

**Texas College  
 Division of Humanities and Education  
 Religion Department  
 SYLLABUS FOR:  
 COMPARATIVE WORLD RELIGION  
 Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 1:00-1:50pm**

**Course No. RELI 1354101**

**Course Description:** This course introduces students to the variety of religions across the globe. In a time of war on terrorism Americans need more sophisticated and informed awareness of the contributions of world religions as we strive together to find global peace.

**Credit Hours      3**

**Professor:    Dr Garth Baker-Fletcher**

**Telephone:    (214) 729-9291 or leave message (903)**

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**Office:            Glass Building Room 109**

**Office Hours:    Monday, Wednesday, and Friday  
 8:00-9:30am; and 1:00-2:30pm**

**Email:            gfletcher@texascollege.edu**

**Attendance Policy:**

Students may not have more than 3 unexcused absences before running the risk of an automatic lowering of their grade. Students are to be promptly seated no later than **5 minutes past the hour or the door will be locked**. Many students do not recognize or believe that regular attendance is an indication of their respect for the course, the teacher, and their own commitment to their education. When they do not attend, this reflects poorly on their character, and they will be graded down as a result.

Prepared By:

\_\_\_\_\_

professor

\_\_\_\_\_

date

Approved

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Division Chair

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date

**Required Text:**

**Experiencing the World's Religions** by Michael Molloy

**Goal:** The goal of this course is to enable students to have a sufficiently informed, compassionate, and open-minded approach to persons of another religious orientation than their own.

**Performance/Learning Objectives:**

- Providing information about the various doctrines that motivate the major religions of humanity
- To especially emphasize both the similarities and differences that exist between the major monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- In a time of war and terrorism with Islamic fanatics, to educate students about the mainstream religious dogma, ethos, and mores of Islam.
- To expose students to religions of they have had no contact --Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and so forth.
- To enable students to embrace their own religious orientation in relationship with other faith systems.

**Course Requirements:**

1. ***Weekly One page Reflection Paper writing assignment [60% of grade]***  
Reflection papers are the most important indicator of your grade This paper is to be your critical reflection on the reading, or internet research, or research project assignment. Reflection involves *three moments which must always be in every paper:* (1) **"I understand this week's assignment to be about..."** *Description.* Use the opening phrase as a formula to jump of into your own interpretation of how you understand the assignment. (2) **"I disagree with the following point (s)..."** *Critique.* This is the moment where you criticize, or find areas of disagreement with your religious background. *Remember that in this course we are learning to respectfully disagree with the content of each other's religious beliefs without demonizing each other.*(3)**"I would like to see us discuss..."***Construction.* This last moment enables you as a critical thinker to contribute something to class discussion about the weekly reading. We learn together, and what you think is part of the learning process. Papers must be turned in on time for credit.
2. ***Internet Research and Discussion Days*** -- on every religious movement, world religion, and weekly assignment. The internet research is integrated into the reading assignments, and can become a part of your Weekly Reflection Paper.
3. ***Weekly Reading Assignments from WWR will be necessary in order to support the weekly Reflection Papers*** Reading assignments are to be found in the syllabus.
4. ***Two "Pop Quiz" Evaluations [20% of grade]***
5. ***Mid-Term and Final Essays [20% of grade] or students may opt for: Final Research Project [20% of grade]*** This project must be done with the permission of the professor by Tuesday, October 29,2006. Students must choose a faith community upon which to do in-depth research. The research must include multi-media analysis-  
-thought, art, music, rituals, architecture, dance, etc. The project is to be turned in during *Finals*, and will be counted in kind.

## SYLLABUS

### August

**25** Fri. *The Religious “Tool Kit”*  
*Every field of endeavor has a set of terms it uses in order to negotiate, translate, describe, manipulate, criticize, and communicate. Religious studies has its own “tool kit” described in Chapter 1 of EWW. What are your questions about these terms? Have you ever seen these terms used before?*

**28** Mon *Introductions to the Exploration of Religion*

Handing out the *Syllabus* and introducing the topic

**First reading assignment: Read Chapter 1 p1-27 --**

make sure that you learn the bold-face vocabulary words, they will appear on the Mid-Term

**30** Weds. *Continuing Introductions to the study of Religions*

### September

**1** Fri. *Oral Religions and Black Folk*

*Black folks came from West Africa with rich oral religious traditions that the European “Christians” who enslaved them sought to denigrate as primitive. Further, the Native Americans the Europeans met here also had rich oral religions that Europeans sought to eradicate. In fact, throughout the colonial expansionist period of 1500-1900s the Europeans systematically belittled, sought to destroy, and eradicate oral religions throughout the globe of peoples that they encountered as they went about colonizing the planet. Studying Oral religions, therefore, is a very important way of retrieving the most ancient of global religions.*

- **First Reflection Paper Due on Chapter One** [use the questions on p.26 to help your reflections if you are stuck]
- **Reading Assignment-Chapter 2 Oral Religion p.29-69.** --again, remember to memorize the bold-face vocabulary terms

**4** Mon. **Labor Day No Class**

**6** Weds.. *Judaism and The Ten Commandments*

*Judaism is the religion of Modern-day Israel. It is the faith of one of the “hot spots” of the most violent regions on the globe today. A truly educated person needs to understand its history*

- **Read Chapter 8 of EWW p. 283-319**

**8** Fri. *Jewish History: Ancient Israel through Hitler and Beyond*

- **Continue Reading Chp 8 p.283-319**
- **Second Reflection Paper Due** [Which commandment is your favorite? Why? Which is your least favorite? Why? Which is the hardest to keep? Why? etc.]

- 11 Mon *Jewish Beliefs and Holidays*  
*The heart of the Jewish contribution to religion is its belief in a singular, all-powerful Deity. This is the singular belief that distinguished Jews from all other peoples, and made them "strange" and different. All of their practices, rituals, and holidays flow from that strongly held and defended religious claim.*
- **Read Chapter 8 EW p.319-339** remember to memorize the vocabulary words
- 13 Weds. *Jewish Beliefs (cont.)*
- 15 Fri. ***Internet and Research Discussion Day on Judaism***  
*Students bring to the class the answers to the questions found on p.337 based on the research on the NET and library. This day is important because it helps bring together our discussion of Jewish religion from outside of the textbook into more concrete figures (artists, composers, musicians, actors, writers, plays, books).*
- **Third Reflection Paper Due** [What aspect of Judaism has been the most difficult for you to understand? Why? Which has been the aspect you have most appreciated? Why? [What aspect of the message of Islam has been most difficult for you to understand? Why? Which aspect do you most appreciate, and Why? Which aspect do you think you might like to incorporate in some fashion into your own faith tradition? Why?]
- 18 Mon *Islam*  
*After 9/11 every American needs to have a course on Islam because the kind of Islam espoused by Osama bin Laden as "true Islam" is not what the majority of Moslems believe and practice around the world. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world today. Islam's social action and social justice orientation are tremendously appealing to many African Americans of every class.*
- **read Chapter 10 EW p.431-452 (top of the page)**
- 20 Weds. *The Five Pillars*
- 22 Fri.
- **Fourth Reflection Paper Due** Does Christianity have anything like Islam's "Five Pillars?" If so, what are they? Does this make Islam and Christianity more similar than you suspected, or more different?
- 25 Mon. *Sunni, Shi'ite, and Sufi --Three Types of Islam*
- **read Chapter 10 EW p.452-487** Remember to memorize the vocabulary words
- 27 Weds. *Three Types of Islam*

- 29 Fri. ***Internet Islamic Theology and the Modern World***  
*Black Americans are particularly attracted to the Message of Muhammad, insofar as it has been tailored for our people here in the USA. Use your Mid-Term Essay/ Fifth Reflection Paper to reflect on that message in light of your own faith experience, and in contrast to the larger worldwide Islamic faith as you have learned it.*

## October

- 2 Mon. *Mid-Term Essays Due*
- **Fifth Reflection Paper/Mid-Term Essay** Write a three page paper that discusses the above remarks. Also, what aspect of the Message of Islam that has been most difficult for you to understand? Why? Which aspect do you most appreciate, and why? Most importantly, which aspect do you think you might incorporate [in some fashion] into your own faith tradition? Why?
- 4 Weds. *Hinduism*  
*One of the most ancient of world religions, and most mysterious, Hinduism remains the religion of the great subcontinent India.*  
**Read Chapter 3 EW p.71-84 (top of the page)**
- 6 Fri *Brahman, Atman, Samsara, and Karma*  
*These fundamental religious concepts of Hinduism flow into the very lifeblood of Indian culture as well.*
- **Sixth Reflection Paper Due** [Have you ever thought that you had lived before, were “reincarnated” as the Hindus believe? Do you believe in Karma? What is the Christian / or Black community/s way of saying the same thing as Karma? What aspect of Hindu thought are you struggling the most with? Why?]
- 9 Mon. *Yoga and Bhakti (Spirituality and Devotion)*  
*Hinduism is filled with a multitude of layers of yoga practices and devotionals to its many gods. It is a richly textured religion*
- **Read Chapter 3 EW p.84- 117** remember to memorize vocabulary words
- 11 Weds. *Yoga and Bhakti (cont.)*
- 13 Fri. **Internet/Library Research Day on Hinduism**  
*Students bring in research they have found on the NET and in the library on Brahma, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, and Shiva. Comparisons with the Christian understanding of the Trinity (Father Son, and Holy Spirit) are welcome.*
- **Seventh Reflection Paper Due** [What aspect of the Hindu religion has been most difficult for you to understand? Why? What have you most appreciated? Why? What aspect of Hinduism would you like to incorporate into your faith tradition if you could? Why?]

**16 Mon. *Buddhism***

*A practical spirituality determined to answer questions about suffering and the quest for peace, Buddhism is an Asian religion that has gained many Western followers in the last generation. Gautama Siddhartha's life was a quest for answers to these questions.*

- **Read Chapter 4 EWV p. 119-135**

**18 Weds. *Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path***

The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are systematic aids developed within Buddhism

to facilitate means for dealing with the three marks of reality: **change (anichcha); impermanence (anatta); and suffering (dukkha)**

**20 Fri. *Four Noble truths...(cont.)***

- **Eighth Reflection Paper Due** [Compare the lives of the Buddha with that of Jesus. How were they the same? How did they differ? What did each one accomplish?]

**23 Mon. *Theravada and Mahayana (The Way of the Elders, and the Big Vehicle); and Zen (Enlightenment through Meditation)***

*There are three main branches of Buddhism --Theravada (The Way of the Elders) passed on by monks; Mahayana (The "Big Vehicle") or the wider vision for compassion which maintains that a person must save himself by saving others; and Zen (Enlightenment through sole emphasis on "sitting meditation.")*

- **Read Chapter 4 p.135-183** remember to memorize vocabulary words

**25 Weds. *Theravada and Mahayana (cont.)*****27 Fri.. *Buddhism Internet/Library Research/Discussion Day***

*Research questions on p.181 and bring answers in for discussion.*

- **Ninth Discussion Paper Due**[ What aspect of Buddhism has been the most difficult for you to understand? Why? What aspect have you most appreciated? Why? What aspect would you like to incorporate into your own faith tradition? Why?]

**30 Mon. *Jainism and Sikhism***

*These are two religions that form a bridge between polytheism and monotheism .*

**Read Chapter 5 EWV p.185-205** remember to memorize vocabulary words

**November****1 Weds. *Influences of Islam and Buddhism***

- 3** Fri. ***Sikh Internet Research***  
*Look into the phenomenon of Sikhism on the NET and report back.*
- 6** Mon ***Taoism and Confucianism***  
*These last weeks we turn to Chinese religions. The two greatest are Taoism and Confucianism.*
- **Read Chapter 6 EW p.207-226 top of page**
- 8** Weds. ***The Tao. Wu-Wei, Simplicity***  
*While most religions speak of a Deity, or nature, the Tao is more ephemeral. It could be the universe, or the cosmos, or nature, or God. Reading “about” the Tao is not the same as experiencing it, but it does seem clear that Lao Tzu’s intention was for the reader of his poetry to “experience” by intuition the Tao.*
- **Tenth Discussion Paper Due** [Contrast Jainism and Taoism, or Sikhism and Taoism. Which religious orientation is more appealing to you? Why?]
- 10** Fri. ***Confucianism***  
*Confucianism is a religion of great virtue. Further, it is a tremendous culture-shaper, and determined the path of society of centuries.*
- **Read Chapter 6 p.227-253. remember to memorize vocabulary words**
- 13** Mon ***Confucian Ethics***
- 15 - 26** Thanksgiving Vacation
- 26** Mon ***Alternate Paths***  
*In the past 100 to 150 years there has been a proliferation of new religions It is important to have more than a passing knowledge of them since many folk you will meet are practitioners of these faiths.*
- **Read Chapter 11 EW, p.489-521**
- 29** Weds. ***Neo-African Religions***  
*Black people have maintained their religious identities despite the ravages of slavery. Religions like **voodoo, Condomble, and Santeria** mix Christian influences with Yoruba religion*

## December

### 1 Fri. ***Alternate Paths Internet Library/Research and Discussion***

*Why have so many contemporary people turned to what many of us would consider to be cults and*

*religious sects? Do you think that major religions like Christianity have not met the faith needs of many people.*

***Extra Credit Reflection Paper*** *What do you think about the Alternate Paths? Choose one and discuss it in light of your own religious faith? Are there any aspects of this religion you would, or could incorporate into your own faith, Why?*

### 4 Mon. ***Final Thoughts: The Modern Search for Religious Meaning***

*The influence of science and technology, multiculturalism, women's rights movement, civil rights movement, and many other factors have complicated all religions, whether traditional or alternate*

- ***Read Chapter 12, EW p. 523-561***

### 6 Weds. ***Final Thoughts [cont.]***

### 8 Fri ***Last Day of Class***

s.

- *finish the reading and bring discussion questions on p.252*
- *Class party*

*Hand-out Final Essay Questions --to be completed turned by Thursday, December 14th*