

# The Human Religious Experience (Introduction to the Study of Religion)

Religious Studies 100-006  
George Mason University – Fall 2017



**instructor:** *Prof. Garry Sparks*  
**office:** *Robinson Hall B, room 444*  
**office hours:** *T/Th 4:30pm-6pm*  
*(or by appointment when available)*

**days/times:** *T/Th 3pm-4:15pm*  
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## Course Description

One of the hallmarks of the modern era (beginning roughly in the sixteenth century) is the encounter between various religious groups in different parts of the world previously unknown to each other. Over the course of the centuries that followed in that age of modern empires these cultural, linguistic, and religious encounters raised questions on not only the understandings of “true” or “proper” religious teachings (orthodoxy) vs. “false” or “deviant” religious teachings (heterodoxy) within western theologies (namely in Christianity and Judaism) but also the very meaning of “religion.” As a result, by the 1800s a new academic field of study began to emerge—religious studies or the scholarly study of religion mainly by means of a comparative approach—which strove to generalize and theorize identifiable phenomena of “religion.” In contrast to a confessional or apologetic (e.g., defense) *for* a particular religious belief or the teaching *of* a religion, the field of religious studies distinguishes itself (from, for example, theology in the narrow sense of the term) as the study *about* “religion” (or religions) and the “religious” dimensions of human life. Religious Studies, therefore, is the rigorous critical and analytical interdisciplinary (i.e., scientific, historical, philosophical, etc.) inquiry primarily concerned with descriptions of religion—including the basic questions of “what is ‘religion?’” and “what makes something ‘religious?’” (rather than judgments regarding which, if any, religious systems or expressions are “true,” “correct,” “good,” or “worthy” of belief).

This course will serve as a basic introduction to the academic study of religion. While not to be confused with a general survey course of religions-of-the-world or “world religions,” this course will draw upon diverse examples of different religious expressions and movements from across the global. However, the main purpose is to introduce you to various theories, methods or approaches, key concepts and terms, taxonomies or typologies (e.g., types or categories of religions), and influential moments and thinkers within the field of religious studies that have probably affected what and how you think about religion whether you are aware of it or not.

## Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- analyze a religion according to basic features along the lines of: rituals, myths, symbols, teachings, senses of sacred time and space, etc.;
- know the names of major thinkers in the modern study of religion and their key ideas;
- describe and distinguish among a diverse selection of methodological approaches to the study of religion and explain some of the important critical responses to each;
- demonstrate critical thinking and self-consciousness about the assumptions implicit in a variety of theoretical models in the study of religion;
- discuss the complexity, ambiguity, and cultural range implicit in the term “religion.”

## Methods of Instruction

This course will consist of a set of required (and recommended) readings and class lectures with discussions. While attendance is not taken it is expected that you will attend all class sessions and will have read all of a day's assigned readings at least twice prior to coming to class. Class sessions will provide additional information on a week's topic to help you further think about and understand what you have read, but class will not merely repeat what is in the readings. In other words, your errand is to synthesize the readings and class lectures; if you fail to attend class and/or fail to keep up with the readings you will most likely fail the course.

A note regarding the readings: the “suggested readings” for this course are designed to provide additional information regarding a particular topic. Therefore, pay close attention between the assigned (required) readings and any subsequent “suggested” (non-required) readings listed below. Inclusion of “suggested readings” in your work (*in addition to* but *not instead of* required readings) will be considered as extra credit in your final grade. For required readings found on Blackboard (Bboard) as PDFs: *you must print, read, mark up, and bring to class hard copies* – consulting electronic versions of these texts on your **computer, smart phone, or equivalent device during class is not allowed.**

In this respect, *please have all computers, phones, and smart watches turned off* (and not merely on “vibrate” as this is still distracting from your learning and to those around you) and put away prior to the start of class (exceptions—including the need to audio record class lecture-discussions—will be made only with prior approval by the instructor; students requesting additional learning provisions should also consult GMU’s Office of Disability Services. If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu/students/>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

***Finally, please note that I (the instructor) reserve the right to change the syllabus during the term if and/or when need arises (e.g., to meet the learning outcomes of the course). You are responsible for checking for such changes (checking the “announcements” on the Bboard course site frequently) and updating your copy of the syllabus accordingly.***

## Semester Outline of Topics (to be divided appropriately between class times every week)

### Week 1 – Introducing an Introduction to the Study of “Religion”

Aug. 29 & 31

- **read** and discuss:
  - course syllabus;
  - Livingston, “What is Religion?” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 3-14 (PDF).
  - Pals, “Introduction,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 3-17 (PDF).
  - Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 56-63 (PDF).

### Week 2 – Methods, Models, and Working Definitions of “Religion”

Sept. 5 & 7

- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Ways of Studying Religion,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 15-34;
  - Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 269-84 (PDF).

### Week 3 – Defining “Religion” & Identifying “Religions” or the “Religious”

Sept. 12 & 14

- **For 9/14 – Assignment 1 Due: “What is ‘Religion’?”**  
must bring 2 copies of completed assignment in hardcopy to class
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “The Sacred and the Holy,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 35-52.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “The Reality of the Sacred,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 193-228.

### Week 4 – Religious Time and Space (*axis mundi*): Case Study of the Maya Calendar(s)

Sept. 19 & 21

- **NOTE:** Turn in hardcopy of final/revised version of Assignment 1 by no later than 9/21.
- **For 9/19 read** and discuss:
  - Pals, “Animism and Magic,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 18-52 (PDF).
- **For 9/21 – documentary, 3 case studies: “American Mystic” (1 hr 21 min).**
  - Be sure to turn in “American Mystic” assignment before leaving class on Thursday.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “Religion as Alienation,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 118-148.

### Week 5 – Religious Texts and/in Traditions

Sept. 26 & 28

- **For 9/26 read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Sacred Scripture,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 96-123.
  - Genesis 2:4b-3:24 (PDF), **note: read only this version for class**).
  - John 1:1-1:18 (PDF), **note: read only this version for class**).
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “Religion as Alienation,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 118-148.
- **For 9/28 meet in Fenwick Library room 2400, Special Collections Research Center workshop session with Rebecca Bramlett, Research Services Coordinator**  
**note: no food, drink, or pens allowed in the SCRC.**

Week 6 – Religious Narratives (Myths), Symbols (Semiotics), and “Ultimate Concern(s)” Oct. 3 & 5

- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 53-73.
  - Tillich, “Symbols of Faith,” *Dynamics of Faith*, 41-54 (PDF).
  - Tedlock, trans., *Popol Vuh*, 63-74 (PDF).
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “Religion and Personality,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 53-84.

Week 7 – Religious Narratives (Myths), Symbols (Semiotics), and “Ultimate Concern(s)” Oct. 12

- **NOTE:** No classes on Oct. 10 (Tue.) for the Day of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.
- **read** and discuss:
  - Tedlock, trans., *Popol Vuh*, 63-74 (PDF).
  - Be sure to turn in “Popol Vuh” assignment before leaving class on Thursday.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “Society as Sacred,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 85-117.

Week 8 – Religious Practices: Ritual and Rites (vs. Rights) of Passage Oct. 17 & 19

- **For 10/17 – Assignment 2 Due: “Religious Myth”**  
must bring 2 copies of completed assignment in hardcopy to class
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Sacred Ritual,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 74-95.
  - Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 166-203, 106-108 (PDF).

Week 9 – Religious/World Dichotomies Oct. 24 & 26

- **NOTE:** Turn in hardcopy of final/revised version of Assignment 2 by no later than 10/24.
- **For 10/24 read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Society and the Sacred,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 124-150.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “A Source of Social Action,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 149-192.
- **For 10/26 – documentary case study: “The Shakers” (1 hr 2 min).**  
Be sure to turn in “The Shakers” assignment before leaving class on Thursday.

Week 10 – Construals of God(s) vs. of the Sacred: Theo- vs. Hiero- Oct. 31 & Nov. 2

- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Deity,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 153-182.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “The Reality of the Sacred,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 193-228.

Week 11 – Quest for “Origins”: Models of Creation, Emergence, and Essence

Nov. 7 & 9

- For 11/7 – Assignment 3 Due: “Society and the Sacred: Secret Societies”  
must bring 2 copies of completed assignment in hardcopy to class
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Cosmogony,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 183-210.
  - Genesis 1:1-2:4a ((PDF), **note: read only this version for class**).
  - Genesis 2:4b-3:24 ((PDF), **note: read only this version for class**).
  - John 1:1-1:18 ((PDF), **note: read only this version for class**).
  - reread: Tedlock, trans., *Popol Vuh*, 63-74 (PDF).
- **select and read one** of the following:
  - *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 9-51 (PDF).
  - *Book of the Hopi*, ix-27 (PDF).
  - *Mvuh Hpa Mi Hpa: Creating Heaven, Creating Earth*, stanzas 1-142 (PDF).

Week 12 – Theodicy and Problems of/with “Evil”

Nov. 14 & 16

- **NOTE:** Turn in hardcopy of final/revised version of Assignment 3 by no later than 11/16.
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Views of the Human Problem,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 211-234;
  - Livingston, “Theodicy,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 235-258.

Week 13 – Religion as Order of Values (Axiologies) vs. Truth (Epistemologies)

Nov. 21

- **NOTE:** No classes on Nov. 23 (Thur.) for Thanksgiving.
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Ethics,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 259-286.
  - Pals, “Religion as Cultural System,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, selection (PDF).
- **suggested** reading:
  - Pals, “Society’s ‘Construct of the Heart,’” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 229-259.

Week 14 – Changing (in) the End... to be cont’d.

Nov. 28 & 30

- For 11/28 – Assignment 4 Due: “Religion and Ethics”  
must bring 2 copies of completed assignment in hardcopy to class
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Soteriology,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 287-333.

Week 15 – Secularization and the End and Rise of Religion

Dec. 5 & 7

- **NOTE:** Turn in hardcopy of final/revised version of Assignment 4 by no later than Tue. (12/5).
- **read** and discuss:
  - Livingston, “Secularization,” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 341-357.
  - Pals, “Society’s ‘Construct of the Heart,’” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 229-259.
- **suggested** reading:
  - Livingston, “Contemporary Challenges...” *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 361-398.
  - Pals, “Conclusion,” *Eight Theories of Religion*, 292-323.

Week 16 – Reading Days (no class, but extended office hours for meetings prior to final exam)

Week 17 – Final Exam

Thursday, Dec. 14 @ 1:30pm-4:15pm

- *Take-home portion of final exam due by 1:30pm.*
- *May bring up to five pages of typed study notes (see detailed instructions).*
- *No bluebook is needed.*

### Methods of Evaluation (a.k.a. Grading)

- *Critical, reflective, civil, and respectful participation* in all class discussions will consist of **10%** of the course grade. Part of this participation grade will involve (1) in-class discussions and part of it will consist of (2) your weekly postings to the discussion forum on the course Bboard site – a minimum of 10 postings for the semester (so, note: 10-9 postings =A, 8=B, 7=C, 6=D, and 5-=F for this portion of your course grade). By no later than 9:00am prior to either Tuesday's or Thursday's class each week you must post at least a paragraph (a minimum of a few of sentences) response (critical insight(s) or question(s)) germane to the respective assigned reading(s) for that week's material. While you may bring in your thoughts on readings already discussed in class in any given posting, each posting must at least focus on a reading (or readings... your choice) which have **not** yet been discussed in class. As the semester unfolds these weekly postings may/should also include replies to your classmates' comments. Occasionally, prompts will direct your reading and focus the on-line dialogue. Bboard postings will be graded on the basis of: /-/ ("minus" for no-posting), /✓/ ("check" for posting), and /✓+/ ("check plus" for a particularly good posting); thus there is a quantitative and qualitative dimension to your participation grade. Barring emergencies, please notify the instructor prior to class time of any absence. While attendance is not graded it is obviously required for participation; excused absences require an original, signed doctor's note. Missed postings cannot be "made up" or done retroactively (note: each posting to the Bboard discussion site is stamped with the date and time of when submitted). **Absences from discussions (both on Bboard and in-class) will jeopardize your grade.**
- Announced and unannounced **in-class assignments** compose **15%** of your grade. These will take a variety of forms, including:
  - announced and unannounced quizzes – these will be short, focus specifically on assigned readings, and easy to pass if you have kept up with the readings; these quizzes will occur at the begin of class and will not be redone or have a make-up due to unexcused absences or lateness to class (therefore, be sure to not only attend class but also be on time);
  - in-class short assignments – these will involve the fulfillment of specific assignments done in small groups of a few students or individually that each that focus on parsing, comparing, and critically evaluating the readings and additional course material or facilitating a close reading of part of a text;
  - engaged reading assessments – periodically you will be asked to turn in your print-outs of assigned readings at the end of class for evaluation, namely the degree to which you are able to critically and analytically engage with the a text (identify its central argument and main claim (a.k.a. thesis), note where and how key terms are defined and used, distinguish between major and minor points of a position, note similarities and differences with other positions discussed in the course, contextualize

## Methods of Evaluation (a.k.a. Grading), cont'd.

it in its respective social and historical milieu, etc.); this evaluation will focus on your marginal comments, underlining, and method of interacting with a text (colored ink/pencil, outline formatting, use of symbols, bracketing, et cetera).

- **Four scheduled assignments** that specifically focus on (1) defining religion, (2) religious myth, (3) society and the sacred, (4) religion and ethics will each contribute to **15%** for a total of **60%** of your course grade (note: there is no mid-term exam for this course). Both detailed general explanation and the particular instructions for each of the assignments are posted on Bboard in the “Course Assignments” area. These assignments are to be completed and two copies brought to class in hardcopy on the due date posted in the syllabus; they will form the basis on in-class group work. Therefore, ***students who arrive late (after the in-class group work has begun) and/or without a completed assignment will be asked to leave the class*** (and thus subject to the loss of up to 30% of the assignment’s grade). While final versions of any of these assignments may be turned in prior to the due date, please note in the syllabus’s schedule exactly when each is due at their respective latest point. A late assignment may be subjected to a loss of up to a whole letter grade (or 10 points) for each day it is past due. Also be sure that each of these prepared assignments conform to the professional and academic writing requirements specified in this syllabus. Assignments that are not well written and/or not properly formatted essays per these standards may also automatically lose up to two letter grades (or up to 20 points). You are highly encouraged to have others (especially the Writing Center, though be sure to make an appointment in advance) proof read your assignments.
- A **final exam** will comprise of the remaining **15%** of the course grade. The exam will cover the entirety of the semester’s course and the issues raised. It will consist of a take-home portion due at the time of the exam and an in-class portion. You will be permitted to bring up to five pages of your own typed outline(s)/notes to the exam (see detailed instructions posted to the course Bboard site), which will also be submitted with the in-class exam.

## Policy on Expectations

All visual materials (such as charts, graphs, or pictures) used in lectures will be posted onto Bboard along with additional images and resource links. These are to be used for any missed classes as well as further exploration into the issues addressed as the course unfolds. However, lecture notes will not be posted; please secure notes for any missed classes from your cohort.

All written assignments prepared outside of class should be:

- typed,
- in a 12 point (vs. 11 point or 10 point) and standard serif font (i.e. Garamond, Palantino, or Times New Roman vs. a sans serif font like Arial, Helvetica, or Gill Sans or a non-standard serif font like Papyrus or **Cracked**),
- double spaced (Note: if the default setting on a computer automatically inserts an additional half space after a paragraph you will need to change this before turning in your assignment),
- 1" margins all around,
- left aligned (not full justified),
- with your full name(s) and page number in either the header or footer on every page.

These should be well-crafted and revised written pieces,

- free of typos and grammatical errors;
- use only inclusive language unless you are writing about something that is a gender-specific topic (i.e. Catholic priesthood);
- no contractions (i.e. “can’t,” “aren’t,” “won’t,” etc.) are inappropriate for professional and academic writing (unless part of a direct quote from another source);
- no the use of the first person singular pronoun (e.g., “I”) should be generally avoided with rare exceptions.

To achieve these please use the writing center, peer-reviewers, as well as discuss with me a drafts of your assignments during office hours (I’m more than happy to do so). **Major points will be deducted from unprofessionally written assignments.**

As a general rule you should always plan on devoting an average of 3 hours out of class dedicated to the work for a particular course for every hour you spend in class in a given week (1:3). So, for each 3 credit hour course you should be dedicating 9 hours per week outside of class to that course. Therefore, for a 12 credit hour semester (4 courses) you should be dedicating a total of 40-50 hours a week to class and coursework... which is why 4 undergraduate courses is considered a “full” load, because it is a full time job, and with it you are first and foremost a professional student.

Your 9 hours (on average) per week dedicated to this course outside of class time should include:

- Reading all required material *at least twice*;
- Reading actively (vs. passively) by underlining with pencil or colored pen(s) (but not highlighter) key information, making notes in the margins of the text, and/or taking notes on a separate blank page;
- Making and reviewing vocabulary flashcards;
- Looking up any and all terms, personal names, historical events, and other references that you do not know but encounter in course readings or lectures (you have more information at your immediate disposal than any other generation in the entire history of humanity... there is no reason to ever say “I do not know X” and not look it up);
- Meeting in small study groups once a week to review and revise reading and class notes;
- Rewriting/typing up class notes and synthesizing them with reading notes;
- Draft, revise (including with the [Writing Center \(make an appointment in advance\)](#)), revise again, and



## Academic Integrity

“I was thrown out of NYU my freshman year for cheating on the metaphysics final... I looked within the soul of the boy sitting next to me.” – Woody Allen<sup>1</sup>

“Academic honesty boils down to three simple but powerful principles:

- When you say you did the work yourself, you actually did it.
- When you rely on someone else’s work, you cite it. When you use their words, you quote them openly and accurately, and you cite them, too.
- When you present research materials, you present them fairly and truthfully. That’s true whether the research involves data, documents, or the writings of other scholars.”<sup>2</sup>

Violation of the academic honor code (i.e. plagiarism or cheating on any course assignment) will not be tolerated in any degree and will be referred to the Office on Academic Integrity.

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. All written work is to be your original thoughts on the assigned texts with references and occasional cites from that text. The format and style rules of all of your assignments should be typed and conform to the *MLA Handbook* or *Chicago Manual of Style* (including *Turabian*). A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

While it is often quipped that “it is better to apologize afterwards than ask for permission before,” this does not hold in academia; please feel free to ask for clarification regarding any of the expectations for this course **before** due dates. For more information, see the [University Catalogue regarding the Honor Code](#). If you have questions about how to properly cite published work in your writing please consult the Writing Center or me during office hours.

## Privacy Policy

Students must use their MasonLive email account (aka @gmu.edu) to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Unless your e-mail to your instructor is from your MasonLive email account your instructor will not be able to reply.

Please see <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3.

## Instructional Materials: Required and Suggested Readings (including Bboard PDFs) & Media

Ken Burns, dir., "The Shakers" (DVD, 1985).

Daniel Dubuisson, "An Uncertain Anthropological Calling," *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, William Sayers, trans. (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 53-75.

Benjamin R. Foster, trans., "Gods and Their Deeds: Epic of Creation," *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1995), 9-51.

Genesis 1:1-2:4a (*Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, JPS).

Genesis 2:4b-3:24 (*Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, JPS).

James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*, Sixth Edition (or most recent) (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2009 (or more recent)).

John 1:1-1:18 (NRSV).

Alex Mar, dir., "American Mystic" (DVD, 2010).

Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Dennis Tedlock, trans., *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of The Mayan Book of The Dawn of Life and The Glories of Gods and Kings*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York, New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996), 63-74.

Paul Tillich, "Symbols of Faith," *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 41-54.

Victor Turner, "Humility and Hierarchy: The Liminality of Status Elevation and Reversal," *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Hawthorne, New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1969), 166-203 and 106-108.

Anthony R. Walker, ed., *Mvuh Hpa Mi Hpa: Creating Heaven, Creating Earth, An Epic Myth of the Lahu People in Yunnan* (Bangkok, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1995), stanzas 1-142.

Frank Waters, ed., "The Myths: Creation of the Four Worlds," *Book of the Hopi* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1963), ix-27.

## Regarding Diversity

The academic study of religion includes the analytical (dissecting in various ways) and critical (bringing various criteria to bear) reflection on a diversity of religions and cultures including, in particular, their diverse order of values – including one’s own. The question, therefore, is not whether or not you (dis)believe, (dis)like, of (dis)agree any particular religion or even some aspect of it (let alone “religion” all together) but rather whether you understand “religion.” This requires thick description along with respectful engagement with a diversity of peoples, thought, and values.

To this end...

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason’s commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

### Classmate Contacts:

Name

E-mail

Phone

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