



Religions of the World

REL 2300 Fall 2026 Session A

Online E-Learning

Gulf Coast State College

Social Science Division

Instructor: Joseph Kyle Stewart (jstewar21@gulfcoast.edu) Office Hours: by appointment via Zoom	Dr. Robert Saunders Division Chair of Social Science Dept. 850-872-3826 rsaunder2@gulfcoast.edu Ms. Jody Walton Senior Administrative Assistant 850-872-3825 jwalton1@gulfcoast.edu
---	--

Course Description

Through readings, discussions, and selected primary materials, including selections from the western canon, this course examines the primitive and the living religions of Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Christianity, noting distinctions and similarities.

REL 2300 requires that students produce extensive college-level writing and complete the course with a minimum grade of "C." (cf., [Florida State Board of Education Rule 6A 10.030](#)).

Prerequisite: ENC1101 with a minimum grade of "C." (Meets Philosophy/Religion Humanities requirement.)

Course Objectives

The course will be divided into four units:

1. What Is Religion and Why Are We Studying It?
2. Family of Eastern Religions
3. Family of Western Religions
4. New Religious Movements & Criticism of Religion

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe several world religions and compare them through the religious studies rubric of creed, code, cultures, and community.
- Analyze the complex interaction between religious belief and the political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual context in which religious people inhabit and enact their faith.
- Identify how scholars have variously defined “religion” and its key components, evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of those definitions, and discuss the methodologies arising from the definitions.
- Demonstrate the ability to read, contextualize, and interpret arguments made by scholars.

In so doing, the course’s main objective is to equip students with a set of tools by which to critically analyze, interpret, and understand religious discourse in both antiquity and the modern world.

Required Texts

- Lewis M. Hopfe, Mark R. Woodward, and Brett Hendrickson, *Religions of the World* (13th ed., Boston, MA: Pearson Publishing, 2016). [ISBN: 9780133793826](#).
- Various other primary sources and scholarly readings will be posted on the course’s website by the instructor.

Course Requirements

Attendance & Participation

Attendance in an online/hybrid Canvas class is defined as the submission of complete written assignments before their posted deadline. ***Failure to do so prior to the September 1st deadline may result in a student receiving either a “No Show” and/or an “F” for their grade.***

Exit Tickets (5% of overall grade)

Students will complete an exit ticket at the end of each module. These exit tickets are designed to provide an opportunity for students to give feedback on that module’s learning content. This will be used for class participation points/attendance.

Reading & Lecture Assignment (15%)

Students are expected to complete and submit an assignment based on that week’s readings and/or lectures. Students will be asked to define “key terms” from the reading and the lecture, and these Lecture Notes are designed to function as a student’s study guide for assessment of learning objectives. ***Late submissions will be accepted with a loss of points as well as any essay response that is under the word count.***

Learning Review Quiz (15%)

There will be a number of assigned quizzes during the term. All quizzes will be

administered in correspondence to that week's religious discussions. The quiz will consist of various multiple-choice, matching, and short-answer questions based on religious vocabulary terms used during that week's readings and lectures. The quizzes will be administered through Canvas. ***Late quizzes are permitted, however, there will be a loss of points off the accumulative grade.***

Module Reflection Essay (15%)

There will be a number of assigned essay reflection questions during the term. All essays will be administered in correspondence to that week's religious discussions. The assignment aims to assess a student's understanding of the key concepts and themes discussed in this week's lecture material. Students will demonstrate their ability to critically analyze the material and formulate a coherent response to two specific questions.

World Religion Project (25%)

Students will be required to create and submit a PowerPoint Presentation (PPT) of at least 10 slides minimum in which you will cover a World Religion which we have not discussed in this course. Students will pick from a pre-set list provided of World Religions to cover, and within the PPT, a student will need to cover five topics. The student's PPT must also be accompanied by a recorded media file in which the student presents their topic and must be at least 15 minutes long. This project is in line with [Florida State Board of Education Rul 6A 10.030](#).

Exams (25%)

There will be a midterm and a final exam administered during the course in order to assess a student's comprehension of basic methodological principles and materials covered in class. The exam will consist of various multiple-choice, matching, short-answer, and essay responses. Students will be able to use a study guide for each exam.

All exams will be administered online and will be conducted through Respondus Lockdown Browser proctoring services. For an optimum proctoring environment, Respondus requires that students have a working web camera, do not use an iPad, and have access to a photo ID prior to testing. Students will also be required to download the necessary program as instructed prior to testing. Any student who has any issue with these requirements must contact the instructor well in advance of their testing in order to arrange for alternative testing.

Students may also choose to take their examination at the Testing Center at Gulf Coast State College. To do this, you will need to make an appointment with the Testing Center at this [link provided](#). ***You must register your appointment 72 hours in advance of your desired testing date and time.*** For questions, call 850-873-3594 or you may email them at testingcenter@gulfcoast.edu.

While make-up exams are permitted for the midterm exam, with a reduction of points off the final grade. No make-up exam will be given for the final exam.

Course and Social Science Department Policies

Class Disturbances

This class covers material about which many students may have strong convictions and opinions. All lectures or course materials are not designed to attack or belittle a particular religion, nor are they advocating for one belief system over another. Therefore, in order for this class to be successful, it is essential that everyone show respect for the instructor and their classmates.

Recording Lectures

Under federal and state privacy laws, students may record class lectures for their personal educational use, in connection with a complaint to the college, or as evidence in internal or external legal proceedings. Students may not publish or upload the recordings or any components thereof without the knowledge and written permission of the faculty member. Failure to obtain permission to publish could lead to the student(s) paying damages, attorney fees, and court costs. For more information about what can be recorded, please see the guidelines in the GCSC Student Handbook:

<https://www.gulfcoast.edu/current-students/student-handbooks/2021-2022-student-handbook.pdf>

Instructor Communication

The instructor will check daily and respond to messages sent to their gulfcoast.edu email account and/or their Canvas Inbox account, barring illnesses or emergencies. All communications must go through those two means of communication. A Canvas Announcement will be posted if communications may be delayed due to special circumstances. The instructor may not check emails during holidays.

Missed Quizzes Assignments, or Exams

If there is a medical or family emergency, official university activity, or religious holiday that requires you to miss a quiz(zes) and/or assignment(s), you must notify the instructor in advance if at all possible and provide appropriate written documentation of the excuse.

If you miss a quiz/assignment/exam without prior permission from the instructor and without an excuse, a late assessments will be penalized, unless acceptable documentation (medical emergencies, religious holidays, official university activities, or something similar) is submitted.

Students are not permitted to email the professor the late submissions unless instructed otherwise. You will need to email the professor to have them reopen the assessment. A new timetable will be given for you to submit the assessment with late points deducted. If you fail to submit your assignment with the new timetable, no further extension will be granted and you will receive a zero unless a family or medical emergency arises.

All assignments and quizzes must be completed by Thursday, December 10th at 11:59pm. There are no exceptions following the posted date and time as grades will be turned in the following day.

Grades Submission

All grades will be turned in to the College and finalized by Friday, December 11th at 12:00pm CST. There will be no exceptions.

Withdrawals and Incompletes

A student may withdraw from any course until the published withdrawal deadline date for that term, see the [Academic Calendar](#) for those deadlines. A student wishing to withdraw from a course and receive a “W” must complete a [withdrawal form](#) and submit the document to the Office of Enrollment Services prior to the scheduled withdrawal date. However, if a student feels as if they have a unique situation that warrants removal after the withdrawal deadline has passed, they may contact their Academic Advisor to discuss their situation.

Two withdrawals are permitted per credit course. After that, a grade will be assigned. Please be concerned about withdrawals. When admitting students into certain programs, universities may calculate withdrawals as grades. ***It is your responsibility to verify the effects of enrollment and/or withdrawal upon your financial assistance (financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc.).***

Incomplete grade in any Social Sciences course can only be assigned to students who have an emergency arise during the last two weeks of the course. To receive an Incomplete, students must: (1) Submit a written request to the instructor before the last face-to-face class meeting. For online courses, a written Incomplete request must be received no later than the week before the Final Exam period begins. (2) Have completed no less than 60 percent of the course requirements and be passing the course at the time the request for an Incomplete is submitted. The Incomplete option provides 30 days from the date grades are due to make up any missing work; if work is not submitted during this period, the grade will automatically change to an “F.”

Course Website & Computer

A student must have a Gulf Coast email account and have access to the course’s Canvas page. All grades will be posted on this site and all class emails and announcements will be made through this site. Any copyrighted materials are for class use only and must not be distributed. You are responsible for all information and material posted on this site.

In addition, ***all students must have complete access to a working computer and the internet throughout the entire course period.*** If access to a computer or the internet becomes an issue during the semester, you must contact the instructor immediately.

Grading Scale

The grading scale used in this class is as follows:

- A 90-100**
- B 80-89**
- C 70-79**
- D 60-69**
- F 59 and below**

If your Canvas final grade percentage is one point away from an A, B, or C, the professor will round it up by one point when submitting grades (so, if you are at 89.1%, or 79.1, I will round it up).

If you have a question regarding a grade, you must meet with the instructor within one week after the work in question is graded. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

Tutoring Services

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Gulf Coast State College. For our course, the Writing and Reading Lab offers free tutoring services and will provide any student with assistance in reading, grammar, essay development, and/or formatting. For more information, visit the Writing and Reading lab that is located in the Rosenwald Classroom Building, Rooms 108, or visit their website at <https://www.gulfcoast.edu/campus-life/tutoring.html> for more information. Please, do take advantage of these services!

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Integrity statement that is published in the Gulf Coast State College's [General Catalog](#) and the [Student Handbook](#).

Honest participation in any academic endeavor fosters an environment in which optimal learning can take place and is consistent with the college's mission. Academic misconduct, including cheating or plagiarism, is destructive to the spirit of an educational environment. It is the duty of the instructor to report every instance of student academic misconduct to the college as part of the permanent academic record.

- Cheating includes, but is not limited to, the use of any unauthorized assistance in completing course work.
- Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment.
- Self-plagiarism occurs when a student submits the same or considerably similar document to fulfill requirements in different classes. For example, if a student submits a term paper in Religion that they originally wrote for an English class, this constitutes self-plagiarism. Once a paper receives a grade in any course, it must not be submitted again for another class.

- Plagiarism also includes submitting work written by a Large Language Model (LLM) like ChatGPT, Google Bard, WriteSonic, and other marketed AI platforms.

Sanctions for incidences of academic misconduct, depending on the severity of the incidence and/or its repetition, range from receiving an F grade (or 0) for the test, assignment, or activity, to failure of the course, to suspension or dismissal from the college.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) Policy

Limited Assistive Use Only: Students may use basic assistive technologies for spelling, grammar, and formatting (e.g., PaperRater or SpellCheckPlus); however, the use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft CoPilot, Google Gemini, etc.) for generating, rewriting, or enhancing content is not permitted. All work must reflect the student's original ideas and writing. Representing work created by A.I. as one's own is a violation of academic integrity and may result in penalties, including a zero on the assignment and additional disciplinary actions as outlined in the college's academic integrity policy.

See the [GCSC Student Handbook](#) for further information. Students with questions about acceptable use should consult their instructor.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities needing academic or testing accommodation should: (1) contact, register with, and provide subsequent documentation to [Student Accessibility Resources](#); (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. ***This should be done during the first week of class.*** For more information about services available to Gulf Coast State students with any disabilities, contact the:

Student Accessibility Resources
Panama City Campus, Student Union East, Rm. 60
Phone: (850) 747-3243 or Fax: (850) 767-8034
Email: sar@gulfcoast.edu

This syllabus and any other class materials can be made available in an alternative format upon request.

Weather Policy

The campus is susceptible to weather-related events that range from thunderstorms, flash flooding, tornadoes, and hurricanes. If these weather events escalate to the point of an emergency, Gulf Coast State College will notify you with instructions using various methods detailed on the [Campus Safety](#) webpage. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and register for these services.

If the campus is closed due to severe weather conditions, students are not required to attend class and are encouraged to stay home. Notification will be provided by the instructor and subsequent changes to the course will be addressed. If the weather is

severe in your area(s) but the campus is still open, a student is not required to attempt to come to class. Students are, however, still responsible for notifying the instructor of their situation and are accountable for any material covered in class that day or that has been previously assigned by the syllabus.

For online students, you are expected to notify the instructor of any technical difficulties that you experience that are weather related which prevented you from completing an assignment. You are expected to notify the instructor no later than a full 24-hour period of your circumstance.

Course Disclaimer

The instructor holds the right to change any aspect of the syllabus – course requirements, course assignments, course policies, course schedule, etc. – as is needed. Students must be given ample time and proper notification of any changes made to the course, by the instructor, that will be in effect. Notices will come in the form of classroom announcements, email notifications, and an updated syllabus that will be posted to the course’s website.

Critical Dates – Fall 2026

Date	Event
Monday, August 17	Fall Session A & B starts
Friday, August 21	Add/Drop period for Fall Session A & B ends
Monday, September 7	Labor Day – No Classes
Tuesday, September 1	Attendance Verification for Fall Session A & B
Thursday, September 10	Midterms for Fall Session B
Thursday, September 17	Deadline for student-initiated withdrawals – B
Monday, September 28	Graduation Application Deadline
Wednesday, October 7	Midterms for Fall Session A
Friday, October 9	Grades Due for Fall Session B
Monday, October 12	Fall Session C starts
Tuesday, October 13	Add/Drop period for Fall Session C ends
Wednesday, October 15	Deadline for student-initiated withdrawals – A
Tuesday, October 27	Attendance Verification for Fall Session C
Friday, November 6	Midterms for Fall Session C
Friday, November 13	Deadline for student-initiated withdrawals – C
Wednesday, November 25 – Friday, November 27	Thanksgiving Break

Friday, December 4 – Thursday, December 10	Final Exam Week for Fall Session A & C
Friday, December 11	Grades Due for Fall Session A & C

REL 2300 Course Schedule: Fall 2026_Session A_Online

Date	Lecture Topic	Assignments
Week 1 = 8/17 – 8/23	Welcome Message & Intro to the Course Lecture 1: Why Study Religion?	Read Course Syllabus, Schedule & Paper prompt materials Aamir Hussain, “How Religious Literacy Can Save Lives,” <i>Religion News Service</i> (PDF) William Graham, “Why Study Religion in the Twenty-first Century?” <i>Harvard Divinity Bulletin</i> (PDF) Course Survey due (8/21) Reading & Lecture 1 due (8/23) Weekly Review 1 due (8/23) Reflection Essay 2 due (8/23) Exit Ticket 1 (8/23)
Week 2 = 8/24 – 8/30	Lecture 2: What is Religion? Lecture 3: What Scholarship has said about Religion?	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 2-8 <i>Religions of the World</i> , 12-20 Reading & Lecture 2 due (8/30) Quiz Review 2 due (8/30) Reflection Essay 2 due (8/30) Exit Ticket 2 (8/30)
Week 3 = 8/31 – 9/06	Lecture 4: Survey of Hinduism, part 1	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 53-55; 58-69

	Lecture 5: Survey of Hinduism, part 2	<i>Religions of the World, 70-85</i> Religious Readings on Hinduism Weekly Review 3 due (9/06) Reflection Essay 2 due (9/06) Reading & Lecture 3 due (9/06) Exit Ticket 3 (9/06)
--	---------------------------------------	---

<p>Week 4 = 9/07 – 9/13</p>	<p>Lecture 6: Survey of Sikhism, part 1</p> <p>Lecture 7: Survey of Sikhism, part 2</p>	<p><i>Religions of the World</i>, 122-128</p> <p>Religious Readings on Jainism & Sikhism</p> <p>Weekly Review 4 due (9/13) Reflection Essay 4 due (9/13) Reading & Lecture 4 due (9/13) Exit Ticket 4 (9/13)</p>
<p>Week 5 = 9/14 – 9/20</p>	<p>Lecture 8: Survey of Buddhism, part 1</p> <p>Lecture 9: Survey of Buddhism, part 2</p>	<p><i>Religions of the World</i>, 55; 100-106</p> <p><i>Religions of the World</i>, 106-117</p> <p>Religious Readings on Buddhism</p> <p>Weekly Review 5 due (9/20) Reflection Essay 5 due (9/20) Reading & Lecture 5 due (9/20) Exit Ticket 5 (9/20)</p>
<p>Week 6 = 9/21 – 9/27</p>	<p>Lecture 10: Survey of Confucianism, part 1</p> <p>Lecture 11: Survey of Confucianism, part 2</p>	<p><i>Religions of the World</i>, 131-133; 146-155</p> <p>Religious Readings on Confucianism</p>

		Weekly Review 6 due (9/27) Reflection Essay due (9/27) Reading & Lecture 6 due (9/27) Exit Ticket 6 (9/27)
Week 7 = 9/28 - 10/04	Lecture 12: Survey of Daoism, part 1 Lecture 13: Survey of Daoism, part 2	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 131-133; 160-161 <i>Religions of the World</i> , 134-146 Religious Readings on Daoism Weekly Review 7 due (10/04) Reflection Essay 7 due (10/04) Reading & Lecture 7 due (10/04) Exit Ticket 7 due (10/04)
Week 8 = 10/05 - 10/11	Midterm Exam Week	Exam will be conducted with Respondus Lockdown Browser on Canvas due (10/11) For Testing Center, make appointments online
Week 9 = 10/12 - 10/18	Lecture 14: Survey of African Indigenous Religious, part 1	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 10-11; 38-49

	Lecture 15: Survey of African Indigenous Religious, part 2	Religious Readings on the Yoruba Religion Weekly Review 9 due (10/18) Reflection Essay 9 due (10/18) Reading & Lecture 9 due (10/18) Exit Ticket 9 due (10/18)
Week 10 = 10/19 – 10/25	Lecture 16: Survey of Judaism, part 1 Lecture 17: Survey of Judaism, part 2	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 173-176; 179-186 <i>Religions of the World</i> , 186-198 Religious Readings on Judaism Weekly Review 10 due (10/25) Reading & Lecture 10 due (10/25) Reflection Essay 10 due (10/25) Exit Ticket 10 due (10/25)
Week 11 = 10/26 – 11/01	Lecture 18: Survey of Christianity, part 1 Lecture 19: Survey of Christianity, part 2	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 203-220 <i>Religions of the World</i> , 221-231 Religious Reading on Christianity Weekly Review 12 due (11/01)

		Reading & Lecture 12 due (11/01) Reflection Essay 12 due (11/01) Exit Ticket 12 due (11/01)
Week 12 = 11/02 – 11/08	Lecture 20: Survey of Islam, part 1 Lecture 21: Survey of Islam, part 2	<i>Religions of the World</i> , 238-251 <i>Religions of the World</i> , 251-260 Religious Readings on Islam Weekly Review 13 due (11/08) Reading & Lecture 13 due (11/08) Reflection Essay 13 due (11/08) Exit Ticket 13 due (11/08)
Week 13 = 11/09 – 11/15	Lecture 22: Survey of New Religious Movements – Religious Cult_Jonestown, part 2 Lecture 23: Survey of New Religious Movements – Religious Cult_Jonestown, part 2	JZ Smith, “The Devil in Mr. Jones,” pdf (read only pages 105-112) Religious Readings on Jonestown Weekly Review 14 due (11/15) Reading & Lecture 14 due (11/15) Reflection Essay 14 due (11/15) Exit Ticket 14 due (11/15)

<p>Week 14 = 11/16 - 11/22</p>	<p>Lecture 24: Survey of New Religious Movements – Parody Religions, part 1</p> <p>Lecture 25: Survey of New Religious Movements – Parody Religions, part 2</p>	<p>Religion Readings on Parody Religions</p> <p>Weekly Review 15 due (11/23) Reading & Lecture 15 due (11/23) Reflection Essay 15 due (11/23) Exit Ticket 15 due (11/23)</p>
<p>Week 15 = 11/23 - 11/29</p>	<p>Thanksgiving Break</p>	<p>No Classes; No Assignments</p>
<p>Week 16 = 11/30 - 12/06</p>	<p>Lecture 26: Atheism & Criticism of Religion</p>	<p>Julian Baggini, <i>Atheism</i>, 91-107 (PDF)</p> <p>Religion Readings on Critics of Religion</p> <p>Weekly Review 16 due (12/06) Reading & Lecture 16 due (12/06) Reflection Essay 16 due (12/06) Exit Ticket 16 due (12/06)</p>
<p>Week 17: 12/07 - 12/11</p>	<p>Final Exam & Final Project Week</p>	<p>Exam will be conducted with Respondus Lockdown Browser on Canvas due (12/11)</p> <p>For Testing Center, make appointments online</p>