

Department of Philosophy and Religion
Western Kentucky University
RELS 103
Religions of Asia

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Course Description:

In this survey course, designed as an introduction to three religious traditions that are firmly rooted in Asia, we will carefully examine a wide variety of primary and secondary sources to help us recognize and understand the many *different* ways in which Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians/Daoists have understood life and death, the purpose and goal of human existence and society, as well as the nature of the world.

In exploring religious traditions that may seem wholly foreign from our own, our emphasis will be on the internal logic of each as well as on the resources that each provides for the construction of meaning, value, and morality. Students will also be indirectly introduced to the methods and issues that characterize contemporary academic study of religion. Upon successful completion of this course students should have developed a *critical understanding* of these distinctive traditions coupled with a *mature sensitivity* to how the traditions provide their adherents with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Course Expectations:

It is essential that you listen to all podcasts for the course posted on Blackboard. As the exams draw heavily on the lecture material and the topics from the weekly assignments, it is very unlikely that students who listen only to a portion of the recordings, who watch only a portion of the posted videos, who don't complete the assigned readings, or who don't complete the weekly writing assignments will pass the course.

You are expected to have completed the readings for each Monday. You are also encouraged to read ahead in order to help balance the "heavy-reading" days with lighter ones. Please note that *all* of the readings will not be discussed in the podcasts or on the writing assignments; however, you are still responsible for all of the content and you should feel free to ask questions on any of the readings that are unclear.

There will be **THREE** exams administered throughout the semester. Exams will follow our exploration and discussion of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism/Daoism. You will be tested on the material covered in the podcasts, assigned readings, writing assignments, and videos. There will be no make-ups for the exams **UNLESS** a university acceptable excuse is presented to the instructor **PRIOR** to the exam. ***There will be no make-up tests for students without valid university excuses.***

Weekly Writing Assignments:

Weekly writing assignments form an integral part of the learning process as they provide you with the opportunity to delve more deeply in the course material and primary sources. There will be eleven weekly writing assignments throughout the semester, and I will drop your lowest score. Each assignment will require approximately a one page response. Prompts for the assignment will be emailed to the students approximately three or four days before they are due; they are an excellent way to study for the exams.

Course Organization:

For this course we will be using Blackboard. On it you will find all of the podcasts (which is how I will be sharing the content with you, the additional readings, short movies, and PowerPoints. All of these can be found under the Content tab on the left.

To make things as user-friendly as possible, I have separated the content into folders for the different religions we will be exploring, and—under each religion folder—subfolders organized by each week.

As an example: We will start our semester by learning about Hinduism and we will spend the 5 weeks on it. Under the Hinduism folder, you will find 5 subfolders (one for each week) and in each subfolder you will find the additional readings and podcasts for that week. Those weeks should synch up well with the course schedule (see below).

In addition to the content material, I will be posting the weekly short writing topics around Tuesday or Wednesday of each week. Those will be due by midnight on Friday.

Grading and Evaluation:

The final course grade will be based on the following:

Three exams	100 points each (300 total)
Writing Assignments	20 points each (200 points total based on the quality and depth)

The total number of points in the course is 500. Grades will be assigned accordingly: A=500-450; B=449-400; C=399-350; D=349-300; F=299 and below.

For students seeking to improve their grade, there will be a number of extra credit assignments. Each assignment (campus or off campus) is worth up to 5 points and will be added to your exam grade.

Temple Visits (extra credit):

Two possible ways to earn extra credit are to visit a Buddhist temple and a Hindu temple (5 points each). The extra credit consists of typing (handwritten will not be acceptable) a 3 page response paper describing 1) your visit to the temple (descriptive) and 2) your reaction to the experience (reflective). Each extra credit assignment must be turned in with a photo taken of the student in front of the temple visited. Please note that if you visit any of the temples, you, as a representative of Western Kentucky University, should make every effort to show respect to the people and the place. **The deadline for turning in any extra credit work is April 23rd.**

Academic Dishonesty:

Students who commit any act of academic dishonesty (plagiarism (i.e., not citing sources used), cheating on the exam, and so on) will not be given the option of withdrawing. They will receive a failing grade for the course. Please note that student work may be checked using plagiarism detection software.

Title IX:

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at <https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf> and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at https://wku.edu/policies/hr_policies/2040_discrimination_harassment_policy.pdf. Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-

5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121. Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and MUST report what you share to WKU’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU’s Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

Course Texts:

Willard G. Oxtoby and Roy C. Amore, eds. *World Religions: Eastern Traditions (3rd edition)*. **This text (ISBN 0195426762)** is available as a used book for very cheap (approximately \$4.00-5.00) from numerous sellers on Amazon. I have purposely chosen this edition because of the numerous cheap copies available. Please order this book as soon as possible as it may take a while for the copy to arrive)

There are additional collections of primary and secondary sources available on Blackboard.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, Room 445, Potter Hall. The OFSDS telephone number is (270)745-5004 v/tty.

Per University Policy, please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

The Buddha is purported to have said that all compound things are impermanent. As something that is compound, this syllabus is no exception. The professor reserves the right to make changes in the reading assignments and dates listed below.

Course Schedule

<p>Week 1 1/19</p>	<p><u>Hinduism: Overview and the Indus Valley Civilization</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 30-36; “Points of Departure” (Blackboard); Oxtoby, pp. 36-39; Podcast: Hinduism: Orientation, Background, and Overview Podcast: Indus Valley Civilization Podcast: Vedic Religion, Pt. 1</p>
<p>Week 2 1/25</p>	<p><u>The Vedic Period: Gods, Rituals, and Society</u> Readings: “Hinduism and History,” pp. 12-42 ONLY (on Blackboard); The Vedas (on Blackboard) Podcast: Vedic Religion, Pt. 2 Podcast: Vedic Religion, Pt. 3 Video: Tradition of Vedic Chanting (on Blackboard)</p>
<p>Week 3 2/1</p>	<p><u>The Upanishadic Movement: World Renunciation and the Path of Knowledge</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 11-15 (*39-43); ; “Hinduism and History,” pp. 42-46 (on Blackboard); “The Upanishads” (on Blackboard), pp. 36-51; Chandogya Upanishad (on Blackboard); Mundaka Upanishads (on Blackboard) Podcast: Upanishadic Period, Pt. 1 Podcast: Upanishadic Period, Pt. 2 Podcast: Upanishadic Period, Pt. 2</p>

	Video: India's Sadhus
Week 4 2/8	<u>The Epic Period: Stages of Life and Krishna's Alternative</u> Readings: "The Mahabharata—A Synopsis" (online); Oxtoby, pp. 43-55; Bhagavad Gita, Selections (on Blackboard) Podcast: Epic Period, Pt. 1 & 2
Week 5 2/15	<u>Hindu Devotionalism</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 61-64, 67-69, 72-76; "Bhakti" (on Blackboard), pp. 130-133. Podcast: Epic Period, Pt. 3. Hinduism Exam handed out (due 2/26)

Buddhism

Week 6 2/22	<u>Background to Buddhism and the Life of the Buddha</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 178-190. Podcast: Introduction to Buddhism Podcast: Life of the Buddha
Week 7 3/1	Life of the Buddha (Conclude) Video: BBC: The Life of the Buddha Basic Buddhist Doctrines: Four Noble Truths Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 190-196. Podcast: Basic Teachings, Pt. 1
Week 8 3/8	<u>Basic Buddhist Doctrines: No Self, Dependent Origination, Samsara and Nirvana</u> Readings: "The Teachings of the Buddha" (on Blackboard), pp. 33-45; "Questions of King Milinda" (on Blackboard); "Dependent Origination" (on Blackboard) Podcast: Basic Teachings, Pt. 2 Podcast: Basic Teachings, Pt. 3

Week 9 3/15	<u>The Monastic Community</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 194-205; "Monasticism" (on Blackboard); "The Sangha" (on Blackboard); "The Laity" (on Blackboard); Oxtoby, pp. 103-106. Podcast: Monastic Community, Pt. 1 Podcast: Monastic Community, Pt. 2
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Week 10 3/22	<p><u>Mahayana Buddhism</u> Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 205-220; “The Mahayana” (on Blackboard) Podcast: Mahayana Buddhism, Pt. 1</p> <p>Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 224-247; “Soteriology and the Pantheon of the Mahayana” (on Blackboard); and “Shorter Amitayus Sutra” (on Blackboard). Podcast: Mahayana Buddhism, Pt. 2 Buddhism Exam handed out (due 4/2)</p>
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Confucianism and Daoism

Week 11 3/29	<p>Confucianism: Introduction Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 256-269 Podcast: Confucianism, Pt. 1</p> <p>Life of Confucius and Basic Doctrines Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 271-281; Selections from the Analects (online) Podcast: Confucianism, Pt. 2</p>
Week 12 4/5	<p>Conclude Confucianism; Begin Daoism Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 281-294 Podcast: Confucianism, Pt. 3 Video: Confucianism Podcast: Daoism, Pt. 1</p>
Week 13 4/12	<p>Daoism: Laozi and the Daodejing; Zhuangzi Readings: Selections from the Daodejing (online) Podcast: Daoism, Pt. 2</p>
Week 14 4/19	<p>Readings: Oxtoby, pp. 300-305; Selections from the Zhuangzi (online) Podcast: Daoism, Pt. 3 Video: Daoism versus Confucianism Podcast: Studying for the Chinese religions exam</p> <p>Confucianism and Daoism Exam handed out (Due 4/30)</p>