

**Syllabus RELI 100 DL2– Distance Learning Course
The Human Religious Experience
Spring 2024**

Meeting place: Blackboard: Asynchronous with two Zoom meetings

Zoom: Feb 15, Apr 18, Thursdays, 11:00 am-12:15 pm (email the professor for alternate assignments if you cannot attend).

Weekly schedule: Each week runs from Monday-Sunday, beginning on Tues, Jan 16–Weds, May 8, 2024

Instructor: Dr. Susan E. Bond

Email: sbond@gmu.edu

Fulfills general education requirement in global understanding. 3 credits.

Course Description

According to a recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012), approximately six of the seven billion people in the world identify themselves as members of a faith tradition. Religion is a powerful force in the world, for good and for ill, and religious literacy should be a requirement for every citizen of the world. The course covers the beliefs, practices, festivals, and history of the major world religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

Human persons answer the age-old question about the ultimate meaning of life in a variety of ways that academic religious study describes as (1) worshipping the powerful forces of nature (the oldest religious form), (2) seeking harmony (Daoism and Confucianism), (3) seeking liberation (Hinduism and Buddhism), and (4) seeking salvation with the expectation of encountering God both in history and at the end of history (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century and with the pace increasing in the mid-twentieth century, world religious traditions have been impacted by modernity in a number of interesting ways: a rise in cults and new religious movements paralleled by an opposing pull towards fundamentalism and orthodoxy; an increasing interest in the West in Asian religious practices like yoga, meditation, and acupuncture; and the rise of women as religious authority.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students will be able to

1. Categorize the major religious traditions by four conceptual approaches to ultimate meaning;
2. Interpret the symbolic language of the major religious traditions;
3. Compare and contrast the practical and active elements of religious ritual and worship that "tie and bind" individuals to community and divinity;
4. Describe and explain the originating history, beliefs, and festivals of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism;
5. Apply literal, moral, and allegorical interpretive approaches to the reading of sacred texts;
6. Explain the impact of modernity, for example, the rise of science, new religious movements, orthodoxy, and women as authority on religious traditions;
7. Articulate a worldview;
8. Apply good academic research and writing skills to all levels of composition.

Global Understanding Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate understanding of global patterns and processes;
2. Demonstrate understanding of the interconnectedness, difference, and diversity of a global society;
3. Explore individual and collective responsibilities within a global society through analytical, practical, or creative responses to problems or issues, using resources appropriate to the field.

Course Logistics

This course uses a distance learning format; the primary meeting space will be on Blackboard with lectures, readings, assignments, and two Zoom meetings with discussions. This is a rigorous, writing - and deadline-intensive course. In a typical two-week period, we will cover one religious tradition and:

- you will read about 60–80 pages and take an open-book quiz
- accomplish online activities and write weekly essays using the standards of good academic form
- work on assignments to be submitted through Blackboard according to the assignment schedule

Time Commitment

You should **expect to spend an average of 8 to 10 hours on coursework each week** (this includes the time you would have spent in a classroom); some weeks it will be as low as 6 hours but a few weeks it will be as high as 12 to 14 hours.

Two-Week Absence

If you fall behind by two weeks for *any* reason, you will not be able to catch up and keep up. I recommend taking a Selective Withdrawal for any two-week absence from the course.

Blackboard

We will use Blackboard for the course. Additional guidance on individual assignments and discussion questions will be posted there. Use the Blackboard assignment link to submit your work for grading. Please note that assignments submitted via email are not graded and receive no credit. Please visit the Blackboard site regularly.

Access Blackboard by following these steps:

1. Go to <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.
2. Login using your NETID and password,
3. Click on the "Courses" tab.
4. Click on RELI 100 under the "Blackboard Course" heading.

Instructor-Student Communication

I usually respond to your emails within 24 hours. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement in the Blackboard course folder. I usually read and answer emails most mornings. Please sign your emails.

Before sending an email, please check the following (available on your Blackboard course menu) **unless the email is of a personal nature**:

- Syllabus
- Announcements
- Blackboard videos on how to use Blackboard features
- Blackboard Q&A, and
- Technology Requirements.

Student Responsibilities

MasonLive/Email

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and **check it regularly**. For accessibility and privacy, the university, school, and program will send communications to students solely through their Mason email account—students should respond accordingly (See <https://thanos.gmu.edu/masonlive/login>)

Patriot Pass

Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems: Blackboard, University Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. (See <https://password.gmu.edu/index.jsp>)

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester (See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>)

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. (See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/distance>)

Honor Code and Virtual Classroom Conduct:

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honorcode/>). We value critical thinking and therefore, it is imperative that students read the assigned books and articles prior to the class with a critical eye. Active thought, quality of inputs, and a conflict resolution attitude should be your guiding principles.

Work Ethic

RELI 100 is designed as a collaborative learning experience. It is important that students participate in every class and that they contribute actively to groups and class discussions. Please participate enthusiastically in group activities while respecting the opinions and valuing the work of other group members. You will be disappointed in this class if you focus on individual effort alone. However, any individual work should be strictly your own. Presenting any other person or source's work as your own (plagiarism) will result in a zero grade for the assignment.

If you are absent from the course for two weeks (no posts in discussion boards, quizzes or assignments completed), you must take a Selective Withdrawal from the course.

University Policies

Students must follow the university policies. (See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>)

Responsible Use of Computing

Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. (See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing>)

University Calendar

Details regarding the current Academic Calendar. (See <http://calendar.gmu.edu>)

Religious Holiday Calendar

George Mason University encourages students to participate in their respective religious holiday celebrations. (See <http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/>)

University Catalog

The current university catalog. (See <http://catalog.gmu.edu>)

Student Services

Writing Center

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. (See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>)

ESL Help: The program was designed specifically for students whose first language is not English who feel they might benefit from additional, targeted support over the course of an entire semester. (See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?page_id=10)

University Libraries

University Libraries provide resources for distance students. (See <http://library.gmu.edu/distance>)

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. (See <http://caps.gmu.edu>)

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. (See <http://registrar.gmu.edu>)

Diversity and Inclusion

The course seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

Zoom Classes

There are two Zoom classes scheduled during the semester. You will write a brief low stakes response for each class. If you cannot attend, email the professor for an alternate assignment by the Wednesday before the Thursday Zoom class. The purposes of the Zoom classes are to

1. connect with one another;
 2. give you a break from formal writing assignments;
 3. give you the chance to listen to a live lecture; and
 4. ask questions.
5. This is also a good time to schedule a private meeting with me after class.

Course Policies

1. Zoom meetings: screen on with your face visible and responsive to questions for class participation points. If you cannot attend, email the instructor for an alternate assignment by Wednesday before the Thursday Zoom class.
2. For credit all work is submitted on Blackboard; no work is accepted via email.

3. Please be respectful and informed when making requests or seeking information.
4. Please sign your name to emails as a matter of courtesy and convenience.
5. Letter grade deductions apply for each day late. See the Rubrics and Grading Criteria on the Course Menu for a list of letter-grade deductions.
6. **Do not wait** until the middle or end of the course to ask to do makeup work. In this course, one week builds on another and as there is a good amount of reading and work to do each week, waiting to do the work all at once is simply untenable.
7. I may suggest a Selective Withdrawal if you cannot do the course work in a timely way.
8. Yet sometimes there are crises. If you are ill or have a family emergency that precludes your ability to work, let me know within the week in which you are requesting an extension for a family emergency or illness. Documentation (official correspondence) is required for extensions.
9. You are responsible for the information on the syllabus, in course emails, announcements, and grading comments.
10. I do not boost grades or offer makeup work at the end of the course.
11. If you need to speak with me in person, please email me for a Zoom appointment.
12. For technical issues contact the Bb help desk at courses@gmu.edu

Improving Your Grade

Note that while make-up work and extra credit are not available, the course drops the four lowest scores in :

- quizzes
- discussion boards
- blog posts
- Zoom class

Late Work/Grade Deductions

All written reports, essays, discussion boards, and blog posts (due on Thursdays) are graded down **one letter grade for each day late**. Activities and quizzes are forfeited if not submitted by their Sunday due date.

Two comments on classmates' posts are required: there is a **letter-grade deduction** for no comments.

Required Textbook

John Esposito, et al., eds. *World Religions Today*. 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Available at the Barnes and Noble campus bookstore <http://gmu.bncollege.com>. For the online course, the eBook is recommended, especially for those registering late.

Major Components

Quizzes (5 %)

Blogs & Comments (4%)

1. Myth, Symbol, Modernity
2. Literal, Moral, Allegorical
3. Symbols and Rituals of Succoth (*Ushpizin*)
4. Sermon Analysis
5. Sunni/Shia
6. Qur'an and Hajj
7. Dalai Lama and Lotus Sutra

Discussion Board Groups & Comments (4%)

1. Global Religious Landscape
2. Cleansing Rituals
3. The Ramayana
4. Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path
5. Confucianism and Daoism

Zoom Meetings (4%)

1. Christian Sacraments
2. Harmony and Liberation

Final Essay (16%)

Activities/Assignments	Percent
Quizzes (7)	40 (5 each)
Syllabus quiz (1)	Drop lowest quiz
GMU Honor Code Module (1)	
Participation:	44 (4 each)
Blogs & comments (7)	Drop lowest blog
Discussions & comments (5)	Drop lowest discussion
Zoom/alternate (2)	Drop lowest Zoom
Final Essay	16
Total	100

Weeks	Topics	Content (Readings/Video/Audio)	Activities	Assessment
-------	--------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

<p>Week 1 Tues, Jan 16– Sun, Jan 21 Week 1</p> <p>Learning Outcome: #6</p>	<p>Welcome and Introduction to the Course</p>	<p>(1) Reading: “The Global Religious Landscape,” pages 9–15(8 pages)</p>	<p>(1) Student Introductions Due Thurs, Jan 18</p> <p>Discussions: a. The Global Religious Landscape</p> <p>Due Thurs, Jan 18; comments due Sun, Jan 21</p>	<p>Syllabus quiz GMU Honor Code Due Sun, Jan 21</p>
<p>Week 2 Mon, Jan 22– Sun, Jan 28</p> <p>Last day add: Tues, Jan 23</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: #1, #2, #6</p>	<p>Religious Language and the Impact of Modernity</p>	<p>(1) Reading: <i>WRT</i>, chap. 1</p> <p>(2) Mini-Lecture: Symbol (7 mins)</p> <p>(3) Mini-Lecture: Impact of Modernity (11 mins)</p>	<p>(1) Blog: Myth, Symbol, Modernity (a) religious symbols in ads; (b) 4 myths map (c) concept map premodern and postmodern Due Thurs, Jan 25; comments due Sun, Jan 28</p>	<p>Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 1 Due Sun, Jan 28</p>
<p>Week 3 Mon, Jan 29 Sun, Feb 4</p>	<p>Introduction to Judaism</p>	<p>(1) Reading: <i>WRT</i>, chap. 3</p> <p>(2) Video: <i>Ushpizin</i> (92 mins) Dar, G. and R. Bukai (Producers) & G.</p>	<p>(1) Blog: Symbols and Rituals of Succoth</p>	<p>Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 3 Due Sun, Feb 4</p>

Learning Outcomes: #1, #4, #6 Last day to drop w full refund Tues, Jan 30		Dar (Director). (2004). <i>Ushpizin</i> [Motion picture]. Jerusalem, Israel: Warner Brothers/Picture House. Available to students using Swank Digital Campus within Blackboard.	Due Thurs, Feb 1; comments Sun, Feb 4	
Week 4 Mon, Feb 5– Sun, Feb 11 Learning Outcomes #2, #3, #5, #6	Judaism: Scripture, Symbols and Rituals	(1) Mini-lecture: Hebrew Bible (5 mins) (2) Mini-Lecture: Reading Scripture Literally, Morally, and Allegorically (7 mins)	(1) Blog: Literal, Moral, Allegorical Video Due Thurs, Feb 8; comments due Sun, Feb 11	
Week 5 Mon, Feb 12– – Sun, Feb 18 Zoom Feb 23 Learning Outcomes: #1, #2, #3, #4	Introduction to Christianity	(1) Reading: <i>WRT</i> , chap. 4 (2) Video: <i>The Sacraments</i> (23 mins)	Zoom meeting Thurs, Feb 15 11:00am-12:15 pm Zoom response due Feb 18 Discussion: Christian sacraments	Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 4 Due Sun, Feb 18
Week 6 Mon, Feb 19– Sun, Feb 25	Christianity: Scripture	(1) Mini-Lecture: New Testament (5 mins)	(1) Blog: Sermon Analysis	

Learning Outcome: #2, #3, #5, #6				M-Z due Thurs, Feb 22; A-L critique due Sun, Feb 25 (no comments)	
Week 7 Mon, Feb 26– Sun, Mar 3 Learning Outcomes: #1, #3, #4	Introduction to Islam	(1) Readings: <i>WRT</i> , chap. 5 (2) Videos: Shia Imam Mustafa Akhound (a) Islam (9 mins) (b) Sunni and Shia (10 mins) (c) Eid al Fitr and Muharram (10 mins)	Sunni and Shia Due Feb 29	Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 5 Due Sun, Mar 3	
Week 8 Spring Break Mar 4–Mar 10					
-Week 9 Mon, Mar 11 –Sun, Mar 17 Learning Outcomes: #2, #3, #5	Islam: Scripture, Symbols and Rituals	(1) Reading: <i>Approaching the Qur'an</i> , pages 40–55 (Surah 82) (15 pages) (2) Video: <i>Hajj: The Pilgrimage</i> (88 mins)	Blog: Qur'an and Hajj Due Thurs, Mar 14; comments due Sun, Mar 17		

<p>Week 10 Mon, Mar 18– Sun, Mar 24</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: #1, #3, #4</p>	<p>Introduction to Hinduism</p>	<p>(1) Reading: <i>WRT</i>, chap. 6 (2) Video: A Year in India (15 mins)</p>	<p>Discussion: Cleansing Rituals</p> <p>Due Thurs, Mar 21; comments due Sun, Mar 24</p>	<p>Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 6 Due Sun, Mar 24</p>
<p>Week 11 Mon, Mar 25 – Sun, Mar 31</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: #2, #3, #5</p>	<p>Hinduism: Famous Epic</p>	<p>(1) Mini Lecture: The Ramayana (9 mins) (2) Video: <i>Sita Sings the Blues</i> (82 mins)</p>	<p>Discussion: Ramayana</p> <p>Due Thurs, Mar 28; comments due Sun, Mar 31</p>	
<p>Week 12 Mon, Apr 1– Sun, Apr 7</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: #1, #4, #6</p>	<p>Introduction to Buddhism</p>	<p>(1) Reading: <i>WRT</i>, chap. 7 (2) Video Interview: Buddhist Nun, Venerable Losang Tendrol: The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path (17 mins)</p>	<p>Discussion: Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path</p> <p>Due Thurs, Apr 4; comments due Sun, Apr 7</p>	<p>Quiz, <i>WRT</i> chapter 7 Due Sun, Apr 7</p>
<p>Week 13 Mon, Apr 8 – Sun, Apr 14</p> <p>Learning Outcomes:</p>	<p>Buddhism: Scripture and the Dalai Lama</p>	<p>(1) Reading: Lotus Sutra (2) Video: <i>10 Questions for the Dalai Lama</i> (87 mins)</p>	<p>Blog: Dalai Lama and Lotus Sutra</p> <p>Due Thurs, Apr 11; comments due Sun, Apr 14</p>	

#2, #3, #5, #6 Week 14 Mon, Apr 15 – Sun, Apr 21 Zoom meeting Thurs, Apr 18 Learning Outcomes: #1, #4	Introduction to Daoism and Confucianism	(1) Mini-Lecture: Harmony (11 mins) (2) Reading: <i>WRT</i> , chap. 8	Zoom meeting Thurs, Apr 18 11:00 am-12:15 pm Zoom response due Apr 21 Discuss harmony and liberation	Quiz, <i>WRT</i> , chapter 8 Due Sun, Apr 21
Week 15 Mon, Apr 22 – Sun, Apr 28 Learning Outcomes: #1, #2, #3, #6	East Asian Traditions: Myth, Symbols and Rituals	Video Interviews: Confucian Institute Director, Dr. Lihong Wang (1) Myths of Harmony (2 mins) (2) Confucianism (2 mins) (3) Daoism (5 mins) (4) Teacher's Day (3 mins)	Discussion: Confucianism and Daoism Due Thurs, Apr 25; comments due Sun, Apr 28	
Thurs, May 2 Learning Outcome #7	Final			(1) Final essay. Due Thurs, May 2