Reflections** offer unique opportunities to pause and reflect on the subject matter, considering it in relationship to students' experiences of learning and life. Journals provide a space for individualized dialogue between students and teacher, but are graded only on the thoughtful and timely completion of the work. (6 entries = 10% of semester grade)
- **Class Participation** and attendance are required. They are essential to the type of inquiry found in religious studies and philosophy classes. One's classroom participation greatly affects the depth and completeness of one's tests and reflections. In both listening and speaking, we will emphasize quality over quantity. (2 assessments = 10%)

Calendar of Major Assessments: See Unit Plan for each section

Name	Date or Class #	Name	Date or Class #
Wise Person Interview		Unit 4 Test – Judaism	
Unit 1 Tes - Intro		Interview Report	
Annotated Bibliography		Unit 5 Test – Christianity	
Unit 2 Test - Hinduism		Presentations Due	
Site Visit Report		Unit 6 Test – Islam	
Unit 3 Test – Buddhism			