

**George Mason University**  
**College of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Department of Religious Studies**

**RELI 211.DL1 – Religions of the West, Spring 2024 (3 Credits)**

**Faculty**

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**Prerequisites/Corequisites**

None.

**University Catalog Course Description**

Focuses on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from historical, comparative, and cross-cultural perspectives. May also include modern developments of those faiths such as Mormonism and Baha'ism, as well as Zoroastrianism and religions of ancient Near Eastern cultures.

**Course Overview**

In this course, students primarily explore the history, practices, beliefs, and contemporary developments of the three major monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will examine these three religious traditions thematically and comparatively, in order to understand the similarities, differences, and relationships among them. The exploration of these three religions and their traditions is conducted against the backdrop of the academic study of religion and the religions of Antiquity. Finally, students examine Indigenous traditions and new religious movements, before exploring current issues such as religion and politics, fundamentalism, religious diversity, the environment, and gender and sexuality in Western religious traditions.

**Learner Outcomes or Objectives**

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Explain the academic study of religion and the relevance of religious life on a global level in today's world.
2. Identify and articulate the basic history, beliefs, and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
3. Compare the similarities and differences between Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and new religious movements and cults.
4. Describe the continuity and innovation among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions in the development of modern society, especially as it pertains to bioethics, the environment, gender and sexuality, politics, and women's rights.
5. Find reliable academic and scholarly resources for the study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

## **Required Texts**

Hussain, Amir, Roy C. Amore, and Willard Gurdon Oxtoby. *World Religions: Western Traditions*. 5th Edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780190877064. (WRWT)

## **Course Performance Evaluation**

- **Course Requirements**

Throughout the course, students will complete assignments that fall into one of four categories, which are as follows:

*Exams:* Two exams will be given throughout the semester, followed by a non-cumulative final exam. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. All exams are closed book and will be administered using the Respondus online proctoring tool. Please see the note on using the Respondus system below.

*Quizzes:* A total of 8 quizzes will be administered throughout the semester, corresponding to each chapter of the book. Quizzes may consist of multiple choice, true/false questions, and short answer questions. While all quizzes are closed book, I am choosing not to utilize the Respondus tool for them (I find the tool incredibly invasive!), so please respect the honor system. At the end of the semester, I will drop one quiz with the lowest score!

*Reading Responses:* A total of 10 reading responses assignments will be required throughout the semester. Questions are drawn from that week's required reading. Reading responses should be at least 250 words in length (there is no upper limit).

*Documentary Assignment:* Students will be required to submit a 3-4 page, double-spaced (12-point, Times New Roman font) reflection essay after watching one of the provided documentary series on Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Detailed instructions will be posted on Blackboard. This assignment is due by 11:59 pm (EST) on Sunday, April 21, 2024, but can be submitted as soon as the corresponding chapter in the book has been covered.

- **Grade Evaluation**

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Quizzes: 15%

Reading Responses: 15%

Documentary Assignment: 10%

- **Numerical/Letter Grade Correspondence**

A	94 – 100%	C+	77 – 79%
A-	90 – 93%	C	74 – 76%
B+	87 – 89%	C-	70 – 73%
B	84 – 86%	D	60 – 69%
B-	80 – 83%	F	Below 60%

- **Deadlines, Extensions, and Extra Credit**

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor. Considering the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has made on our lives, the importance of flexibility and accommodation cannot be understated. As a result, the following policies will be in effect throughout the course:

*Life Happens Pass:* As long as you inform me in writing, you are allowed an automatic, no questions asked, 48-hour extension without incurring a penalty on any assignment (except for the Final Exam) once per semester.

*Standard Deduction:* Late assignments within 24 hours of the deadline will earn a flat 10% grade deduction, and late assignments within 48 hours of the deadline will earn a flat 20% grade deduction. Late assignments beyond 48 hours will not be accepted and will receive a zero.

*Bonus Credit:* There are 10 required Reading Responses assignments throughout the semester that are each worth 1.5% of a student's final grade, totaling 15% collectively. Students may complete an optional 11<sup>th</sup> Reading Response assignment for an additional 1.5% that will be added to their final grade.

## **Class Schedule**

Note: All assignments are due by the end of the week (Sunday, 11:59 PM EST), unless otherwise noted. Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

### **Week 1 (1/16 – 1/21): Introduction**

- Required reading:
  - Nye, Malory. "Religion: Some Basics," in *Religion: The Basics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1 – 22. (Available on Blackboard)
  - Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson, "Introduction: The World Religions Paradigm in Contemporary Religious Studies," in *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies*, ed. Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1 – 17. (Available on Blackboard)
- Reading Response #1
- "Student Introductions" assignment (Available on Blackboard)

**Week 2 (1/22 – 1/28): Studying Western Religions**

- Required reading: Chapter 1 (WRWT), pp. 3 – 23
- Reading Response #2
- Quiz #1

**Week 3 (1/29 – 2/4): Religions of Antiquity**

- Required reading: Chapter 2 (WRWT), pp. 25 – 79
- Reading Response #3
- Quiz #2

**Week 4 (2/5 – 2/11): Judaism**

- Required reading: Chapter 3 (WRWT), pp. 81 – 122
- Reading Response #4
- Watch Judaism documentary (if applicable)

**Week 5 (2/12 – 2/18): Judaism (cont.)**

- Required reading: Chapter 3 (WRWT), pp. 122 – 159
- Quiz #3
- Watch Judaism documentary (if applicable)

**Week 6 (2/19 – 2/25): Christianity**

- Required reading: Chapter 4 (WRWT), pp. 161 – 182
- Reading Response #5
- Exam #1 (Ch. 1 – 3)
- Watch Christianity documentary (if applicable)

**Week 7 (2/26 – 3/3): Christianity (cont.)**

- Required reading: Chapter 4 (WRWT), pp. 182 – 213
- Reading Response #6
- Watch Christianity documentary (if applicable)

**Week 8 (3/4 – 3/10): Spring Break**

- No Assignments – Enjoy the break!

**Week 9 (3/11 – 3/17): Christianity (cont.)**

- Required reading: Chapter 4 (WRWT), pp. 213 – 241
- Quiz #4
- Watch Christianity documentary (if applicable)

**Week 10 (3/18 – 3/24): Islam**

- Required reading: Chapter 5 (WRWT), pp. 243 – 272
- Reading Response #7
- Watch Islam documentary (if applicable)

**Week 11 (3/25 – 3/31): Islam (cont.)**

- Required reading: Chapter 5 (WRWT), pp. 272 – 293
- Reading Response #8
- Quiz #5
- Watch Islam documentary (if applicable)

**Week 12 (4/1 – 4/7): Islam (cont.)**

- Required reading: Chapter 5 (WRWT), pp. 293 – 311
- Exam #2 (Ch. 4 & 5)
- Watch Islam documentary (if applicable)

**Week 13 (4/8 – 4/14): Indigenous Traditions**

- Required reading: Chapter 6 (WRWT), pp. 313 – 383
- Reading Response #9
- Quiz #6

**Week 14 (4/15 – 4/21): New Religious Movements**

- Required reading: Chapter 7 (WRWT), pp. 385 – 425
- Reading Response #10
- Quiz #7
- Documentary Assignment

**Week 15 (4/22 – 4/28): Current Issues in Western Traditions**

- Required reading: Chapter 8 (WRWT), pp. 427 – 449
- Quiz #8
- (optional/Bonus Credit) Reading Response #11

**Final Exam: TBA****Course Delivery Method**

This course will be delivered online using an asynchronous format via Blackboard Learning Management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard (Bb) course site using your Mason email name (everything before @masonlive.gmu.edu) and email password. The course site will be available on January 16, 2024.

***Technical Requirements***

To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers. To get a list of Blackboard's supported browsers see:  
[https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting\\_Started/Browser\\_Support#supported-browsers](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting_Started/Browser_Support#supported-browsers)

To get a list of supported operation systems on different devices see:

[https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting\\_Started/Browser\\_Support#tested-devices-and-operating-systems](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting_Started/Browser_Support#tested-devices-and-operating-systems)

- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- This course requires the use of LockDown Browser and a webcam for online exams. The webcam can be built into your computer (internal webcam) or can be the type of webcam that plugs in with a USB cable (external webcam). Watch this short video to get a basic understanding of LockDown Browser and the webcam feature. A Quick Start Guide for Students is also available.
  - You will need the following system requirements for online exams:
    - Windows: 10, 8, 7
    - Mac: OS X 10.10 or higher
    - iOS: 10.0+ (iPad only). Must have a compatible LMS integration [[Details](#)].
    - Web camera (internal or external) & microphone
    - A reliable internet connection
  - Prior to your first exam, you must install LockDown Browser following the step-by-step instructions.
  - To ensure LockDown Browser and the webcam are set up properly, do the following:
    - Start LockDown Browser, log into Blackboard and select this course.
    - Locate and select the Help Center button on the LockDown Browser toolbar.
    - Run the Webcam Check and, if necessary, resolve any issues or permissions your computer prompts.
    - Run the System & Network Check. If a problem is indicated, see if a solution is provided in the Knowledge Base. Further troubleshooting is available through the ITS Support Center.
    - Exit the Help Center and locate the practice quiz.
    - Upon completing and submitting the practice quiz, exit LockDown Browser.
  - When taking an online exam that requires LockDown Browser and a webcam, remember the following guidelines:
    - Ensure you're in a location where you won't be interrupted.
    - Turn off all other devices (e.g. tablets, phones, second computers) and place them outside of your reach.
    - Clear your desk of all external materials not permitted — books, papers, phones, other devices.
    - Before starting the test, know how much time is available for it, and that you've allotted sufficient time to complete it.
    - Remain at your computer for the duration of the test.
    - Make sure that your computer is plugged into a power source, or that battery is fully-charged.
    - If the computer or networking environment is different than what was used previously with the Webcam Check and System & Network Check in LockDown Browser, run the checks again prior to starting the test.

- Remember that LockDown Browser will prevent you from accessing other websites or applications; you will be unable to exit the test until all questions are completed and submitted.
- To produce a good webcam video, do the following:
  - Do not wear a baseball cap or hat with a brim that obscures your face.
  - Ensure your computer or tablet is on a firm surface (a desk or table). Do NOT have the computer on your lap, a bed, or any other surface where the device (or you) are likely to move.
  - If using a built-in (internal) webcam, avoid tilting the screen after the webcam setup is complete.
  - Take the exam in a well-lit room and avoid backlighting, such as sitting with your back to a window.

### *Expectations*

- Course Week:  
Because asynchronous courses do not have a “fixed” meeting day, our week will start on Monday, and finish on Sunday.
- Log-in Frequency:  
Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communications from the instructor, class discussions, and/or access to course materials at least 3 times per week.
- Participation:  
Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.
- Technical Competence:  
Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students who are struggling with technical components of the course are expected to seek assistance from the instructor and/or College or University technical services.
- Technical Issues:  
Students should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.
- Workload:  
Please be aware that this course is **not** self-paced. Students are expected to meet *specific deadlines* and *due dates* listed in the **Class Schedule** section of this syllabus. It is the student’s responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities and assignments due.
- Instructor Support:  
Students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content or other course-related issues. Students should email the instructor to schedule a one-on-one session, including their preferred meeting method and suggested dates/times.
- Netiquette:  
The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued. Students must always re-read

their responses carefully before posting them, so as others do not consider them as personal offenses. *Be positive in your approach with others and diplomatic in selecting your words.* Remember that you are not competing with classmates, but sharing information and learning from others. All faculty are similarly expected to be respectful in all communications.

- Accommodations:

Online learners who require effective accommodations to ensure accessibility must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services.

## **GMU Policies and Resources for Students**

### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/> ).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).

### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to [tk20help@gmu.edu](mailto:tk20help@gmu.edu) or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

## **Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:**

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing [titleix@gmu.edu](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu).