

RELI-211-001: Religions of the West
Spring 2024 | TR 10:30-11:45 | Krug Hall, Room 7

Professor James Dooley

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Office Hours:

In person: Mon/Wed/Fri 10:00-1:00 p.m. ; other times by appointment

Online: by appointment

The aim of an undergraduate program of studies in religion should be the understanding of religion as one of [our] primary responses to, and expressions of, the human condition. Religion is one of the major means [we possess] for constructing a significant world and for establishing [our] existence by expressing the truth of what it is to be human.

— Jonathan Z. Smith, *On Teaching Religion*

Course Syllabus: Description and Schedule (v.1)

1. Course Overview

a. Course Description and Purpose

In simplest terms, this course is an introduction to Western Religions, giving particular attention to origin, history, and doctrine.

But there's a lot more to it than that!

The study of religions and the ways that they are practiced has fascinated students in all walks of life for as far back as you might care to look — people who are interested in people tend also to be interested in how they think, and in what ways they express their beliefs. If it sounds like religion, society, and culture are closely intertwined, then you're hearing me correctly.

The course will begin with an explanation of some basic concepts in the study of religion — the types of questions that we can ask that are both respectful to the religion being studied and useful in understanding the religion. We will then focus primarily on the origins, beliefs, and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as the different cultural contexts in which they are practiced. Along the way, we will encounter a few other religions, but we will remain primarily focused on those three. Lectures, assignments, and exams (yes, exams!) are designed to help us all make connections across religions, and we'll each gain a larger understanding of the historical, geographical, and cultural dimensions of the world's religions.

b. Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will have developed a comprehension of what religion is in varied cultural settings. Specifically, you will be able to:

- i. Understand the scope of, and engage in, the academic study of religion
- ii. Identify the central beliefs and practices of the major Western Monotheistic Religions
- iii. Describe the complex relationship between religion and culture in various historical and contemporary contexts
- iv. Engage in field research regarding a religion and religious service, and submit a written report on your project.

c. Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this class.

2. Texts and Materials

a. Required Text

Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*, 8th ed. McGraw-Hill, 2021. ISBN 978-1-260-81375-0 (bound) or 978-1-260-25351-1 (loose-leaf).

→ Earlier editions of this textbook would be adequate, probably less expensive, and readily available online somewhere. I will provide a correlated reading list for the 5th, 7th, and 8th editions, so I highly suggest that you choose one of those.

A copy of the first week's reading assignment is posted on Blackboard.

b. Other Assigned Readings

Other readings and resources will be available as PDFs on Blackboard.

3. Requirements and Grading (descriptions of the projects appear elsewhere)

Assignment	Value
1. Three module exams, each worth 75 points	225
2. Experience Project (125 pts)	125
3. Three writing assignments, each worth 100 points	300
4. Ten Reading quizzes, each worth 10 points	100
5. In-class attendance and participation (up to 5 points daily)	100
6. Comprehensive Final Exam (150 points)	150
Total	1,000

	Percentage	Points (out of 1,000)
A	90% – 100%	900 – 1,000 pts.
B	80% – 89%	800–899 pts.
C	70% – 79%	700–799 pts.
D	60% – 69%.	600–699 pts.
F	0% – 59%	0-599 pts

4. Project Descriptions

a. **Module Exams (3 @ 75 points = 225 possible points)**

There will be three in-class module exams during the semester. All exams will consist of multiple choice and/or matching questions, short-answers, and a short essay. A study guide will be posted on Blackboard at least one week before each exam. Exams are NOT open-book, and you may not refer to notes. If you are absent on the day of an exam due to a substantiated emergency, I may allow you to take a make-up exam without penalty within one week; without substantiation, expect a 10% penalty. After one week, we would need to discuss the matter.

b. **Experience Project (Summary Plan plus final paper = 125 possible points)**

You will write a paper of at least 5 pages based on your experience of attending an in-person religious service of a tradition other than your own. Detailed instructions for this project are posted on Blackboard. A one-page summary of your plan is due by *Friday, March 1*, and will count for 10 points of your grade. Your project paper must be submitted no later than *Friday, April 26*. Late papers will lose 5 points per day late — however, project papers not submitted before the Final Exam due-date of May 7 will not be graded and will receive a zero.

c. **Writing Assignments (3 @ 100 points = 300 possible points)**

You will write three short papers (at least 3 full pages, each) based on specific reading assignments during the semester. These papers will not require additional research beyond the readings, but will ask you to make connections and draw conclusions. Their respective due-dates are identified on the Course Schedule. Late papers will lose 5 points per day after the assigned due-date, up to a maximum penalty of 25 points — however, papers not submitted before the associated module exam will not be graded and will receive a zero.

d. **Online reading quizzes (10 @ 10 points = 100 possible points)**

You will have 10 reading quizzes over the course of the semester, each of which will be made up of 10 multiple choice or short answer questions (one or two words). Each question will be worth 1 points, for a total of 10 points per quiz. The quizzes will be based on the assigned readings (not lectures or videos).

Quizzes will be taken online through Blackboard, and will be due on Monday evenings before 11:59 pm. They will be unveiled on the Friday morning before the quiz is due. You may complete the quiz at any time during the weekend; however, from whenever you start, the quizzes will be timed to allow only 15 minutes.

The quizzes will cover material that is specified in the syllabus for the upcoming week, not for the preceding week. The quizzes are open book, so you may consult your textbook or any notes you have taken, but you must take the quizzes on your own, without help from any other person. Be careful with time, though! The 15-minute clock starts when you begin the quiz, and when the time is up the quiz will close. It will not be possible to exit the quiz and resume it at some later point; time will almost certainly have expired by the time you get back. Be prepared to see it through from start to finish. There is no late option for quizzes.

e. **In-Class Attendance and Participation (100+ points possible)**

You can earn up to 5 points per class day, not including exam dates. You are expected to attend and participate in any short writing assignments, class discussions, and other activities. For the most part, these will not be graded, but you will get full credit for turning them in. There are 25 such class meetings, so you are technically able to earn 125 points. Any points earned in excess of 100 will count as extra credit, which would definitely be to many students' advantage.

Absences, or tardiness beyond 30 minutes, will not accrue any points. If you are merely present and do not actively participate, expect to gain fewer points.

f. **Final Exam (150 possible points) — due Tuesday, May 7, by 11:59 p.m.**

The final exam will ask you to draw on all that we will have covered throughout the semester, including readings, lectures, and your experience project. You will also be asked to make connections between the different religions we have studied. The test will be administered online through Blackboard, and will be available beginning Wednesday, May 1.

5. **Office hours:**

I consider myself dedicated to your success in the class, but not responsible for it. If you think that you are having difficulty, it behooves you to contact me as soon as possible so that we can figure out an approach to solving the problem. The longer you wait, the bigger the problem can become.

My in-person office hours are from 10:00–1:00 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. My office is in the English Department complex, Horizon 4167. You may appear unannounced and take your chances that I am not meeting with another student, or you can contact me directly beforehand and reserve a spot.

Zoom meetings are available by appointment. I will typically not be available on Tuesday or Thursday evenings, but other times during the week are generally available.

Outside of class time and office hours, I may or may not be on campus; however, if you stop by my office and I'm there (and the door is open), then my time is yours. It would be wise, however, to schedule a time with me if it is necessary to meet outside of my regular office hours.

You do not need to be facing difficulties in order to visit me and chat! If you are excited about a particular aspect of the course, I would be happy to hear about it. If you want to pursue a line of inquiry, I can probably guide you to some helpful resources.

6. Course Policies

a. Email policies

All communications by email must use both your and my official “gmu.edu” addresses. The university system occasionally blocks emails from outside of our system, and I must use only your university email address when responding. If you send me an email and it seems as though I haven’t responded within 24 hours, please try again, and mention it to me the next time you see me.

b. Attendance Policies

i. From the *University Catalog*:

AP.1.6: “Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they are registered. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor’s grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.”

(visit <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/registration-attendance>)

ii. Absences prevent you from engaging with the material and being part of the classroom learning experience; they will also affect your grade negatively. If you miss more than two consecutive classes, or if there is a significant ongoing situation, you should schedule an appointment with me to discuss what remedies might (or might not) be possible.

c. Adding or dropping classes; withdrawing from classes

- i. Last day to add any classes: Tuesday, January 23
- ii. Last day to drop with 100% tuition refund: Tuesday, January 30
- iii. Last day to drop with 50% tuition refund: Tuesday, February 6
- iv. Last day to drop with full tuition liability – Tuesday, February 20
(visit <https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal> for information)
- v. Selective Withdrawal Period: February 21 – March 25
(visit <https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal/selective>)
- vi. Non-academic withdrawals (situations must be verifiable)
(<https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal/non-academic>)

d. Class Cancellation / Inclement Weather Policy

If the university is closed due to inclement weather, classes are cancelled. In some instances, the university imposes only a delayed opening; only those classes which would have completed before that specified time are cancelled. In other instances, the university might close early, in which case classes in session will end at the appointed time, and all later classes are cancelled.

Any assignments that are to be submitted on Blackboard remain due in accordance with the syllabus, regardless of whether or not the university is closed for whatever reason.

I strongly encourage you to keep to the reading schedule. In the event that the schedule must be adjusted, I will provide updated material, but we should be able to adjust our discussions without undue hardship.

In some years past, the university has chosen to cancel “Reading Day” in order for classes to hold make-up sessions lost to inclement weather. I will keep you advised of anything I learn in this regard.

7. Format for written assignments

Any written assignments, unless specifically designed to be done in class, are to be submitted as attachments in the “assignments” section for our course in Blackboard.

Unless otherwise indicated, assignments should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with standard one-inch margins. Do not insert extra spacing or blank lines between paragraphs or before and after block quotations, charts, or other graphics. On the top left of the *first page only* of each assignment, include your name, the course number and the professor’s name, and the date submitted. Include a rhetorically purposeful title centered at the head of the assignment. Pages should be numbered at the top right of each page and should include your last name in the header.

In all your written work, format and citations must follow a consistent accepted style, preferably either MLA or Chicago (Turabian). You remain responsible for correctly-formatted and bibliographically accurate citations and so should not rely on citation generators.

Please note that you must provide citations for any material derived from ChatGPT or other forms of AI. Check your style manual for the appropriate format.

8. Technology

a. Electronic materials and reading assignments

You will need internet access for several purposes for this class: to access the course folder in Blackboard, to access assigned readings, to conduct online research, and to submit quizzes and reports. For electronic material, you should access and download or print out any required readings before they are needed for class, so that you can get assistance if you run into any trouble along the way. (“Inability to access the material in time” is really not an acceptable excuse for failure to do the assigned reading, except in exceptional circumstances.)

b. In-class use of electronic devices

You may bring laptops or tablets to class for your work for this class. Please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism and may affect your participation grade. If your use of electronic devices in class appears to me to be a problem, I will ask you to put them away. (I may, in any case, ask everyone to close electronic devices for parts of the class discussion.)

You should always bring some lined paper and a pen with you to class, *in the likely case* I ask you to complete an occasional in-class exercise.

9. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and violations of academic integrity contravene the GMU Honor Code and will be submitted to the Office of Academic Integrity for disciplinary action. I include here a statement from the University about 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."*

Regarding the issue of plagiarism, in particular: scholarly work, like other cultural discourses, works by building on, re-assessing, re-inflecting, scrutinizing, and critiquing other people's work. It involves a dialogic exchange. But this exchange also requires that you do not claim credit for things you borrow or adopt from others, even though the uses you put them to may be your own. So, when you use language (phrasing), ideas, or information that you gleaned from somewhere else, give appropriate credit. This applies even if you paraphrase those ideas or information into your own words. The challenge is to ensure that your work is not entirely derivative: you accomplish this, not by trying to hide your debts to others, but by making sure you do not simply rehearse what others have researched, thought, and written.

As stated above, you must provide citations for any material derived from ChatGPT or other forms of AI. Check your style manual for the appropriate format.

10. Conduct in Class Spaces

a. GMU Nondiscrimination Policy

"George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status, pregnancy status or genetic information. George Mason University shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

"The University is dedicated to ensuring access, fairness and equity for minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, and veterans (as covered by law) in its educational programs, related activities and employment. George Mason University shall thus maintain a continuing affirmative action program to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices in every phase of university operations.

"Any employee who becomes aware of sexual harassment or other potentially discriminatory behavior must contact Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics.

"Retaliation against an individual who has raised claims of illegal discrimination or has cooperated with an investigation of such claims is prohibited."

b. GMU Diversity Statement

"George Mason is committed to excellence and integrity in all its endeavors. The university's reputation is one of its most valuable assets, and members of the community should not place personal interests above the best interests of the university; even the appearance of impropriety must be avoided."

c. GMU Statement on Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence

“George Mason University is committed to providing a safe learning, living and working environment free from discrimination. The University’s environment is meant to be experienced as vibrant and dynamic, and one that includes ample opportunities for exploration of self, identity and independence. Sexual misconduct and incidents of interpersonal violence deeply interrupt that experience, and George Mason University is committed to a campus that is free of these types of incidents in order to promote community well-being and student success.

“George Mason University encourages individuals who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support.

“Confidential resources are available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.gmu.edu), Student Health Services (shs.gmu.edu), the University Ombudsperson (ombudsman.gmu.edu), and Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services (waves.gmu.edu).

“All other members of the University community (except those noted above) are not considered confidential resources and are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator.”

d. Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office (<http://ods.gmu.edu>) and must be identified at the start of the semester.

11. The University Writing Center opens on Monday, January 22, at 10:30 am.

The University Writing Center (located in the Johnson Center, Room 227-E, in the Lab for Writing and Communication) is a free writing resource for students. Visit their website (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>) to learn about their hours and services, and to use the online scheduler. *Sessions are offered in person and online.* Tutors will not proofread your writing, but they will help you to develop revision and editing strategies. This is a terrific resource for all students, and especially if you’re having difficulties with writing.

Spring appointments may be booked starting on Tuesday, January 16.

12. Although it is unlikely, this syllabus, like any other, may be subject to change

I will notify you in class, on Blackboard, and via GMU email, if any of the policies outlined in the syllabus need to be modified, or if the course schedule must be updated.

13. Course Schedule

SETTING THE STAGE	
WEEK 1: Course Introduction, and Basic Concepts in the Study of Religion	
Day 1: Tue, Jan 16	Discussion Topic: Introduction and Course Overview Assignments: Browse the Blackboard site. Acquire a copy of the textbook.
Day 2: Thu, Jan 18	Discussion Topic: Elements of Religious Studies Assignments: Read <i>Genesis</i> , <i>Enuma Elish</i> , and <i>Gilgamesh</i> excerpts (PDF)
Mon, Jan 22	Online Reading Quiz #1: Syllabus Quiz
WEEK 2: Introduction to Religions Originating in the Near East	
Day 3: Tue, Jan 23	Readings: <i>Genesis</i> , <i>Enuma Elish</i> , and <i>Gilgamesh</i> excerpts (PDF) Discussion Topic: Religions Originating in the Near East
Day 4: Thu, Jan 25	Readings: Zoroastrianism (PDF) Discussion Topic: Zoroastrianism
Mon, Jan 29	Online Reading Quiz #2: Judaism-A (Molloy, pages 271-282)
JUDAISM MODULE	
WEEK 3: Introduction to Judaism; Early Jewish History	
Day 5: Tue, Jan 30	Readings: Molloy (pp. 271-279) Discussion Topic: Early Jewish History
Day 6: Thu, Feb 1	Readings: Molloy (pp. 279-282); The Joseph Story in Genesis (PDF) Discussion Topic: Early Jewish History: Abraham to Joseph
Mon, Feb 5	Online Reading Quiz #3: Judaism-B (Prophetic Lit; Molloy, 291-297)
WEEK 4: The Exodus; Development of the Kingdoms; Prophetic Literature; Exile	
Day 7: Tue, Feb 6	Readings: Molloy (pp. 282-291) Discussion Topic: The Exodus, Development of the Kingdoms
Day 8: Thu, Feb 8	Readings: Prophetic Literature (PDF) Discussion Topic: The Writing Prophets; Jewish History and the Exile
Mon, Feb 12	Online Reading Quiz #4: Judaism-C (Molloy, 291-301)
WEEK 5: The Second Temple Period; Rabbinical Judaism; Medieval and Modern	
Day 9: Feb 13	Readings: Molloy (pp. 291-297) Discussion Topic: The Second Temple Period; Rabbinical Judaism
Day 10: Thu, Feb 15	Readings: Molloy (pp. 297-301) Discussion Topic: Questioning and Reform; Modern World
Friday, Feb 16	→ Assignment Due: Judaism Paper, due Friday, Feb 16, 11:59 pm
WEEK 6: Judaism Exam on Monday; Introduction to Christianity	
Day 11: Tue, Feb 20	Readings: Molloy (pp. 301-313) Discussion Topic: Jewish Beliefs, Practices, and Issues
Day 12: Thu, Feb 22	EXAM # 1: JUDAISM
Mon, Feb 26	Online Reading Quiz #5: Christianity-A (Molloy, 319-344)

CHRISTIANITY MODULE	
WEEK 7: Introduction to Christianity and the Life of Jesus; Early Christian History	
Day 13: Tue, Feb 27	Readings: Molloy (pp. 319-328); the Gospel of Mark (PDF) Discussion Topic: Life and Teachings of Jesus
Day 14: Thu, Feb 29	Readings: Molloy (pp. 328-344); excerpts from Matthew, Luke, and John Discussion Topic: Early Christian History
Friday, Mar 1	→ Assignment Due: Your Plan for the Experience Project (One Page)
WEEK 8: Spring Recess — No classes	
Tue, Mar 5	<i>No class</i>
Thu, Mar 7	<i>No class</i>
Mon, Mar 11	Online Reading Quiz #6: Christianity-B (Molloy, 344-359)
WEEK 9: Early Christian History; Monasticism; the Middle Ages; the Reformation	
Day 15: Tue, Mar 12	Readings: Molloy (pp. 344-354) Discussion Topic: Eastern Orthodox; Monasticism; the Middle Ages
Day 16: Thu, Mar 14	Readings: Molloy (pp. 354-359) Discussion Topic: Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation
Mon, Mar 18	Online Reading Quiz #7: Christianity-C (Molloy, 360-368)
WEEK 10: The Catholic Counter-Reformation; Modern Christian History	
Day 17: Mon Mar 19	Readings: Molloy (pp. 360-368) Discussion Topic: Development of Christianity after the Reformation
Day 18: Thu, Mar 21	Readings: Molloy (pp. 368-382) Discussion Topic: Christian Practices and the Arts; Issues
Friday, Mar 22	→ Assignment Due: Christianity Paper, due Friday, Mar 22, 11:59 pm
WEEK 11: Mormonism; Christianity Exam on Wednesday	
Day 19: Tue, Mar 26	Readings: Review Molloy (pp. 364-368); related readings (PDF) Discussion Topic: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Day 20: Thu, Mar 28	EXAM # 2: CHRISTIANITY
Mon, Apr 1	Online Reading Quiz #8: Islam-A (Molloy, 389-408)

ISLAM MODULE	
WEEK 12: Introduction to Islam, Muhammad, and the Qur'an	
Day 21: Tue, Apr 2	Readings: Molloy (pp. 389-395) Discussion Topic: The Life and Teachings of Muhammad
Day 22: Thu, Apr 4	Readings: Molloy (pp. 395-408) Discussion Topic: Essentials of Islam
Mon, Apr 8	Online Reading Quiz #9: Islam-B (Molloy, 409-416)
WEEK 13: Historical Development of Islam	
Day 23: Tue, Apr 9	Readings: Molloy (pp. 409-412) Discussion Topic: Historical Development of Islam
Day 24: Thu, Apr 11	Readings: Molloy (pp. 412-416) Discussion Topic: Sunni and Shiite Divisions
Mon, Apr 15	Online Reading Quiz #10: Islam-C (Molloy, 417-433)

WEEK 14: Sufism; Islam and the Arts; Islamic Law	
Day 25: Tue, Apr 16	Readings: Molloy (pp. 417-423; 427-433) Discussion Topic: Sufism; Islam and the Arts
Day 26: Thu, Apr 18	Readings: Molloy (pp. 424-427); PDFs Discussion Topic: Islamic Law
Friday, Apr 19	→ Assignment Due: Islam Paper, due Friday, Apr 19, 11:59 pm
WEEK 15: Contemporary Issues; Islam and the Modern World	
Day 27: Tue, Apr 23	Readings: Molloy (pp. 433-444), PDFs Discussion Topic: Contemporary Issues
Day 28: Thu, Apr 25	EXAM # 3: ISLAM

EXPERIENCE PROJECT	
Fri, April 26	→ Project due Friday, April 26, by 11:59 pm

COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM (Online via Blackboard)	
Tue, May 7	COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available beginning Wednesday, May 1. • Due by Tuesday, May 7, 11:59 pm