

## 2022 Spr WKU - RELS 102-701: World Religions – Syllabus – DRAFT

Instructor: Paul Fischer

Office: ~~Cherry Hall 308~~ Student hours: T/Th 8.30-9.30am on Zoom (link is on Blackboard – Student hours)

Email: paul.fischer@wku.edu (please put “RELS 102” in the subject line of emails to me)

Class times: T/Th 9.35-10.55 on Zoom (link is on Blackboard – Zoom class)

Attendance is not required for this class: Zoom class is for those who want to ask questions at those times.

### Course description:

Religion is often a crucial factor in understanding both the history of human civilization as well as every individual's relation to whatever they conceive as “spiritually ultimate.” The paradigms of self, society, and cosmos that religious traditions transmit affect many aspects of culture, including art, literature, social norms, and political policies. Despite sturdy claims of continuity however, these paradigms vary considerably, depending on place and time. Transient, evolving, and always subject to selective emphasis, their material traces are later excavated by archeologists and historians, who then produce, *ex post facto*, rational surveys like this one. This course is an introduction to the major religious and intellectual traditions of the modern world and to their critical appraisal; namely, Shinto, Christianity, Deism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, spirituality, agnosticism, and atheism. The academic study of religion is part of a liberal education in two important ways. First, together with technical training, it allows us to practice our skills of literacy and critical thinking. Second, distinct from technical training, it does not teach us how to make a living, but invites us to consider how to live.

*This course fulfills the Colonnade / Explorations / Arts & Humanities requirement.*

### Course goals:

1. Learn about global culture; specifically, the main *ideas* of the world's most influential religions.
2. Learn the *means* to objectively critique global culture; specifically, via sixteen critical thinking items.

### Course methodology:

This course uses four components and is designed to facilitate *understanding* of these components and *articulation* of how they may relate to one another. The components are: (1) three religious paradigms, (2) sixteen critical thinking items, (3) ten theories of religion, and (4) eleven religious/intellectual traditions. (These are all listed on the “Colonnade Assignment Instructions” PDF on Blackboard.) As an example of how we might think about relations among these, we may consider questions like: “How might Huxley (a theorist) have used metaphor (a critical thinking item) to interpret the spiritual (a paradigm) Zen (a religious tradition) injunction to “kill the Buddha”? [He'd say it means: “Don't get stuck on culturally-specific conceptions of the divine: listen to your heart.”]

### Course assignments and grades:

Your grade derives from in-class quizzes (60%), written participation assignments (20%) and one 1-page (single-spaced) Colonnade assignment (20%). Given the large size of this Colonnade course, the instructor's primary feedback to you is in the proactive form of the Reading Questions, posted on Blackboard, for the readings. See the “Grading details” section below for additional detail. I reserve the right to add or subtract points based on particularly good or bad classroom participation. (If you are particularly shy, you can chat with me during my office hours.) **Your grade is in the “weighted total” column of Blackboard, not the “total” column.**

### Course texts:

Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha* (1922; Susan Bernofsky, trans. NY: Modern Library, 2006) *Please buy or rent this, but the WKU library does have an eBook copy, but with limited use (and no page numbers)....*

PDFs on Blackboard - Content: 0. Syllabus; 1. BA (Britannica Academic) readings; 2. Primary Sources PDF; 3. Harari; 4. Grand Inquisitor (GI); 5. Paine; 6. Whitman; 7. Ingersoll; 8. Deutsch; 9. RQs (reading questions) for BA, Harari, GI, Sita, *Siddhartha*, Ingersoll, Deutsch; 10. Colonnade Assignment instructions.

*Please print Primary Sources handout and bring to class.*

**Please note: This is a reading and lecture course; if you dislike reading or coming to class, you may want to reconsider taking it. Also, laptops, tablets, and cellphones are not allowed in this class.**\*

\* If you wish to know why, please see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/22/business/laptops-not-during-lecture-or-meeting.html>

“Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.”

– Henry Thomas Buckle

**Course meetings (2022 Spr):**

**Week 01 (18, 20 Jan): Intro + Evolution of religion**

01. Introduction, Paradigms, Syllabus, Critical Thinking Items (CTIs)

02. Evolution of Religion: Harari ch.12 (2015) (PDF reading: 28pgs) + Quiz #1: CTIs & Harari (quiz does not count)

**Week 02 (25, 27 Jan): Theory**

03. Theories 1-8 (Winkler video)

04. Theories 9-10 (Thomson video) + Quiz #2: Theory

**Week 03 (01, 03 Feb): Shinto**

05. Shinto I: Old (BA reading: pp.5-12)

06. Shinto II: Dual, Restoration, State + Quiz #3: Shinto

**Week 04 (08, 10 Feb): Christianity**

07. Jews & Jesus (Emanuel video) (BA reading: pp.13-21)

08. James, Paul, early church councils, Augustine, Luther, Enlightenment + Quiz #4: Christianity

**Week 05 (15, 17 Feb): “Grand Inquisitor” + Deism**

09. Deism: Paine handout (1794-95; 2pgs) (BA reading: pp.29-31)

10. “Grand Inquisitor” (1880) (PDF reading: 13pgs) + Quiz #5: Grand Inquisitor + Deism

**Week 06 (22, 24 Feb): Islam**

11. Review #1: Q&A

12. Islam (Qadhi-Sarsour video) (BA reading: pp.22-28) + Quiz #6: Islam

**Week 07 (01, 03 Mar): Hinduism**

13. Hinduism I: Vedas, Upanishads (BA reading: pp.32-39)

14. Hinduism II: Puranas (Puja video) + Quiz #7: Hinduism

**Week 08 (08, 10 Mar): HTDTCA + “Sita Sings the Blues”**

15. HTDTCA (= How to do the Colonnade assignment)

16. “Sita Sings the Blues” (2008) + Quiz #8: Sita

**Week 09 (15, 17 Mar): Spring Break: 14-18 Mar**

17.

18.

**Week 10 (22, 24 Mar): Buddhism**

19. Buddhism: Hinayana (Baggini video) (BA reading: pp.40-51)

20. Buddhism: Mahayana + Quiz #9: Buddhism

**Week 11 (29, 31 Mar): Siddhartha**

21. Review #2: Q&A (including Colonnade assignment questions)

22. Siddhartha (1922; bring the book) + Quiz #10: Siddhartha

**Week 12 (05, 07 Apr): Confucianism**

23. Confucianism I: Kong, Meng, Xun (BA reading: pp.52-62) + Colonnade Assignment DUE

24. Confucianism II: “Great Learning,” Zhang Zai, Zhu Xi + Quiz #11: Confucianism

**Week 13 (12, 14 Apr): Confucianism II + Daoism**

25. Daoism: Lao, Zhuang (BA reading: pp.63-71)

26. Spirituality (Peterson video) (BA reading: pp.1-4) + Quiz #12: Daoism + spirituality

**Week 14 (19, 21 Apr): Agnosticism + Atheism**

27. Agnosticism: Ingersoll (PDF reading: 7pgs) (Windsor video)

28. Atheism (Fry video, Rizvi video) (BA reading: pp.72-79) + Quiz #13: agnosticism & atheism

**Week 15 (26, 28 Apr): Deutsch**

29. Deutsch ch.15: The Evolution of Culture (RE: Theory #9: memes) (PDF reading: 29pgs) + Quiz #14: Deutsch

30. Review #3: Q&A

### Grading details:

This grading rubric is designed to encourage student participation and success. The percentages indicate the percentage that each activity contributes to your total score (of 100). [90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D] **Your grade is always available to you on Blackboard – Grades, in the “weighted total” (not the “total”) column.**

1. **Topic quizzes** (60%): There are 14 quizzes, each with ten multiple-choice questions, but only 12 of them count: Quiz #1 is a practice quiz and does not count, and of the 13 remaining quizzes, the one with the lowest score is automatically dropped. Quizzes may be found on Blackboard – Quizzes. **All quizzes are due at 3pm on the day after the dates specified on the schedule** above. The questions all derive from either the assigned readings or the lectures. Answering the Reading Questions (RQs), which may be found in Blackboard – Content, is *not* required (and your responses will *not* be collected), but many of the questions in the multiple-choice topic quizzes are drawn from the RQs, so your answers to them make an ideal study guide for the quizzes.

2. **Written participation** (20%): The Written Participation Questions (WPQs) that are done during class are for your personal engagement with the ideas under discussion; there are 10 WPQs per class. They can be found on Blackboard – WPQs, grouped by week (i.e., WPQ #1 has the questions for both classes of week #1). **They are due every Friday at 3pm** (except for the last one). All of the WPQs *together* are worth 20% of your final grade.

3. **Colonnade assignment** (20%): The Colonnade assignment is a 1-page, single-spaced paper that addresses all of the relevant Colonnade prompts. Please **email** it to the instructor as an attached Word document before class time on the due date. (Do not send it to Blackboard.) See the “How to Do the Colonnade Assignment” (HTDTCA) PDF on Blackboard for instructions.

*(Life pro tip: never hand in a first draft of the paper; always get someone to critique it before I do.)*

**Late work:** If you miss a quiz or a WPQ assignment, you have one week to make it up (**except those in the last week of class**); no excuse needed. For example, if you miss a quiz on a Thursday, you have until 3pm on the following Thursday to do it. This late work policy means, unfortunately, that the instructor will not be able to go over the quizzes in class afterwards. **The deadline for the Colonnade essay is hard.**

### Extra credit:

#### Questions: 5%

If you have questions about the ideas considered in this course, you may visit the instructor during office hours to ask them, and you will get extra credit for doing so. (These extra credit points will be in the EC column in Grades on Blackboard.) Each question is worth ½ a point but, while you can ask as many questions as you want during office hours, you can only get a maximum of 1 point per visit. The maximum number of these kinds of point is 5 (over five visits, on five separate days).

**\* The last day you can visit the instructor to ask questions is before class on 26 Apr.**

#### Writing: 5%

You can get 2.5 points if you go to the library, find the call numbers for a given topic relevant to this class (ask a librarian; for example, “atheism” is under “rationalism,” which has the call numbers BL2700-2790), browse the stacks, find a *relevant* book that interests you, check it out, look it over, and write a 500-word (about 2/3rds of a page, single-spaced) summary of the book. The summary must include your name, the call numbers of the topic, the author, title, and date of publication, and your 500-word summary. You do not have to read the entire book: reading the table of contents, the introduction, and/or the first few paragraphs of each chapter may be enough. ~~Print your summary out, and when you hand it in, also bring the book to show the instructor.~~ You can do this twice, for a total of 5 points.

**\* The last day you can hand in such a summary is before class on 26 Apr.**

The instructor reserves the right to modify this reading schedule and grading rubric at any time.

Note: the key to doing well in this class lies in two things: (1) taking responsibility for understanding the readings and the lectures (and asking questions when you do not understand), and (2) using the RQs for creating your own study guide (and asking questions when you do not understand) for the quizzes.

The scholar said: ‘Craftsmen who want to become competent at their craft must first sharpen their tools.’ *Lunyu* 15.10.

子曰：「工欲善其事，必先利其器。」

**Video URLs:** (We will watch these in class, except for “Sita Sings the Blues,” which you must watch on your own.)

Matthew Winkler on Campbell’s hero cycle (2012; 5 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA>

Andy Thomson, “Why We Believe in Gods” (2009; 45 mins; w/Q&A 54 mins)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liMmvu9eMrg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liMmvu9eMrg&feature=player_embedded)

Ezekiel Emanuel, “What Do You Believe?” (2009; 2 mins)

<https://bigthink.com/u/ezekielemanuel>

Yasir Qadhi and Linda Sarsour, “Muslim Americans and U.S. Liberal Values” (2015; 18 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kP3uL6NQLRY>

Nathan Antila (writer) and A.C. Warden (producer), “Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion” (1996; 12 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9LSdqRLIVM>

Nina Paley, “Sita Sings the Blues” (2008; 1 hr, 22 mins)

<http://www.sitasingingtheblues.com/watch.html>

Julian Baggini, “Is There a Real You?” (2011; 12 mins)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/julian\\_baggini\\_is\\_there\\_a\\_real\\_you.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/julian_baggini_is_there_a_real_you.html)

Jaime Windsor, “Why Bad Photographers Think They’re Good” (2018; 9mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmSYI6AjFUg>

Jordan Peterson “What is God?” (2018; 5 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X87Os7tyD70>

Stephen Fry on what he would say to God (2015; 3 mins)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suvkwNYSQo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suvkwNYSQo&feature=emb_logo)

Ali Rizvi, “The Atheist Muslim” (2017; 12 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noFx0wTsZZI>

Tim Minchin, “Life Lessons” (2017; 7 mins)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vHS\\_ay3z5U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vHS_ay3z5U)

18 min version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoEezZD71sc>

### **Student issues:**

#### **Student-teacher relations in the Arts & Humanities:**

I’m not here to sell you knowledge. If that is all you want, you can get it online or in the library. Selling knowledge to a customer may be the paradigm for some academic divisions, but not in the Arts. History, literature, and religion professors are like football coaches: we impart knowledge, but we also show you what exercises to do to acquire certain skills, skills like information literacy, critical thinking, and objective communication, but *you do the actual work to acquire those skills*. You are not a passive receptacle of learning, but rather an active practitioner of skill acquirement. Thus we often say of our courses: the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

#### **Preparation for class:**

It is generally accepted that students must study two to three hours outside of class for every hour spent in class. As this course meets 2.5 hours per week, you should expect to spend between five and eight hours per week reading and studying for this one course. Students who are unable or unwilling to commit this amount of time to this course should reconsider whether this course is appropriate for them. Try not to fall behind on the reading because it is very difficult to catch up. This is a survey course, and we move along quickly.

#### **How to read in academia:**

For the reading each week, first skim the appropriate chapters or pages in order to identify the main points, events, and individuals. Then re-read those chapters or pages in order to determine how examples are used to support those points, events, and individuals. Pay attention to chapter titles and subheadings to help guide you. As you read (just as when you listen in class), do so with pen or marker in hand so you can note or highlight those key points, events, ideas, themes, patterns, and individuals in the margins. Do not underline or highlight everything. Teach yourself to discriminate between important information (including analyses and conclusions) from unimportant information; practice determining why something is important, in the short run, in the long run, in other places, to other people, and for other events. Note causes, effects, and results. Review these notations regularly as you read the assigned pages. Reviewing in this fashion should enable you to see the direction a chapter (or lecture) is taking; it should also help to improve your concentration. With practice you should improve.

#### **Attendance & Participation:**

Timely, prepared, and engaged attendance is recommended. It is not necessary to obtain prior approval from the instructor when missing a meeting is unavoidable, but note that students bear the *entire responsibility* for the decision to miss class and for whatever effect that may have on their course grade and their learning experience. Participation in class discussions will be evaluated on quality, quantity, and appropriateness of student questions and comments. Please note: it is just as possible to talk *too much* as it is to talk too little in class. Likewise, there is such a thing as active listening, and yes, your professors are capable of distinguishing this from passive listening. If you are worried about the level and/or quality of your participation, the best thing to do is to come to office hours, where the professor can give you direct feedback throughout the semester, rather than at the end (when it is too late).

**Classroom behavior:**

I expect you to be not only on time and prepared, but also to demonstrate initiative by asking interesting questions and otherwise engaging the topic at hand. You may have thoughtfully read all of the assignment, but I won't know this unless you give me evidence of this by talking with me about it. An Arts classroom is also like a corporate boardroom: there is protocol to be followed (e.g., raising your hand for a question), there are other people in the room deserving of your respect (e.g., by not distracting them), and there is the fact that you are being judged on your behavior and participation.

**Cellphones, computers, tablets (and all other electronic devices):**

We live in a fast-paced world. But the skills you have the opportunity to practice in Arts courses require mental focus. Staying focused on a task for fifty-five or eighty minutes at a time is a skill, and a marketable one at that. Cellphones are distracting, perhaps delightfully so, but distraction detracts from focus. Therefore cellphones are not allowed in class: please put them away where they cannot be seen or heard. Computers can be useful for viewing texts and taking notes, but they can also be a distraction, both to the user as well as to all those who can see the screen. Therefore, computers are not allowed in class.\*

\* <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/22/business/laptops-not-during-lecture-or-meeting.html>

**Talking in class:**

You should not talk in class when others are speaking. Not out of respect for me, but out of respect for the other students trying to focus. I see the class period as an opportunity for you. If you do not wish to participate, that is fine with me: you may put your head down and go to sleep, or you can quietly pass notes to one another, or you can lean over and whisper to one another. *But if I can hear that you are talking, even if I cannot hear what you are saying, that means you are distracting other students.* Please don't do that. (Yes, this will affect your grade.)

**Email communication:**

At times I will communicate with the entire class using campus email systems, so it is essential that you regularly check your WKU email address or forward your WKU account email to your preferred email address. I encourage you to contact me via email with questions about the course, the material we cover in class, and assignments. You are expected to be professional in all communication with the instructor. All email communication should be in complete sentences with a proper salutation and conclusion. Treat the email more as a letter and less like a text message. Include a comprehensible subject heading (e.g., "REL 317 paper question"), address and sign the email, making sure to identify what class you are in (usually instructors are teaching more than one class) and explain clearly what it is that you are inquiring about. Failure to do these will guarantee that you will not get a response. Also, unless I've explicitly stated otherwise, I generally check my faculty email only during normal business hours (more or less M-F from 8am to 5pm).

Finally, here is a short list of things to which **I may not respond**:

- Questions that can be answered by checking the course syllabus or looking online.
- A request to know **if** you missed anything during an absence. (The answer is yes.)
- A request to know **what** you missed during an absence. (Instead of asking this through email, take the appropriate next steps to catch up: ask a classmate for notes, meet with me in my office hours, etc.)

**The Library:**

I like Google as much as the next guy. Probably more so. But as wonderful as Google is, there are still lots of things the library has that cannot be found with a Google search. Two spring immediately to mind: librarians and books. Librarians know all kinds of things about how to access useful and relevant information, both online and in dead-tree format. Go talk to one! The other thing is books. I know Google Books is making good progress, but there are still a great many texts that are only accessible by browsing the stacks. Browsing the stacks is a key part of the university experience. Don't miss out!

**Studying together:**

Studying together can be a good thing or it can be a bad thing. If you do the work and want to deepen your understanding by discussing it with other students to gain their perspective, that's great. This course is a rare opportunity for you to talk about potentially divisive issues. But if you simply meet up with other students, divide the reading, then meet back up to plagiarize each other's notes, that is not a good thing. It's just cheating.

**Plagiarism:**

Whenever you submit work to me, of any kind and for any assignment, either oral or written, if the words that you use in your work match uncited words anywhere else in the universe (except your own notes, written in your own words): that is plagiarism. This includes any webpage, any monograph in any language anywhere, and even other students' notes, past or present. If you were sick one day and got notes from another student, you must first put them in your own words if you are going to submit them as your own work. I am the judge of what constitutes words that "match." Any work that includes plagiarized words will receive a zero, and may result in failing the class and expulsion from the university. If this concept is unclear to you, please see me or a WKU librarian for explanation.

**The Learning Center (TLC):**

Should you require academic assistance with your WKU courses, The Learning Center provides free supplemental education programs for all currently enrolled WKU students. TLC @ Downing Student Union and TLC @ FAC offers certified, one-on-one tutoring in over 200 subjects and eight academic skill areas by appointment or walk in. Online tutoring is offered to distance learners. TLC also has four satellite locations. Each satellite location is a quiet study center and is equipped with a small computer lab. These



satellite locations are located in FAC, Douglas Keen Hall, McCormack Hall, and Pearce Ford Tower. Please contact TLC @ Downing Student Union for more information or to schedule a tutoring appointment.

### **Writing Center:**

*The Writing Center on the Bowling Green campus* will have writing tutors available to offer advice to current WKU students on any stage of their writing projects. In-person tutoring is available in Cherry Hall 123 from 9-4 Monday through Friday and in the Cravens Commons (at the horseshoe-shaped reference desk) from 5-9 on Sunday through Thursday evenings. Students may also request feedback on their writing via email or arrange a real-time Zoom conference to discuss a paper. See instructions and how-to videos on the website ([www.wku.edu/writingcenter](http://www.wku.edu/writingcenter)) for making appointments. Walk-in feedback is available unless we are booked up. Students may also get short writing questions answered via email; just put "Quick question" in the subject line to ([writingcenter@wku.edu](mailto:writingcenter@wku.edu)).

### **Student Disability Services:**

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at [sarc.connect@wku.edu](mailto:sarc.connect@wku.edu). Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

### **WKU Colonnade Program: Essential Learning Outcomes:**

1. Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, including
  - a. An informed acquaintance with major achievements in the arts and the humanities
  - b. An appreciation of the complexity and variety of the world's cultures;
  - c. An understanding of the scientific method and a knowledge of natural science and its relevance in our lives;
  - d. A historical perspective and an understanding of connections between past and present.
2. Intellectual and practical skills, including
  - a. The capacity for critical and logical thinking;
  - b. Proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking;
  - c. The ability to understand and apply mathematical skills and concepts.
3. Personal and social responsibility, including
  - a. An understanding of society and human behavior;
  - b. An understanding of factors that enhance health, well-being, and quality of life.
4. Integrative Learning, including  
Synthesis and advanced accomplishments across general and specialized studies.

### **WKU Colonnade Program: Foundations, Explorations, Connections:**

#### **Arts & Humanities, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Natural & Physical Sciences:**

Explorations courses introduce students to discipline-specific concepts, theories, methodologies, and practices that provide a variety of ways to know and understand the world. From artistic expression to scientific experimentation, students learn how various forms of disciplinary knowledge can be applied to solve problems, to understand social interaction, and to interpret human experience through language and image.

In Arts and Humanities, students analyze concepts, theories, methodologies, and practices from the arts and humanities in order to interpret the human experience through literary, visual, and performing arts. Courses offer opportunities for students to explore cultural expressions and enduring questions about human experience.

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Utilize basic formal elements, techniques, concepts and vocabulary of specific disciplines within the Arts and Humanities.

*This course will introduce students to, and help them to understand and to utilize, the foundational terms, concepts, methods, and other formal elements of the academic study of religion.*

2. Distinguish between various kinds of evidence by identifying reliable sources and valid arguments.

*This course will distinguish between various kinds of evidence by utilizing primary and secondary sources, videos, and newspaper articles to introduce and discuss a variety of the world's religious traditions.*

3. Demonstrate how social, cultural, and historical contexts influence creative expression in the arts and humanities.

*This course will demonstrate how social, cultural, and historical contexts influence religious expression.*

4. Evaluate the significance of human expression and experience in shaping larger social, cultural, and historical contexts.

*This course will evaluate the significance of religious expression and experience in shaping the larger social, cultural, and historical contexts by demonstrating how religious traditions are lived out through ritual, practice, and the development of doctrine in both historical and contemporary periods.*

5. Evaluate enduring and contemporary issues of human experience.

*This course will evaluate enduring and contemporary issues in human experience by demonstrating the way that religious traditions raise and address such issues.*

Sturgeon's law: 90% of everything is crap.