

RELS 102: World Religions
Fall 2023
Prof. TK Waters

Instructor Information

Prof. TK Waters

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Office Hours: By appointment (all times are in CST)

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the academic study of religion, beginning with looking at popular theories and methods of studying religion as well as religious vocabulary. After exploring ways to study religion academically, we will turn our attention to world religious movements and traditions, including indigenous traditions, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Confucianism, and Jainism. We will discuss the history, traditions, and scriptures—including reading excerpts of these scriptures—of these traditions as well as their role in the world and in American popular culture and media today.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able 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.

The U.S. Department of Education requires that distance education courses must include regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty. For more information about Regular and Substantive Interaction at WKU, please visit the [Regular and Substantive Interaction in Online and Distance Learning](#) webpage.

In this course, regular and substantive interaction will take place in the following ways:

- Weekly lecture videos created by the instructor
- Discussion board for students to ask content questions and receive faculty engagement and feedback
- Weekly announcements or e-mails from the instructor

Required Textbooks and Material

- All readings will be supplied by the instructor and/or posted to the Blackboard site.

Grades

Assessment	Percentage
Final Exam	50%
Quizzes	50%

Grading Scale*

Final Grade	Letter Grade
900-1000	A
800-899	B
700-799	C
600-699	D
Below 600	F

*Final grades will not be rounded up automatically. At the instructor's discretion, a student may have their grade rounded up to the next letter grade (for example, an 89.1 to a 90) if they have demonstrated exceptional participation, work ethic, attendance and promptness, etc.

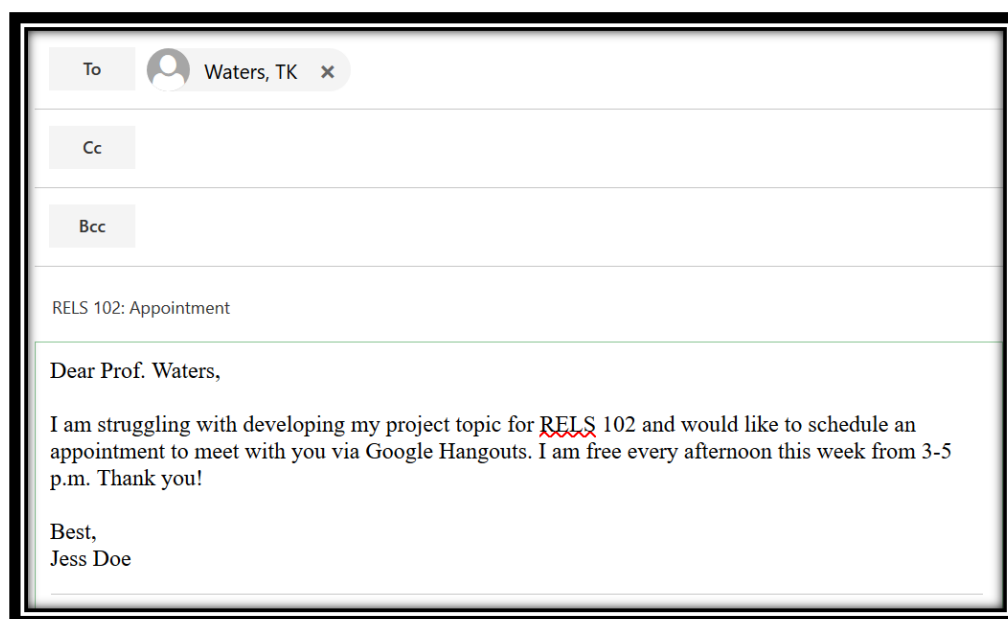
Communication and E-mail Etiquette

Since this is an online course, communication should be frequent between students and the instructor. There are a few ways this will take place in this course. The most reliable way to contact me is through e-mail, which I will check and respond to frequently. I am also happy to set up an individual time to meet with you through Zoom if my office hours do not work for you.

E-mails to the instructor should be properly written. Please use correct grammar and spelling. When addressing the e-mail, please write "Dear Prof. Waters" or "Prof. Waters," not "Hey, Prof. Waters" or "Yo dawg," etc. The subject line of the e-mail must include the course number (RELS 102) and the topic of your inquiry, concern, comment, etc. E-mails are automatically sorted by subject line into a folder for

the course, so only e-mails within that folder will be answered—be sure to use the course number to ensure your e-mail is sorted into the folder for the course. E-mails that request information already explained in the syllabus may not be answered. E-mails will be responded to within 48 hours during the week. Any e-mails sent over the weekend will be responded to as soon as possible on the following Monday. Do not assume the instructor will receive an e-mail before a class, test, or meeting if these guidelines are not followed and 48 hours is not given.

EXAMPLE E-MAIL:



Students should check their university e-mail frequently, as this is the primary way the instructor will communicate with the class and individual students. Students are encouraged to check their e-mail at the beginning of each week, as announcements will typically be added on Monday mornings, and every 24 hours throughout the week. Students are responsible for any changes made to the class schedule, homework assignments, etc. that are explained in e-mails from the instructor. Note that students *must* have access to their university e-mail. Please contact WKU's IT Department (<https://www.wku.edu/its/>) if you are unable to access your TopperMail and/or Blackboard.

Requirements

Technology

Since this is an online course, students must have reliable access to a computer and internet. This course will take place through Blackboard, and final assignments must be submitted in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format, NOT .pages, a Google Doc share, or in the body of the submission text. Blackboard can be accessed through WKU at <http://wku.blackboard.com>. If you do not have Microsoft Word, it is available through WKU's IT department website.

In the event of technology issues that preclude you from submitting an assignment on time, please notify the instructor immediately, including your original submission (if the issue is with a paper, essay, etc.) in your e-mail. You may also contact the [WKU IT department](#) to resolve the issue (<https://www.wku.edu/it/helpdesk/>). It is recommended that you type your essays in a Word document to copy/paste to the Blackboard submission text to avoid Blackboard losing your work due to internet errors.

Homework and Readings

Students are responsible for thoroughly watching and taking notes on assigned short lectures, videos, etc. that will be posted to the [RELS 102 YouTube channel](#) (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4wzjDoXzl9ObXSeGo1XrBw>). For most modules, students will watch a lecture video with background information about the module topic before reading the assigned texts. Each week, students will be reading one or more primary texts from the religious tradition or topic assigned for that week.

Final Exam

There will be a final exam in the course to be taken during finals week. This exam will be available to take on Blackboard and will be open-book and open-note. Since all Colonnade courses must have a written component that is uploaded at the end of the semester to ensure courses are meeting learning objectives and outcomes, the final exam will include a short essay in addition to the multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and other objective questions. Students will have from December 2-7 to take the exam on Blackboard but must finish the exam in one sitting after they start it.

Quizzes

Students will take quizzes through Blackboard most weeks. Quizzes are not intended to be stressful for students—they are meant to review important material, to aid the instructor in ensuring students are understanding the material, to ensure students are keeping up with the readings and videos, and to prepare students for the final exam. Quizzes will typically be 5-10 questions long and composed of multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and multiple answer questions. There will be 11 quizzes throughout the semester and the lowest grade will be dropped.

The answers to quiz questions are immediately released after the quiz has been submitted. For this reason, students cannot retake quizzes. When taking a quiz, be sure to have reliable internet access and take the quiz on a computer (not a smartphone). Additionally, be careful not to refresh the page, close the page, etc.

Discussion Boards

Discussion boards will not be required to earn grades in the course but will be available to facilitate student discussion and engagement. If you have questions, thoughts, concerns, etc. about the module for the week, post in the respective discussion board to start a conversation

with your peers. The instructor will check the discussion boards on Mondays and Thursdays to respond to new student posts about content.

Late Work and Grading

Grades will be updated weekly in the Blackboard grade center. All work will typically be graded within two weeks of the due date but may take up to two weeks. In the event that work cannot be graded within this time frame, the instructor will notify the students as soon as possible.

The syllabus schedule below contains suggested deadlines for quizzes. It is *highly* recommended to keep up with the syllabus schedule to avoid having excessive work at the end of the semester as late work will not be accepted. However, there are two hard due dates by which point that work must be submitted:

- Quizzes 1-11: December 4 at 12 p.m./noon
- Final Exam: December 7 at 12 p.m./noon

Assignments must be turned in by the time and date listed in the syllabus and on Blackboard. Late assignments will not be accepted. Once a zero is entered for a missing assignment, that grade is permanent.

Class Etiquette

We are a learning community which means that in all communication with the class, we should always be respectful to the entire class: the instructor, classmates, and ourselves. Class discussion should be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but should also treat the rest of the class fairly and respectfully with regard to race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Do not use hurtful language, slurs, etc., use gender-inclusive language (i.e. "humankind" instead of "mankind"), and use whatever name and pronouns classmates request. There is a zero-tolerance policy for hate speech of any kind in this class.

Academic Integrity/Dishonesty/Plagiarism Policy

Please refer to <http://www.wku.edu/judicialaffairs/process-for-academic-dishonesty.php> for WKU's full policy on academic dishonesty and plagiarism. In short, no plagiarism or cheating will be permitted in this course and will result in a zero for the assignment and possibly a failing grade in the course. By remaining in the class, students certify that they understand what plagiarism is and will be held accountable for any plagiarism that may occur on their part, whether intentional or accidental.

Students with Disabilities

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. Please do not request accommodations directly from the

professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

Free Services for Students

WKU provides students with many free services to aid in their academic success. Helm and Cravens Libraries offer books for check-out with a WKU ID card and articles and journals that can be accessed online. In addition, WKU provides free tutoring for students in many classes and general study skills at The Learning Center (TLC). TLC is located in the Academic Advising and Retention Center, DSU-2141. TLC provides free tutoring services that empower students to achieve academic success. Trained peer tutors are available to review course content, answer questions, and demonstrate effective study strategies. TLC offers individual appointments and group sessions (PASS) for hundreds of undergraduate courses. For more information or to make an appointment, visit www.wku.edu/tlc. Cherry Hall houses The Writing Center on the first floor (CH 123) where students can get help with academic writing skills, and there is an additional location in the Helm Library Reference Room.

The WKU Center for Literacy is located in Gary A. Ransdell Hall 2066. At the Center for Literacy, students can receive assistance in developing strategies to help reading/studying to learn and writing for evidence and argument. The Center for Literacy offers both individual and small group sessions throughout the semester. More information about the WKU Center for Literacy can be found on the website: <http://www.wku.edu/literacycenter/>

WKU's Counseling Center offers free services for students and can be found in Potter Hall 409. The Counseling Center offers individual counseling, group counseling, and even has a therapy dog. They are there to talk to whether you are suffering from severe mental illness or distress or simply want to talk to someone because your semester is overwhelming.

Non-Confessional Approach to the Course

Non-confessional study of religion is how we study religion in religion courses at secular universities. This does not mean that students have to get rid of their religious beliefs, change them, or have any certain beliefs; it also does not mean that outside of class time and classwork the students cannot study what they are reading or learning confessionally. The point is that in this course we must study religion by focusing on what the texts tell us about the history, culture, beliefs, and so on of these various religious movements and ideas in the past and present using the tools of academic study without imposing our own religious or personal beliefs—whatever they may be—on the material. In this course, students must use non-confessional language in course assignments, including blogs, journal entries, projects, etc. Students will be issued a reminder the first time they do not use non-confessional language in an assignment, then will not be able to earn over half of the possible grade on subsequent assignments where they do not use non-confessional language. For students to get practice on what constitutes non-confessional study of religion, a worksheet will be available and due during the second module of the semester.

Title IX Discrimination, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy

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/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.

Class Schedule

Last Updated 05/05/2023

Weeks are from Monday through Monday for the purposes of this class. All work in lesson modules is due on Mondays at 12:00 p.m./noon CST at the end of the week the module is assigned for, unless otherwise noted. Assignments with hard due dates (i.e. dates by which work must be turned in) are bolded and italicized.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS

- **Lesson 1: Introduction to Religious Studies (August 21-28)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Read syllabus
 - Watch “Introduction to Religious Studies” video
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 1 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 2: Ancient Religious Traditions (August 28-September 5)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Ancient Religious Traditions” video
 - Watch “Zoroastrianism” video
 - Read *Enuma Elish* selections (Mesopotamian)
 - Read Pyramid Texts selections (Egyptian)
 - Read *Theogony* by Hesiod selections: Lines 116-206 (Greek)
 - Read *Metamorphoses* by Ovid selections (Roman)
 - Read *Avesta: Vendidad* selections (Zoroastrian)
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 2 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 3: Indigenous Religious Traditions (September 5-11)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Indigenous Religious Traditions” video
 - Watch “The Sundance Ceremony” video
 - Watch “Pocahontas ‘Savages’” video
 - Watch “Wodaabe, Dance of Warriors” video
 - Watch “Challenge Day – Black Panther (2018)” video
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 3 (50 pts.)

UNIT 2: ABRAHAMIC RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- **Lesson 4: Jewish Religious Traditions (September 11-18)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Judaism: Origins and History” video
 - Watch “Jewish Scriptures” video
 - Read Genesis 1:1-2:4, 49:1-33

- Read Exodus 15:1-21
 - Read 1 Kings 6:1-38
 - Read Daniel 1:1-21
 - Read Babylonian Talmud: Book 1, Chapter 1 selections
- Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 4 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 5: Jewish Religious Traditions in the 21st Century (September 18-25)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Judaism: Living Tradition” video
 - Watch “A God Who Remembers by Elie Wiesel” video
 - Watch “The Jewish Orthodox Community of New York” video selections
 - Watch “Torah Reading” video
 - Watch “Rosh Hashanah Rock Anthem” video
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 5 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 6: Christian Religious Traditions (September 25-29)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Christianity: Origins and History” video
 - Watch “Christian Scriptures” video
 - Read Matthew 5:1-12, 38-42
 - Read Luke 15:8-10
 - Read Nicene Creed
 - Read Apostles’ Creed
 - Read Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book Two, Chapter 4
 - Read Martin Luther’s *95 Theses*
- **Lesson 7: Christian Religious Traditions in the 21st Century (October 4-9)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Christianity: Living Tradition” video
 - Watch “Abbey of Gethsemani Novices” video
 - Watch “What Is Baptism?” video
 - Watch “Pope Francis on the Meaning of Baptism” video
 - Watch “MLK on the Poor People’s Campaign, Nonviolence, and Social Change” video
 - Watch “Ichthus Christian Music Festival 2006 Corporate Promo” video
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 6 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 8: Islamic Religious Traditions (October 9-16)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Islam: Origins and History” video
 - Watch “Islamic Scriptures” video
 - Read Surah 1, al-Fatihah
 - Read Surah 9:1-22, at-Tawbah
 - Read Surah 45, al-Jathiyah

- Read Hadith selections
- Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 7 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 9: Islamic Religious Traditions in the 21st Century (October 16-23)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Islam: Living Tradition” video
 - Watch “Koran by Heart” video selections
 - Watch “American Muslims Travel for Hajj by the Thousands” video
 - Watch “Muslims Start Observing Ramadan with Fasting and Prayer” video
 - Watch “Women Lead Prayer for Men in This California Mosque” video
 - Watch “Muslim Women Talk Hijab” video
 - Read *Ms. Marvel, Vol. 1: No Normal*

UNIT 3: ASIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- **Lesson 10: Hindu Religious Traditions (October 23-30)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Hinduism: Origins and History” video
 - Watch “Hindu Scriptures” video
 - Read Yagurveda, Kanda I, Prapathaka II, The Soma Sacrifice
 - Read Rig Veda 2.1.1.1, Invocation of Agni, and 2.1.1.2, Hymn to the Funeral Fire
 - Watch “Altar of Fire Documentary” video
 - Read Upanishads 2.2.3.1, Indra and the Demons, and 2.3.2.1., The Self
 - Read Bhagavad Gita selections
 - Read Puranas 4.1.1, How Brahma Created the Universe
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 8 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 11: Hindu Religious Traditions in the 21st Century (October 30-November 6)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Hinduism: Living Tradition” video
 - Watch “Diwali – The Festival of Lights” video
 - Watch “Shri Ganesha Temple in Nashville, USA” video
 - Read selections by Mahatma Gandhi
(<https://www.mkgandhi.org/swmgandhi/chap03.htm>)
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 9 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 12: Buddhist Religious Traditions (November 6-13)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Read “[The Origins of Buddhism](#)”
 - Read “[The Buddhist Society: Scriptures & Texts](#)”
 - Read “The First Sermon at Deer Park”
 - Read “Heart Sutra”
 - Read Jataka Tales: “The Future Buddha as a Wise Judge” and “How a Vain Woman Was Reborn as a Dung-Worm”

- Read *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* by D.T. Suzuki, Chapter 2: “What is Zen?”
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 10 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 13: Buddhist Religious Traditions in the 21st Century (November 13-20)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Buddhism: Living Tradition” video
 - Read *Ethics for the New Millennium* by the Dalai Lama, Chapter 2: “No Magic, No Mystery”
 - Watch “Buddhism in America” video
 - Watch “Beastie Boys Bodhisattva Vow” video
 - Watch “‘Open Your Mind’ Scene: Doctor Strange” video
 - Assessments and Activities
 - Complete Quiz 11 (50 pts.)
- **Lesson 14: Sikhism, Jainism, and Other Asian Religious Traditions (November 20-December 4)**
 - Readings and Videos
 - Watch “Sikhism” video
 - Watch “Jainism” video
 - Watch “Chicago Jain Temple” video
 - Read “Asian Religious Traditions” handout
 - Assessments and Activities
 - *All Quizzes Due (500 pts.)*
- **Lesson 15: Finals Week (December 4-7)**

ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 12 P.M./NOON ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

- Assessments and Activities
 - *Complete Final Exam (500 pts.)*

Disclaimer: changes to the schedule and syllabus may be made at the instructor’s discretion. Students will be notified of changes via a Blackboard announcement at least four days in advance. The date above the course schedule will be changed to reflect the last update and the updated syllabus will be posted on Blackboard with an announcement. All course material needed for a module/lesson will be posted to Blackboard by 11:59 a.m. on Monday the week before the module is due.

Important Dates

Classes Begin	August 21
Last Day to Drop/Add	August 28
Fall Break	October 2-3
Thanksgiving Break	November 22-24
Final Examinations	December 4-7
Final Grades Due	Tuesday, December 12 (noon)

Grade Keeper

Assessment	Possible Points	Student Points
Final Exam	500	
Quizzes*	500	
Quiz #1	50	
Quiz #2	50	
Quiz #3	50	
Quiz #4	50	
Quiz #5	50	
Quiz #6	50	
Quiz #7	50	
Quiz #8	50	
Quiz #9	50	
Quiz #10	50	
Quiz #11	50	
Course Total:	1000	

*Note that the lowest quiz grade will be dropped, which will make each quiz worth 40 points.