

Department of Religion
Gustavus Adolphus College

REL 115-004
World Religions

Fall 2019
Dr. Samuel J. Kessler
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T/R
10:30-11:50AM
Old Main 004

Office Hours:
Old Main 304D
T/R 3-5PM
(and by appointment)

Final Examination:
Tuesday, May 21 at 3PM to Saturday, May 25 at 9PM
(available on Moodle)

This course explores the history and core tenets of the major (normative) streams of the classic World Religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism—as well as less discreet spiritual phenomena, such as those practices by the indigenous peoples of sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas. Each of these traditions will be studied in their cultural and political context, with frequent reference to their interactions and conflicts with other monotheistic and non-monotheistic cultures, using the most recent scholarly theories and methodologies. We will learn many concepts in the study of religion, such as myth, ritual, cosmology, theodicy, legalism, and the effects of geography and modernity. We will discuss the various ways each of these religious traditions have been in continual dialogue over the past millennia, and how this interaction has both reified and diversified traditional beliefs and practices. Finally, the multitude of sources we encounter will help us to develop a more complex vocabulary when discussing the various branches, sects, societies, ethics, and communities associated with all these traditions.

Students will leave this course with a thorough sense of the historical trajectory of the interacting cultures of the world from ancient times to the present. Students will be expected to learn many of the key figures, texts, beliefs, and geographies associated with each of these traditions, as well as to have a visual sense of the migrations and political instantiations of their adherents across the centuries.

This class has no prerequisites. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

You may not use a laptop or smart phone in class.
You may use an iPad or other tablet device for note-taking purposes only.

Guidelines & Policies

Course Readings & Communications

Readings for this course can be found either as a PDF on Moodle or under the list of Required Texts below. You can purchase all required books at The Book Mark or online. Readings should be completed before the Tuesday class for the week that they are listed. *You must bring each text to both classes for the week it is assigned, either as a PDF or physical copy.*

You are responsible for checking your Gustavus email regularly for communications about the course.

Accommodations Resource Policy

Those who qualify under Gustavus policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through College's Center for Academic Resources and Enhancement (CARE) can be found at https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Assignment Policies

All assignments are to be printed and submitted in class on the day they are due. You will be penalized 10% for each day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline will not be accepted. If you are ill or have a family emergency please contact the professor as soon as possible.

All assignments must be written in 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with 1-inch margins.

The Gustavus Writing Center provides helpful overviews and links for improving your writing. They also have appointment services available to help edit papers or discuss the writing process with a tutor. You can find more information on these services at <https://gustavus.edu/writingcenter/>.

Note: You should not expect a response from the professor about papers or exams beginning 24-hours prior to their due date.

University Honor Code

The Undergraduate Honor Code states: "*On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.*" For additional information about the Honor Code, visit https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Required Texts

- *Invitation to World Religions* (3rd Edition), ed. Jeffrey Brodd et al. (Oxford 2019)
- A new diary/journal notebook

Course Assignments & Expectations

Class Attendance and Participation

Attendance will be taken during each class period. If you arrive late and attendance has already been taken you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade by 2% per absence. You cannot receive a course grade higher than a C if you have more than six unexcused absences. Please notify the professor as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the Gustavus Class Attendance Policy can be found at https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Class participation points are based on the following criteria: arriving in class on time; being awake and attentive during lecture; being responsive and active during discussions and small group activities; respectfully listening when others are speaking; and being engaged in the course without checking your mobile devices. Failure to meet these criteria will result in the loss of participation points throughout the semester.

Religion in Film Response Paper (3 pages, double-spaced)

During the semester you will write a response paper about religion in film. You may choose your own film, *though you must email the professor with the title and a short summary before writing the paper.*

For this paper, you must take one of the definitions of the religion (from Weeks 1 and 2) and apply it to the way religion is depicted in your chosen film. Your paper should answer the following question: does religion, as so-and-so defines it, appear in this film? How? Your answer should use specific evidence you see on screen – including lines of dialogue, imagery, geography, physical actions – to prove your answer.

(Due Thursday, Nov. 21)

Map Quizzes & Vocabulary Quizzes

Over the course of the semester you will have two (2) map quizzes and two (2) vocabulary quizzes. Quizzes will be fifteen (15) minutes in length and will be taken at the beginning of the class period. Map quizzes will be based on the maps and terms in the PowerPoint slides, and vocabulary quizzes will be based on the glossary at the end of each PowerPoint lecture.

(Thurs., Oct. 10; Thurs., Oct. 17; Thurs., Nov. 14; Thurs., Dec. 5)

Midterm Exam

The midterm will consist of two essays. The first will ask about a specific historical event and its importance to a particular religion. The second will give you a text, and you will need to identify and explain the key theological and cultural ideas expressed in it. *You will be provided with a study guide prior to the exam.*

(Thursday, Oct. 31)

Final Exam

The final exam will be cumulative. It will consist of seventy (70) multiple-choice questions. The questions will address specific topics, figures, texts, and historical events covered throughout the semester. The essay will test your knowledge of specific religious practices and their cultural context.

The final exam will be online. You should set aside ninety (90) minutes to complete it.

*Note: You will only have one opportunity to answer each question; you will **not** be able to return to flagged questions.*

**The final exam will available on Moodle
from
Thursday, December 12 at 12PM to Tuesday, December 17 at 9PM.**

Grading

Class Attendance and Participation	5
Film Response Paper	15
First Map Quiz	10
Second Map Quiz	10
First Vocabulary Quiz	10
Second Vocabulary Quiz	10
Midterm Exam	20
Final Exam	<u>20</u>
	100

Schedule*Conceptualizing Religions*Week 1: September 3-5

Introduction: How to Study Religion

Reading (for Thursday)

- *Invitation*, Chapter 1, “An Invitation to the Study of World Religions”

Week 2: September 10-12

The Religious Impulse

Readings

- Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20-65 (Moodle)

*Africa*Week 3: September 17-19

Out of Africa: Life Cycles of Humans and Spirits

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 3, “Indigenous Religions of Africa”

*Western Monotheisms*Week 4: September 24-26

Judaism: Wellspring of Monotheism

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 11, “Judaism,” pp. 362-368, 372-393, 397-413

Note: No class Tuesday, September 24 (Nobel Conference)You must submit a two-page (double-spaced) response paper to one of the Nobel lectures.*Week 5: October 1-3

Christianity I: Evangelizing the Gospel

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 12, “Christianity,” pp. 420-441

***Note: No class Tuesday, October 1 (Rosh Hashanah)**Week 6: October 8-10

Christianity II: Theological Diversities

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 12, “Christianity,” pp. 441-462

***First Vocabulary Quiz: Thursday, October 10**

Week 7: October 15-17

Islam I: A New Prophecy in Arabia

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 13, “Islam,” pp. 481-498, 517-531

Note: No class Tuesday, October 15 (Sukkot)**First Map Quiz: Thursday, October 17**Week 8: October 22-24

Islam II: Empires and Cultures

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 13, “Islam,” pp. 498-517

Note: No Class Tuesday, October 22 (Fall Break)Beyond the Hindu Kush*Week 9: October 29-31

Silk Roads I: Hinduism

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 4, “Hinduism”

***Midterm Exam: Thursday, October 31**Week 10: November 5-7

Silk Roads II: Hinduism & Buddhism

Readings

- *Invitation*, “Chapter 5, “Buddhism,” pp. 147-167

Week 11: November 12-14

Silk Roads III: Buddhism

Readings

- *Invitation*, “Chapter 5, “Buddhism,” pp. 169-187

***Second Vocabulary Quiz: Thursday, November 14**Week 12: November 19-21

All the Way to China: Daoism & Confucianism

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 8, “Chinese Religions: Confucianism and Daoism”

Film Response Paper Due: Thursday, November 21**Note: No class November 26 and 28 (AAR and Thanksgiving Break)**

Old New World

Week 13: December 3-5

From Sea to Shining Sea: Native Religions of North America

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 2, “Indigenous Religions of North America”

***Second Map Quiz: Thursday, December 5**

Week 14: December 10-12

The Future of Religion: Alternative Spiritualities

Readings

- *Invitation*, Chapter 14, “New Religious Movements”

Final Exam:

Thursday, December 12 at 12PM to Tuesday, December 17 at 9PM.

Note: *You will only have one opportunity to answer each question;
you will **not** be able to return to flagged questions.*

Suggested Source Books & Translations

Norton Anthology of World Religions (2 vols.), ed. Jack Miles (Norton 2014)

The Hebrew Bible (3 vols.), trans. Robert Alter (Norton 2018)

The Five Books of Moses (The Schocken Bible: Volume 1), trans., Everett Fox (Schocken 1996)

The Early Prophets (The Schocken Bible: Volume 2), trans., Everett Fox (Schocken 2014)

The Qur'an, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford 2008)

The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary, trans, Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (HarperOne 2015)

Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (Yale 2018)

A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, ed. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton 1963)

Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation, trans. Stephen Mitchell (Three Rivers Press 2000)

Dr. Kessler's Grading Chart

A	95
A-	92
B+	88
B	85
B-	82
C+	78
C	75
C-	72
D+	68
D	65
F	>65

Appropriate Email Etiquette

This sheet is intended to help you compose formal and appropriate emails to your professors and/or anyone employed by the College.
You should follow these guidelines *every time* you compose an email message, *unless specifically instructed otherwise*.

How to Compose an Appropriate Email

- Include a clear, direct subject line
- Begin your email with a professional, formal salutation
 - Begin with “Dear” or “Hello,” *always avoid* “Hi” or “Hey”
 - Address the person with his/her highest formal title (e.g., Dr., Prof., Ms., Mr., &c.)
- Space your message appropriately
 - Never send a long, run-on paragraph
- Provide background on your question or comment
 - Assume the recipient does not know the context of your note
- Never send a single line response (even if the message is part of a chain)
- Use normal font styles and sizes
- End your note formally and with your typed name
 - Above your name, write “Sincerely” or “All the best” or “Regards”
 - Never end *only* with an automatic signature

When Applicable

- Never assume the answer to a question, especially if it involves asking someone for their time
- Be explicit about specific needs or requests
 - Bold or italicize times, dates, and deadlines
- Give your recipient at least *one business day* (i.e. not Saturday or Sunday) to answer, *even* if it feels like an emergency to you
- Use your professional (college) email address

What to Avoid

- Never *begin* an email without a formal salutation
- Never address your professors by their first name *unless specifically instructed otherwise*
- Never *end* an email simply with an automatic signature—always type your name, first and/or last
- Never send an email you haven’t read at least twice

**Remember:*

Nothing you write in an email is permanently confidential. *Absolutely nothing*. Go to the email recipient *in person* with anything that might be best not written down.