



GRST 200: INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGION

(Online – Summer I 2023)

Instructor: Dr. Joshua A. Irizarry
Duration: May 29 – June 23, 2023

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Course Credits: 3

Course Description:

Religious expression has been an essential part of the human experience throughout recorded history. Among other things, religion has been a catalyst for social change and conflict, a means of expressing social and personal identity, a tool of political control and of revolution, and a statement of the way people and cultures understand their purpose and place in the world. Studying the way religion has influenced historical events, cultural frameworks, and personal experiences is an important avenue for understanding human society and interaction. A basic level of global religious literacy is therefore essential if one wishes to be a global citizen.

This course is an introduction to global religious studies, a field of study that draws from many different academic disciplines such as anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. We will be taking a multimedia approach to the material, using text, lecture, and film to enable students to recognize, understand, and appreciate the diversity of the world's religious traditions.

This class emphasizes the exploration of religious diversity and does not endorse or advocate for any single religion's beliefs, traditions, or worldviews.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- ✓ Demonstrate an understanding of religious identities, how they come about, and how they are expressed;
- ✓ Identify key differences and similarities between worldviews, practices, ideas, and rituals across major global religions;
- ✓ Explain how major religious traditions have evolved and adapted across time (history) and space (geography);
- ✓ Recognize the internal diversity and complexity of individual religions;
- ✓ Develop an appreciative knowledge of different worldviews and faith traditions.

NOTE: This class is taught **asynchronously**, meaning that there are no scheduled class meetings. **All lectures, readings, and films will be available electronically on Blackboard.**

While this format allows you to work on your own schedule, it can also be risky since you are solely responsible for keeping up with the assigned class material.

Observing the assigned deadlines and keeping in regular communication with the instructor are crucial to your success in this class. Please contact me by e-mail (jirizarry@bridgew.edu) if you need assistance or would like to schedule a video conference.

Academic Integrity:

IMPORTANT: I enforce a **zero-tolerance** policy towards academic dishonesty in this class.

Academic dishonesty includes:

- Plagiarism:** presenting the work of another as one's own without attribution.
- Cheating:** using or attempting to use prohibited materials or information.
- Complicity:** attempting to help another to misrepresent their efforts on any assignment.

Evidence of academic dishonesty in work you submit will result in a **zero** for that assignment. A second offense will result in **immediate failure of the course.**

Thankfully, academic dishonesty is easy to prevent:

- ✓ Avoid using outside sources like Wikipedia to “clarify” course concepts. Refer regularly to the course materials (lectures and readings) and ask questions.
 - ✓ If you do consult an outside source, make sure that you include both an in-text citation and a bibliographic citation at the end of your paper.
 - ✓ If you are in doubt as to whether you should include a citation, **CITE IT.**
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Grading:

Journal Responses: 80% (16 entries @ 5% each)

Each week, you will be asked to watch video lectures – approximately two hours per unit, broken into smaller segments. **Twice per lecture (and once per assigned film)**, you will write a short **journal response** (about 250 words, or approximately 1 double-spaced page) in the journal entry link provided on Blackboard. Unlike a discussion board, journal entries are private: **only you and I will be able to see your responses.**

These responses are your opportunity to reflect on and continue your engagement with the material. In your response, be sure to consider:

- What were the most important things you learned from the lecture, and why?
- What personal insights did you have?
- What connections between topics did you make?
- What lingering questions do you have?
- What would you like to know more about?

Each journal response will be graded on a **0-2** scale:

- 0: Response **does not demonstrate** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 1: Response demonstrates **limited** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 2: Response demonstrates **active** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 2+: Response demonstrates **exceptional** engagement with lecture and readings.
 - Every two 2+ responses earns a point of **extra credit.**

You **must** put thought and effort into your journal entries if you want full credit. Your journal entry must incorporate information you have learned from the readings, lectures, and videos. Entries that are based on unsubstantiated opinion or outside sources will not get credit.

Journal entries are due **every Wednesday and Sunday by 11:59pm EST (GMT -5)**, as listed in the course schedule. Entries received the following day will lose one point. Entries more than a day late or not at all will forfeit all points for that assignment and cannot be made up.

Final Assignment: 20%

A comprehensive assignment which will serve as the course final will be due **by 11:59pm on June 23**. More information on this assignment will be provided during the semester.

Course Schedule: (all lectures, readings, and films are available on Blackboard)

Week 1

Read: "What Is Religious Literacy?"

Video Lecture: "Course Introduction – Understanding Religion"

Film: "Sacred"

Unit 1 Journal Responses due **June 2**

Week 2

Read: "Hinduism"

Video Lecture: "Understanding Hinduism"

Film: "Sita Sings the Blues"

Unit 2 Journal Responses due **June 7**

Read: "Judaism"

Video Lecture: "Understanding Judaism"

Unit 3 Journal Responses due **June 9**

Week 3

Read: "Christianity"

Video Lecture: "Understanding Christianity"

Unit 4 Journal Responses due **June 13**

Read: "Buddhism"

Video Lecture: "Understanding Buddhism"

Film: "The Buddha: The Story of Siddhartha"

Unit 5 Journal Responses due **June 16**

Week 4

Read: "Islam"

Video Lecture: "Understanding Islam"

Film: "Inside Mecca"

Unit 6 Journal Responses due **June 21**

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE SUNDAY, JUNE 23 by 11:59pm EST