

Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to the history, practice, and core doctrines of the religions originating in the Middle East, sometimes called the “western religions.” Following a discussion of preliminary questions in the academic study of religion, we will familiarize ourselves with ancient Mesopotamian religion as reflected in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and with Zoroastrianism, the still-existing tradition of ancient Persia. Both traditions have exerted remarkable influences on the development of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheistic religions. These three traditions will concern us in more detail in the subsequent section of the course. Here you will familiarize yourself with the major religious and philosophical traditions of these three faiths by focusing upon their key historical developments and contemporary forms. Of particular interest to us will be the interaction and interconnectedness of these traditions, particularly in the modern period. In the course’s final section we will deal with the question of whether it is justified to speak of an inevitable conflict between different religions, cultures, or civilizations in the light of the semester’s findings. We will acquaint ourselves with new religions such as Baha’i and discuss desirable and viable ways to accommodate the world’s growing religious diversity from a perspective of simultaneous commitment to one’s own worldview and respect toward beliefs and ways of life other than one’s own.

Course Objectives

From the foregoing you can see that the ultimate aim of the course is to neither glorify nor critique any one tradition but rather to allow you to understand how people within these traditions view themselves and how these traditions in their interactions with each other have shaped human values and cultural traditions in and beyond the western world. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student enrolled in this course are:

- to gain factual knowledge of the historical forces and cultural traditions that have shaped and in turn have been shaped by the western religions,
- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of human religious activity and to think both empathetically and critically about the western traditions,
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications, and, of course,
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

Readings

- (1) Required Course Textbook: Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward, *Religions of the World*, 11th edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009 (available at the book store).
- (2) Required Supplemental Text: The *Epic of Gilgamesh: An English Version with an Introduction* (Penguin Classics), transl. N. K. Sanders, revised edition, 1960 (available at the book store).
- (3) Additional Readings: Primary and other secondary readings will be photocopied and provided in class or will be made available through Blackboard.

Blackboard

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. You would do well to acquaint yourself with Blackboard’s features and different usages and use them as frequent points of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing as well as in preparation for the assignments.

Course Requirements and Grading

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

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| 1. Preparation and Participation (incl. students minutes and peer evaluations) | 10% |
| 2. Three (3) Tests | 45% (15% each) |
| 3. One (1) Site Visit Analysis Paper | 10% |
| 4. Final Exam | 15% |
| 5. Academic Research Paper | 20% |

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)

Attendance: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. The assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. Make sure you arrive for class on time. Latecomers will be counted absent at the very beginning of class. Should you be late, you are permitted to enter the classroom only if you do so silently and without disturbing class proceedings. You are allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%. This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy. My expectations of professionalism extend, of course, to classroom etiquette, including the use of cell phones during class. If you use your phone, let's say, to tweet or to check the stock market, or if your phone goes off during class, you will be counted as absent for that day as well.

Preparation and Participation: There will be ample opportunity for you to participate in our class. Apart from my lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, and in-class writing assignments. Additional activities and assignments including peer assessments on written and oral work will also count toward your participation grade. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. While I will call on you often and ask about the content of assigned readings you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion in class on your own.

Student Minutes and Presentation: Taking notes on lectures and class discussion is a critical part of your learning experience. You are all expected to take notes during class as you will have to draw on them for your own work as well as when preparing for the essays. Your notes will also be the basis for a brief 3-minute presentation that each of you is to give in class as part of your participation grade. Every day our meetings will start with one of you presenting on the previous class session. Be concise as you only have three minutes of talking time. Highlight the main points and provide details only when relevant. Your peers will provide you with feedback on your presentation's content, structure, and delivery. Additional tips and guidelines for presentations and public speaking can be found on our Blackboard site.

2. Three (3) Tests (45%, 15% each)

There will be three announced tests during the semester (see course schedule for dates). Make-ups will only be given for excused absences, and you should notify me *in advance*. The tests will consist of multiple-choice, short identification, and essay questions.

3. One (1) Site Visit Analysis Paper (10%)

You are required to attend a public worship service or a particular religious ceremony in a religious tradition covered this semester (see Blackboard for details). You may choose any temple, synagogue, church, mosque, etc. that you wish, with *the rule that it must be of a faith you have never practiced*. Part of the visit will be to interview a member of the group about what you observed. After your visit you are to write an analytical essay about your observations as well as the interview. The due date for your Site Visit Analysis is **Monday, November 23**. You can submit your essay early, but late papers will not be accepted.

4. Final Exam (15%)

The final exam for our class will be given on **Friday, December 11 (9:00-12:00)**. It is a formal test of what you have learned during the class lectures and discussions, seminars, guest lectures, your research, films, and assigned readings. The final will be cumulative and will treat the semester's material in a synthetic and comparative manner. I will indicate the types of questions that may be asked on the final exam during the last class. Textbooks and notebooks will not be allowed in the exam room. The time of the final may not be changed.

5. Academic Research Paper (20%)

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. It is of greatest importance that you choose a topic of interest to you. The research paper should ideally use both primary source material and appropriate secondary and theoretical studies to focus more closely on a particular subject. You can find a list of recommended resources on the [research guide](#) available on the library web page. Your paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed.

Format, Length, Deadlines: Your research paper must be 2,400-3,000 words. Use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout. Consistently follow the **MLA (Modern Language Association)** system for manuscript format and documentation as set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed. (New York: MLA, 2003). There are several good websites that deal with MLA style (see Blackboard/Assignments/Writing Tips). The due date for the final draft of your research paper is the last day of class. Late papers will not be accepted.

The research and writing process consists of different stages and includes a wide variety of activities such as making a decision about your research topic, locating the appropriate references and texts, devising an outline and initial bibliography for your paper, presenting your initial findings to a group of peers and eliciting feedback from them, writing a preliminary draft, and usually ends in editing and revising your paper before you turn in your final draft. You will find that I indicated different dates and deadlines for these activities on the course schedule at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers.

- **Week 4 (9/14-9/18):** Determine research paper topic and clear it with me
- **Wednesday 9/23:** Library Research Workshop
- **Monday 9/28:** Three annotations
- **Wednesday 10/7:** Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources)
- **Wednesday 10/21:** Thesis statement and outline
- **Monday 11/30:** Draft for peer review (minimum of 2,400 words, completed bibliography)
- **Wednesday 12/2:** In-class peer reviews (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- **Monday 12/7** (last day of class): Turn in final draft with copy of initial draft and peer reviews

Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please also note the support provided by the Writing Center run by Dr. Adriane Ivey or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact [Jessalyn P. Smiley](#), the Coordinator for Disability Services for Students at Emory.

Academic Honesty

Finally, all students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Emory University live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code which indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so I (and you) am obligated to report violations. Emory University takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

Class Schedule

Week 1 (8/26) Introductions to each other and the class (syllabus): What are your expectations from this course? Why should we study (western) religions?
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Introduction Overview)

Week 2 (8/31) The Academic Study of Religion; Characteristics of Basic Religions: What is Animism?
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.1). Optional: Selections from Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (BB).

Week 2 (9/2) Ancient Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh, Myth, and the Hero's Journey
Reading: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (62-119); Genesis 6-9 (BB). Optional: Enuma Elish (BB)

Labor Day: Monday, September 7

Week 3 (9/9) Ancient Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh, Myth, and the Hero's Journey
Reading: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (cont.).

Week 4 (9/14, 9/16) Ancient Persia: Zoroastrianism
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.10). Optional: "Zoroastrians Keep the Faith, and Keep Dwindling" (BB).
Research Paper: Last week to clear topic with me

Week 5 (9/21, 9/23) Test I and Library Workshop
Reading: "Writing Academic Papers in Religious Studies" (BB)
Test I: in-class (Monday)
Library Research Workshop (Wednesday)

Week 6 (9/28, 9/30) Biblical Judaism: Monotheism, Covenant, Written and Oral Torah
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.11). Optional: *Union Haggadah* (BB).
Research Paper: Turn in first set of three annotations (Monday).

Week 7 (10/5, 10/7) Judaism: Holocaust, Theodicy, and Modern Jewish Thought
Reading: Selections from Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Optional: Selections from the biblical book of *Job* (BB).
Research Paper: Turn in annotated bibliography (Wednesday)

Fall Break (10/12-10/13)

Week 8 (10/14) Christianity: Life of Jesus and Sources about Him
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 292-313).

Wednesday, October 14: Midterm deficiencies due

Friday, October 16: Last day for dropping course without academic penalty

Week 9 (10/19, 10/21) Christianity: Creeds and Trinity; Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Reformation
Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 314-344).
Research Paper: Turn in thesis statement and outline (Wednesday)

Week 10 (10/26, 10/28)	Christianity Today: Fundamentalism and Second Analysis Paper Test II: in-class (Wednesday)
Week 11 (11/2, 11/4)	Islam as a Monotheistic Creed: Muhammad and the Qur'an, Sacred Rites Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13: 345-361). Optional (BB): Andrea Useem, "Islam, a Vocal Exercise of Faith," <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i> 47:13 (2000), A72.
Week 12 (11/9, 11/11)	Variations within Islam: Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi Muslims Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13: 361-381). Optional (BB): Prologue to Rumi's <i>Masnawi</i> . Open Day: Topic to be determined (Wednesday)
<u>Religion and Modernity</u>	
Week 13 (11/16, 11/18)	Religion and Modernity: Baha'i Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.14; on BB).
Week 14 (11/23)	Test III Site Visit Analysis Paper: Last chance to turn in paper (BB)
11/25-11/29	Thanksgiving Recess
Week 15 (11/30, 12/2)	Clash of Civilizations? Reading: Samuel P. Huntington, "The Coming Clash of Civilizations" (BB) and at least one response to Huntington's thesis (BB). Optional: Additional responses to Huntington (BB). Research Paper: Turn in draft of research paper to peer group (Monday); in-class peer review discussion (Wednesday);
Last Day of Class (12/7)	Evaluations and Review Research Paper: Turn in revised paper along with earlier assignments (e.g., annotations), drafts, and peer reviews.

Final Exam: Friday, December 11 (9:00-12:00)