

COURSE SYLLABUS



Comparative Religions

Course code: REL 140

Semester and year: Fall 2021

Day and time: Wednesdays, 11:30 – 14:15

Instructor: Ted Turnau, Ph.D.

Instructor contact: ted.turnau@aauni.edu, 774-3535-91

Consultation hours: Wednesdays, 14:30 – 15:00 in faculty lounge (4.17).

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Introductory
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	TOEFL iBT 71
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	Bachelor General Education Course

- 1. Course Description** This course investigates what religion is and why it remains so potent a force in the world today. We will examine the definition of a religion and survey the major world religions (African Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), as well as postmodern religious relativism.

This course is designed to introduce you to the world's major religions, as well as to explore some crucial questions about religion: What is religion? How can someone compare religions? Are they all true? Why are people drawn to religion? We will explore these and other questions together through lectures, class discussion, and student panel discussions (see course requirements below).

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- identify what religion is and why it remains so potent a force in the world today,
- define various terms and core beliefs associated with the religions studied,
- understand how these terms integrate into a religious system,
- be able to compare, contrast and evaluate them.

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

- The library has Irving Hexham's *Understanding World Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). You will prepare for each unit by reading a chapter or two from this book. Readings drawn from other sources will be placed on the class website. Please complete the assigned reading before class so that you will be able to participate in discussions. These readings will orient you to what we shall be learning in class. There will also be in-class readings from the sacred texts of various world religions.

Recommended Supplemental Materials (available by request from lecturer)

- Beckerlegge, Gwilym, ed. *The World Religions Reader*, 2d ed. New York: Routledge, 1998, 2001.
- Braswell, George. *Understanding World Religions*, rev. ed. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994.

- Corduan, Winfried. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Lewis, James F., and William G. Travis. *Religious Traditions of the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, ed. *The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought*. Boston, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Co., 1990.
- Schmidt, Roger. *Exploring Religion*, 2d ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988.
- Smart, Ninian, and Richard D. Hecht, eds. *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Smith, Huston. *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.
- Star, Jonathan, ed. *Two Suns Rising: A Collection of Sacred Writings*. New York: Bantam, 1991.
- **Eastern Religions**
- Basham, A. L. *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*. Ed. and annotated by Kenneth G. Zysk. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Embree, Ainslie T., ed. *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning to 1800*, 2d ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Hay, Stephen, ed. *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 2, *Modern India and Pakistan*, 2d ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Schumacher, Stephan, and Gert Woerner, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Hinduism*. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.
- Suzuki, D. T. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove Press, 1964.
- Yoshinori, Takeuchi, ed. *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- **Western Religions**
- Braswell, George W., Jr. *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Noonday Press, 1951.
- John Paul, II. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d. ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 1997.
- Langer, Lawrence L. ed. *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Earl Raab. *Jews and the New American Scene*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

- Mawdūdī, Abul A 'lā. *Human Rights in Islam*. Leicester, U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 1994.
- Milne, Bruce. *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, 2d. ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982, 1998.
- Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke, translator. *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān*. Tripoli: Islamic Call Society, 1930.
- Schirmacher, Christine. *Islam and Politics: Sharia Law, Jihan, Women in Islam*. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008.
- Stott, John R. W. *Basic Christianity*, new rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958, 1971.
- Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*, new ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1963, 1997.

4. Teaching methodology

Lecture (some with PowerPoints) and in-class discussion. I occasionally use film clips and songs to illustrate the ideas and textures of various religions. We will also be analyzing and synthesizing each religion upon completion of each unit. There will also be a student-led panel discussion (see below).

5. Course Schedule

Session	Class Agenda
Sept. 1st	<p>Topic: Introduction: Why and How to Study Religion, and What Is Religion, Anyway?</p> <p>Description: An introduction to the class (syllabus, assignments, etc.), and an introduction to the topic of religion and how we will be approaching it.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham chapters 1-2; Bavinck "Five Magnetic Points," and "The Riddles of Religious Consciousness."</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: see "reading" below.</p>
Sept. 8 th	<p>Topic: African Traditional Religion</p> <p>Description: An overview of the thought and practice of ATR as well as a critical consideration of the terms "primal" or "primitive" religion.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 3-5 (optional: Hexham, ch. 6).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: After completion of each unit, complete the grid and 5 magnetic points (due at the beginning of the next class and used as review).</p>
Sept. 15 th	<p>Topic: The East: Hinduism 1 (Vedic and Vedantic)</p> <p>Description: An overview of the gods, concepts and practices of two "schools" of Hinduism.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 7-8.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Vedic and Vedantic Hinduism.</p>
Sept 22 nd	<p>Topic: Hinduism 2 (Bhakti Hinduism)</p> <p>Description: An overview of Bhakti Hinduism, including the three main schools of Bhakti: Vedic, Vedantic, and Shaktite.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, ch 9 (optional: Hexham, ch. 10).</p>

	<p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Bhakti Hinduism.</p> <p>MID-TERM EXAM pt. 1: covers introduction (definition of religion), ATR, Hinduism (as far as we've covered). If you want to meet with me as a study group prior to the test, let me know.</p>
Sept. 29 th	<p>Topic: Buddhism</p> <p>Description: Introduction to the thought of Siddhatha Gautama, as well as Buddhism's early development and an overview of Theravada.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 11-12 (optional: Hexham, ch. 13).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Therevada and Mahayana.</p>
Oct. 6 th	<p>Topic: Buddhism continued/begin Chinese Traditional Religions</p> <p>Description: Further explorations in Buddhism, including Mahayana, Zen, and Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism. Then we shall begin an overview of basic concepts in Chinese religion (yin, yang, etc.), as well as Confucianism and Daoism.</p> <p>Reading: No reading for today.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Zen, and Vajrayana.</p>
Oct. 13 th	<p>Topic: Finishing Buddhism, Begin Chinese Traditional Religions.</p> <p>Description: Review of types of Buddhism we have just finished, introduction to Chinese Traditional Religion, Confucianism.</p> <p>Reading: No reading.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Any grids and 5 magnetic points we haven't gotten to.</p>
Oct. 20 th	<p>Topic: Finish Chinese Traditional Religions/Begin Judaism.</p> <p>Description: Introduction to Judaism and it's major concepts.</p> <p>Reading: Reading for next class (Hexham 15-17, optional ch. 18).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Confucianism.</p>
Oct. 27 th	<p>Midterm break! Rest well!</p>
Nov. 3 rd	<p>Topic: Judaism cont.</p> <p>Description: An overview of the major concepts, history, practices and varieties of Judaism.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 15-17 (optional: Hexham, ch. 18).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Daoism.</p> <p>Midterm exam part 2: covers Buddhism (all forms), Chinese Traditional Religions, and Judaism (as far as we've covered). If you want to meet with me as a group for a study session, let me know.</p>
Nov. 10 th	<p>Topic: Christianity 1</p> <p>Description: An overview of major concepts drawn from the Christian Bible, as well as the life and ministry of Jesus.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapter 19.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points as review for Judaism.</p>
Nov. 17 th	<p>No class: Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day!</p>
Nov. 24 th	<p>Topic: Christianity 2</p> <p>Description: An overview of the life and ministry of Paul, key concepts of Pauline theology, as well as branches of the Christian church.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 20-21(optional: Hexham, ch. 22).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Christianity.</p>
Dec. 1 st	<p>Topic: Islam</p>

	<p>Description: An overview of the life of Muhammad, the early history of Islam. Key concepts from the Qur'an, aspects of Muslim practice (5 Pillars, etc.), as well as the problem of militant Islam.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapter 23.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Panel discussion 1.</p>
Dec. 8 th	<p>Topic: Islam, continued.</p> <p>Description: Key concepts from the Qur'an, aspects of Muslim practice (5 Pillars, etc.), as well as the problem of militant Islam.</p> <p>Reading: Hexham, chapters 24-25 (optional: Hexham, ch. 26, as well as Schirmacher, "Defection from Islam," and A 'la Mawdudi, "Human Rights in Islam").</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Grid and 5 magnetic points for Islam. Panel discussion 2.</p>
Dec. 15 th	<p>Topic: Postmodern Religious Relativism</p> <p>Description: An exploration of religion in Western pluralistic democracies, and whether one must be relativistic in order to be tolerant.</p> <p>Reading: None.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Panel discussion 3. Study hard for the final!</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (average)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance and Class Participation	42	10%	Attendance, in-class participation (especially as audience during panel discussion) is very important in this class.	1, 2, 3.
Homework (reading, grid, 10 Diagnostic Points)	38	20%	Evaluating and analyzing each religion.	1, 2.
2 Midterm Exams (short essay)	5 each	15% each (30% total)	Demonstrate knowledge of terms associated with each religion, understanding how terms integrate with each religion.	1, 2.
Written Project	30	20%	Comparing, contrasting, and evaluating religions, understanding why a particular religion is still relevant and beneficial in the world today.	1, 2.
Oral project (Panel Discussion)	30	20%	Demonstrate ability to see the world from the perspective of someone with a very different religion and argue from that perspective.	1, 2, 3.
Extra-credit paper	3	2%	Personal reflection regarding the material learned.	1,2.
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Attendance/class participation: *Be in class, ask questions (either in class or on NEO forums), ask questions at panel discussions.*

Assessed area	Percentage
Being in class and participating.	100%
Being present, active, and curious in this class is crucial for understanding the concepts. I know some students are introverted and find asking questions in person intimidating. Students are welcome to ask questions through NEO forum—there will be one for each class. I will answer your questions, and might bring it up in class if you raise a significant point.	
If you miss a class, I will expect you to borrow notes from a classmate and give me a summary on NEO forums. Failure to do so by the next class will count against this part of your grade.	

Homework: Complete readings, and on completion of a unit, fill out the Grid and 5 Magnetic Points sheet.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Reading	Each of these
Complete the Grid	is assessed on
Complete the 5 Magnetic Points	completion only,
	not correctness. Complete = 100%. Incomplete = 0% (or some fraction of 100%).

Oral Project (see document – “Panel Discussion Expectations and Rubric” on NEO): You will be assigned a religion which you are to study throughout the semester. Toward the end of the semester, you will represent that religion in a panel discussion. Note: this is NOT an oral presentation. Rather, you are to *be* a believer from that religion, ready to answer any and every question posed to you by students in the audience...or me.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Preparation/argumentative cogency	30%
Imaginative empathy	30%
Presentation/response/thinking on feet	30%
Sources	10%

Written Project (see document – “Paper Expectations and Rubric” on NEO): In this paper (5 pp., double-spaced, typed), you are to a) describe two religions (including the religion you were assigned for the oral project), b) compare and contrast, noting similarities and differences, and c) evaluate them and answer which you think is “better” (however you choose to define that), and why. You will need to choose, however you frame your choice (in other words, saying “Well, they’re both nice and pretty equal” will not suffice. It is important that you not simply choose and state an opinion, but that you back it up with

argumentation. If you would like feedback before you hand in your final draft, you must give me a *completed* early draft no later than a week before the final (Dec. 7th).

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Preparation	40%
Cogency of arguments	40%
Clarity of written expression	20%

Extra-Credit Paper: For those who wish to pick up a couple extra points (maximum), you may write a paper in which you reflect on your own thinking about religion. Which, if any, comes closest to the truth, and why? What do you think about religious truth? How has this class helped clarify issues, or has it confused them. This paper is to be more personal than the term paper, but feel free to draw upon sources from the class and from the term paper.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Clarity and depth of reflection	100%

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules available in the Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students’ university email address for communication. It is strongly recommended that any email communication between students and instructors take place in NEO LMS.

Each e-mail sent to an instructor that is about a new topic (meaning not a reply to an original email) shall have a new and clearly stated subject and shall have the course code in the subject, for example: “COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question”.

All electronic submissions are carried out through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Attendance

Attendance is required. Students who are absent 35 percent of classes will be failed (or administratively withdrawn from the course if most absences are excused). Students might also be marked absent if they miss a significant part of a class (by arriving late or leaving early) as specified in the syllabus. *For online students who are unable to join live, you may watch the recording and post at least 3 comments and/or questions on NEO forums within 48 hours if you wish to be counted as present.*

Note: My own absence policy is that after two absences (excused or not), the student must give me a short summary of the material he/she missed on NEO forums. The same with the third absence. After the fourth absence, the student must withdraw or fail, regardless of whether those absences were excused or unexcused. Four absences automatically produces a fail.

Further, being more than 15 minutes late will count as half an absence. Being more than a half hour late might count as a full absence. If you leave class half an hour early, that will count as half an absence (or a full absence if you miss more than half the class). Bottom line: you are expected to be in class on time. (These rules might change if we aren't actually in the classroom).

Absence excuse and make-up options

Should the student be absent from a class for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), s/he needs to submit an Absence Excuse Form supplemented with documents proving the reasons for absence to the Assistant Dean. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if they submit an Absence Excuse Form along with the finalized add/drop form. The form and documents must be submitted within one week of absence. If possible, it is recommended to inform the instructor about the absence in advance.

Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean are entitled to make up exams they missed provided that the nature of the exam allows for a make-up. The students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week from the date the absence was excused, and for making arrangements with the instructor about make-up options as necessary.

Unexcused absences

Students are allowed two unexcused absences. Absences above this number may result in failure of the course.

Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

Electronic devices

I do not allow electronic devices in class. You may use electronic devices only during the break. I will provide outlines for written note-taking.

Eating is not allowed during classes.

Cheating and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive or other conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment of an institution of learning, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the activity or for the day and shall report the behavior to the Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating (e.g. whispering or passing notes) will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misbehavior the student will be expelled from the exam and the exam will be marked as failed.

Plagiarism and Academic Tutoring Center

Plagiarism is "the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work." (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Random House, New York, 1993)

Turnitin's White Paper 'The Plagiarism Spectrum' (available at <http://go.turnitin.com/paper/plagiarism-spectrum>) identifies 10 types of plagiarism ordered from most to least severe:

1. CLONE: An act of submitting another's work, word-for-word, as one's own.
2. CTRL-C: A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.

3. FIND-REPLACE: The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. REMIX: An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. RECYCLE: The act of borrowing generously from one's own previous work without citation; To self plagiarize.
6. HYBRID: The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. MASHUP: A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 ERROR: A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources
9. AGGREGATOR: The "Aggregator" includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.
10. RE-TWEET: This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text's original wording and/or structure.

As the minimum policy the types of plagiarism from 1 through 8 results in the failing grade from the assignment and must be reported to the Dean. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Allegations of bought papers and intentional or consistent plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

If unsure about technical aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult their papers with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>.

For a simplified guide to my plagiarism policy, please see the document "Plagiarism in Turnau's classes." PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. If you're in doubt about your citation, please see me.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities are asked to contact their instructor as soon as possible to discuss reasonable accommodation.

9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95 – 100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A-	90 – 94	
B+	87 – 89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83 – 86	
B-	80 – 82	
C+	77 – 79	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73 – 76	
C-	70 – 72	
D+	65 – 69	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60 – 64	
F	0 – 59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by and when: Ted Turnau, June 21st, 2021.

Approved by and when: Andrew Giarelli, June 21, 2021