

### **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*, 11<sup>th</sup> 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 of LPs, APs, and RPs) | 10%            |
| 2. One (1) Lecture Presentation   | 10%            |
| 3. Three (3) Analysis Papers  | 30% (10% each) |
| 4. Academic Research Paper Project  |                |
| a. First Paper (incl. annotated bibliography, outline, and thesis)                                  | 20%            |
| b. Revised Paper  | 10%            |
| 5. Final Exam   | 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. Lecture Presentation (10%)

During the course of the semester we will be discussing a wide range of concepts, events, or people in the history and contemporary reality of western religious traditions. Frequently we will benefit from additional information and analysis that goes beyond what our readings offer. Therefore, you will be assigned a particular topic for which to develop expertise through additional out-of-class research. You will be responsible for an **eight-to-ten-minute lecture presentation** based on your topic in order to deepen the class' understanding of the subject (see additional guidelines on Blackboard). Your lecture will be graded based on content, organization, and delivery. As you will be covering important course content, your audience's responsibility is to listen actively and attentively, take notes, keep track of main ideas, and think critically in order to evaluate and pose questions after the lecture. Furthermore,

everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Blackboard).

### 3. Three Analysis Papers (10% each)

You will write three 1,000-word essays (12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) over the course of the semester. These are meant as opportunities for analysis and critical, scholarly reflection. Therefore it is essential that you not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. In your writing I will look for increasing use of terminology relevant to the academic study of religion, exploration of religious concepts, questioning that extends beyond class discussion, and courageous attempts on your part to answer questions that arise from your interaction with the material. Your assignments will be graded based upon quality of thesis, argument, and writing style as well as evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the topic. More concrete guidelines for each assignment can be found on BB and will be discussed in class. You also may wish to come to me with a sheet of paper that includes a title and thesis paragraph to discuss your ideas.

- a. *First Analysis Paper*: The topic for the first essay is assigned (see Blackboard for details). Please bring a copy of your paper to class for peer review on **Tuesday, September 22**. A revised version of the paper along with a copy of the peer reviews is due in class on **Thursday, September 24**.
- b. *Second Analysis Paper*: The topic for the second essay is self-selected (see Blackboard for details). This assignment follows the same format as the first. The one exception is that you are responsible for choosing the topic of your analysis. Any topic that relates to the traditions studied up to this point in the semester and that can be treated successfully within the parameters of the assignment is permissible. Please bring a copy of your paper to class for peer review on **Thursday, October 29**. Bring your revised analysis paper (with copies of the peer reviews) to my office on **Friday, October 30**.
- c. *Third Analysis Paper/Site Visit Analysis*: For your final essay 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 **Tuesday, November 24**. You can submit your essay early, but late papers will not be accepted.

### 4. Academic Research Paper Project (30%): First Paper (20%), Revised Paper (10%)

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: Your research paper must be 3,000-3,600 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*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: MLA, 2003). There are several good websites that deal with MLA style (see Blackboard/Assignments/Writing Tips).

Revisions and Grading: You cannot expect to produce your best writing when you first get started. Revising your work is an integral part of successful writing. Thus, your research paper will develop in stages over the course of the semester and will go through a series of evaluations and revisions (see

below). The grade for the research paper project will be calculated as follows: **First Paper 20%** (incl. assignments leading up to it such as annotated bibliography and outline), **Revised Paper 10%**.

Stages of the Writing Process, Deadlines: Writing an academic research paper 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 revising and proofreading your paper before you turn in your final work. 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
- **Thursday 9/24:** Library Research Workshop
- **Tuesday 9/29:** Three annotations
- **Thursday 10/8:** Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources)
- **Thursday 10/22:** Thesis statement and outline
- **Tuesday 11/10:** Draft of *First Paper* due for peer review (min. 3,000 words; completed bibl.)
- **Thursday 11/12:** In-class peer reviews (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- **Tuesday 11/17:** Turn in *First Paper* for grading with earlier assignments, drafts, and peer reviews
- **Tuesday 12/8** (last day of class): Turn in *Revised Paper* along with all earlier assignments

### **5. Final Exam (20%)**

The cumulative final exam for our class will be given on **Monday, December 14 (2:00-5:00)**. 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. It will include multiple choice, short identification, and essay questions. The final 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.

### **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

### The Study of Religion

- Week 1 (8/27) 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 (9/1, 9/3) 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).

*Labor Day: Monday, September 7*

### Ancient Middle East and Persia

- Week 3 (9/8, 9/10) Ancient Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh, Myth, and the Hero's Journey  
**Reading:** *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (62-119); Genesis 6-9 (BB). Optional: Enuma Elish (BB)
- Week 4 (9/15, 9/17) 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 (9/22, 9/24) Peer Review of Analysis Paper I and Library Workshop  
**Reading:** "Writing Academic Papers in Religious Studies" (BB)  
**Analysis Paper I:** in-class peer review (Tuesday); turn in revised paper with peer reviews attached (Thursday)  
**Library Research Workshop** (Thursday)

### Abrahamic Traditions

- Week 6 (9/29, 10/1) 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 (Tuesday).
- Week 7 (10/6, 10/8) 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 (Thursday)

### **Fall Break (10/12-10/13)**

- Week 8 (10/15) 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 (10/20, 10/22) 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 (Thursday)
- Week 10 (10/27, 10/29) Christianity Today: Fundamentalism and Second Analysis Paper  
**Analysis Paper II:** in-class peer review (Thursday); turn in revised paper with peer reviews attached (Friday)
- Week 11 (11/3, 11/5) 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," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47:13 (2000), A72.
- Week 12 (11/10, 11/12) Variations within Islam: Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi Muslims  
**Reading:** Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13: 361-381). Optional (BB): Prologue to Rumi's *Masnawi*.  
**Research Paper:** Exchange First Papers for peer review (Tuesday); in-class peer discussion (Thursday).

### **Religion and Modernity**

- Week 13 (11/17, 11/19) Religion and Modernity: Baha'i  
**Reading:** Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.14; on BB).  
**Research Paper:** Turn in (revised) First Paper for grading (Tuesday).
- Week 14 (11/24) Open Class  
**Analysis Paper III:** Turn in site-visit analysis (BB)
- 11/25-11/29 Thanksgiving Recess**
- Week 15 (12/1, 12/3) 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).
- Last Day of Class (12/8) Evaluations and Review  
**Research Paper:** Turn in Revised Paper

**Final Exam: Monday, December 14 (2:00-5:00).**