



# Course Syllabus

## Introduction to Religion in America

REL 2300/ CRN: 83604/ Fall 2026

A Session (8/17/26 – 12/10/26)

Credit Hours: 3

Mondays & Wednesdays: 2:00pm – 3:15pm

Pre-requisites: None

Classroom SS 102

## Contact Information

### Instructor

Jennifer Linn Hamilton  
Associate Professor  
[jhamilton@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:jhamilton@gulfcoast.edu)  
850-769-1551, ext. 5850

Office: Social Sciences 216  
Office Hours: 9 am to 11 am Monday, Wednesday, Friday; 11 am to 12:30 pm Tuesday and Thursday; 1 pm to 2 pm Tuesday.

Response Time: 48 hours

### Division Chair

Robert Saunders, Jr., PhD.  
Professor and Chair  
[rsaunder2@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:rsaunder2@gulfcoast.edu)  
850-872-3826

### Division Administrative Assistant

Ms. Jody Walton  
Senior Administrative Assistant  
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## Course Information

### Important Note

For any syllabus posted prior to the beginning of the term, the instructor reserves the right to make minor changes prior to or during the term. The instructor will notify students via e-mail or Canvas announcement when changes are made in the requirements and/or grading of the course.

### Catalog Description:

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

### Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- 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, evaluate 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.

### Course Perspectives and Goals

Religion has been one of the most powerful forces in human history. Religious beliefs, practices, communities, and institutions have shaped cultures, inspired artistic and intellectual achievements, motivated social reform, justified political authority, and influenced the daily lives of billions of people. To understand the modern world and the civilizations that preceded it, one must understand the religious traditions that have informed human thought and action across time and place.

This course approaches religion as an academic subject of study rather than as an exercise in devotion, apologetics, or criticism. Drawing upon historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary methods, students will examine a variety of religious traditions, including Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and

Islam. Using the framework of creed, code, cultus, and community, students will explore how religions answer fundamental human questions concerning meaning, morality, suffering, identity, and transcendence.

Using Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward's *Religions of the World* alongside selected primary sources, including selections from the Western canon, students will investigate both the internal beliefs and practices of religious communities and the broader social, political, economic, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which religions develop and evolve. Particular attention will be given to the ways religious traditions respond to historical change while maintaining continuity with their foundational teachings.

By the end of the course, students should be able to describe and compare major religious traditions, critically evaluate scholarly definitions of religion, analyze the interaction between religion and culture, and engage thoughtfully with academic arguments about religion. Through extensive college-level reading and writing, students will develop the skills necessary to interpret religious texts, contextualize scholarly claims, and better understand the diverse religious landscape of both the past and the present.

#### Course Materials & Resources:

The required textbook for the course is **Religions of the World - REL2300** Hopfe/Woodward ISBN: 9780133793826 Copyright: 16 Publisher: REL2300 Edition: 13 Binding: PAPERBACK

*Religions of the World* provides a balanced and comparative introduction to the major religious traditions of the world. Combining historical context, religious beliefs, ethical teachings, rituals, sacred texts, and contemporary practices, the text examines both ancient and living religious traditions, including Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions. Emphasizing the academic study of religion, the authors encourage students to understand each tradition on its own terms while also exploring the similarities, differences, and interactions among religious communities across cultures and throughout history. The text's comparative approach helps students develop a deeper understanding of religion as a dynamic force shaping human societies, values, and worldviews.

#### Delivery Method:

This is a face-to-face course. It is important to attend class consistently in order to engage with the course materials with your classmates and your professor. Discussion of materials is integral to deep understanding. Doing well on assignments, like examinations and even your research paper, demands your presence and attention in class.

### Attendance and Make-Up Policies for this Course

### Attendance Policy:

I call roll at the beginning of each class, if you are late, please come see me immediately after class in order to be recorded as present. Your participation grade is partly drawn from your attendance record. If you cannot make it to class, feel free to send me a message through Canvas. You can discuss missed materials with me during my regularly scheduled office hours or by appointment.

### Make-Up Work Policy:

Make-ups for missed examinations must be completed within one week of the examination. I accept late work with a 2-point deduction for every day late.

## AI Policy for this Course

### 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, Copilot, Grammarly's AI function, 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 AI 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.*

## Student Expectations

Communication and feedback within the course will occur through various channels, including GCSC email, Canvas Inbox, Canvas Announcements, Canvas Discussions, Microsoft Teams or Zoom, assignment feedback, and/or instructor office hours.

Additionally, as a student at Gulf Coast State College, you are expected to:

- **Adhere to Course Guidelines:** Follow the instructions within the course syllabus along with any additional instructions provided by the instructor. Be certain you understand the course objectives, grading criteria, and academic policies.
- **Maintain Regular Contact:** Keep in touch with your instructor via your GCSC email or other designated communication channels. Regular contact helps clarify doubts, share ideas, and foster a collaborative learning environment.
- **Active Participation:** Engage actively in the course and submit assignments on time. Your active participation is crucial for your academic success and contributes to a deeper learning experience.

As your instructor, my commitment to you is to:

- **Provide Timely Feedback:** I will review and provide feedback on your assignments and submissions promptly. My goal is to help you understand your strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Respond Via Canvas Inbox:** I will respond to your emails or messages within 48 hours (excluding weekends) unless otherwise noted. I understand the importance of clear and timely communication in addressing your questions and concerns.
- **Post Regular Announcements:** Announcements will be posted to keep you updated and help you manage your time. These reminders will include important dates, upcoming assignments, and any changes to the course schedule.
- **Maintain Weekly Office Hours:** I will maintain regular weekly office hours, but I can also be available by appointment. This is to ensure I'm available for any questions or concerns that may come up during the week.

### Course Requirements:

Students enrolled in this course will be required to:

1. Attend lectures, participate in discussions, and complete assigned readings in a timely manner. The most significant readings that we will do are the selections from sacred literature that I will post on Canvas.
2. Take and pass four essay exams: three in-term exams and one cumulative final examination. The final exam will lean heavily on the course material learned from the last quarter's materials and include one comprehensive essay question. The exams will cover lecture notes, our discussions, any assigned readings, or films/videos. Examinations will be short-answer and essay. You will need to purchase four blue books from the college bookstore – one for each examination.
3. **Research Paper Assignment – Intro to World Religions** This paper gives you the opportunity to explore a topic in world religions in depth, applying skills in research, analysis, and interpretation. You will use both primary and secondary sources to build a clear, evidence-based argument.

## Assignments/Assessment Instruments

### I. Exams

- The four exams will be comprised of short answers, identifications, and essays.
- The exams will be delivered face-to-face in our classroom.
- The exams require blue books, purchased in the college book store, and blue or black ink pens.

**Three in term examinations comprise 45% of your overall grade.**

**The comprehensive final exam comprises 20% of your overall grade.**

## II. Participation

Students are expected to be in class ready to participate in conversations about the class material. It is often helpful to bring your own question or point with you in written form.

In addition to oral discussion, there will be a discussion board on Canvas related to our primary source readings – sacred texts of the various World Religions. You will be required to read a selection of sacred literature and respond to my prompts, but feel free to pose questions of your own.

**These small assessments count as your participation grade, comprising 10% of your overall grade.**

## III. Research Paper

**Research Paper Assignment – Intro to World Religions** This paper gives you the opportunity to explore a topic in world religions in depth, applying skills in research, analysis, and interpretation. You will use both primary and secondary sources to build a clear, evidence-based argument.

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### Choose One Prompt

- 1. Comparative Sacred Texts**  
Compare the role of sacred texts in two world religions included in this course. How does each tradition view the origin and authority of its scriptures, and how are these texts used in worship, moral teaching, and community identity?
- 2. Religion and Social Change**  
Examine a historical period or movement in which a religion significantly influenced political or social change. What beliefs, leaders, and practices shaped this impact, and what were the long-term effects on the society involved?
- 3. Pilgrimage and Sacred Space**  
Investigate the concept of pilgrimage in one world religion. How do sacred journeys and locations reflect the beliefs, values, and communal identity of that tradition? What challenges or transformations occur for participants?
- 4. Religion in the Modern World**  
Select one world religion and explore how it has responded to a modern issue such as technology, globalization, environmentalism, or human rights. How have traditional teachings been reinterpreted or reinforced?

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### Requirements

- Length: **5–6 pages**, double-spaced, 12-point font
- Sources: **At least 5 total sources**
  - **2 primary sources** (e.g., sacred texts, historical documents, religious art, speeches, liturgies)

- **3 scholarly secondary sources** (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reputable online databases)
- Citation Style: **Chicago** Notes/Bib style
- Use evidence to support claims and provide proper context for all quoted or paraphrased material.

## Research Paper Milestones – Intro to World Religions

### Week 4 – Topic Proposal (10 points)

Submit a 150- to 200-word description of your chosen topic and research question. Include a preliminary thesis statement and a brief explanation of why this topic matters within the study of world religions.

### Week 7 – Annotated Bibliography (15 points)

List at least 5 sources you plan to use, including **2 primary** and **3 scholarly secondary** sources. Each annotation should be 3–5 sentences summarizing the source’s content and explaining its relevance to your research.

### Week 10 – Detailed Outline (10 points)

Submit an outline showing your thesis statement, major sections, and supporting evidence you plan to use. Include references to your sources where they will be integrated

### Week 14 – Final Paper (65 points)

5–6 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, with proper Chicago citations. This is graded using the **Final Paper Rubric** (worth 65 points).

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### Total: 100 points

- Process Milestones: 35 points (proposal, bibliography, outline)
- Final Paper: 65 points (graded via rubric)

**The Research Paper project comprises 25% of your overall grade.**

## Course Schedule

Part 1: Introduction to the Study of Religion. Religions Originating in the Americas and Africa.

Textbook chapters 1-3

**Research Paper Topic Proposal Due by September 14**

**Test 1 – September 16**

Part II: Religions Originating in India

Textbook chapters 4-7

**Research Paper Annotated Bibliography Due by October 5**

**Test 2 – October 19**

Part III: Religions Originating in China and Japan

Textbook chapters 8-9

Research Paper Outline Due by October 26

**Test 3 – November 4**

Part IV: Religions Originating in the Middle East.

Textbook chapters 10-13

Complete Research Paper Due by November 21

**Final Examination TBA**

## Grading

### Grading Scale

All grades will be posted in the student grade book in Canvas and will be assigned according to the following scale:

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

### Incomplete Grades

Grades of Incomplete in any 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:

- Submit a written request to the instructor prior to 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.
- Have completed no less than sixty percent of the course requirements and be passing the course at the time the request for an Incomplete is submitted.

**Important Note:** The Incomplete option provides 30 days from the date grades are due to make up any missing work; if all remaining work is not submitted during this period, the grade will automatically change to an "F."

## General GCSC Course Policies

### Accessibility Statement

Gulf Coast State College supports an inclusive learning environment for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that hinder your full participation, reasonable accommodations can be arranged. Prior to receiving accommodations, you must register with

Student Accessibility Resources. Appropriate academic accommodations will be determined based on the documented needs of the student. Please visit [GCSC's Student Accessibility Resource \(SAR\) webpage](#) to learn more. For information regarding the registration process, email [sar@gulfcoast.edu](mailto:sar@gulfcoast.edu) or call 850-747-3243.

## GCSC Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance and participation are significant factors that help to promote success in college. Students are expected to attend all class meetings of all courses for which they are registered.

You are expected to know the instructor's specific attendance policy as stated in the syllabus for each course. In the event of absence, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible to indicate the reason and to inquire whether make-up work is possible. (Make-up work is offered solely at the discretion of your professor.)

If your absences in a class become excessive, as stated in the course syllabus, your professor can withdraw you from a course for excessive absences without your permission.

Instructors will monitor attendance at the beginning of each semester. If you are not in attendance during this period, you may be withdrawn from the course. You will be financially responsible for the course, and a "W or NS" will appear on your transcript. Withdrawal from a course may also have implications for financial aid.

## Withdrawal Policy

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.). There are two kinds of withdrawals---student and administrative.

- **Student Withdrawal (W1)** - Students wishing to withdraw must complete the online Student Withdrawal Form before the scheduled withdrawal deadline as published in the College catalog. Student withdrawals initiated prior to the scheduled withdrawal deadline will be recorded as a grade of "W." The withdrawal deadline for an off-term or condensed term is one week after midterm.
- **Administrative Withdrawal (W2)** – A faculty member may withdraw a student up to the published withdrawal deadline for violation of the class attendance policy, in which case the student will receive a grade of "W." The withdrawal deadline for an off-term or condensed term is one week after midterm.

Students cannot withdraw from developmental studies courses (college-preparatory classes) after the drop/add period without written permission from their instructor and/or their academic advisor.

## Academic Integrity

Honest participation in academic endeavors 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. GCSC professors report every instance of student academic misconduct to the college for inclusion in the student's records.

Most course syllabi include an academic honesty policy and the consequences for violating this policy. Familiarize yourself with course policies regarding authorized or unauthorized use of AI to avoid the pitfalls of academic dishonesty.

The following definitions will apply:

"Cheating" includes but is not limited to the use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; the acquisition without permission of tests or other academic materials belonging to a member of the College's faculty.

"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, as well as the purchase of papers or projects. It can also include overuse of an editing program like Grammarly or submitting work written by an Artificial Intelligence (AI) generator like ChatGPT. Make certain to consult your course syllabi for your instructor's guidelines on AI material.

"Self-plagiarism" occurs when a student submits the same or a 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 is self-plagiarism. Once a paper receives a grade in one class, it cannot be submitted again for another class.

"Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)" is technology that uses machine learning to create new content, such as text, images, or code, based on user input. These systems are trained on vast amounts of data, including large language models and image or code generators. Common examples include ChatGPT, GitHub, Copilot, Google Gemini, Perplexity, and the Grammarly AI function.

Sanctions for incidents of academic misconduct, depending on the severity of the incident and/or its repetition, may 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.

## Classroom Recording

In accordance with federal and state privacy laws, students may record class lectures for their own 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 students having to pay damages, attorney fees, and court costs. For more information about what can be recorded, please see the guidelines in the GCSC Student Handbook.

## Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

The use of generative AI tools in academic work requires clear guidelines to maintain academic integrity. Please review the policy selected for this course regarding the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Grammarly's AI features, and similar platforms for assignments, research, and other coursework.

See the student handbook for further information. Students with questions about acceptable use should consult their instructor.

## Anti-Discrimination Policy

Gulf Coast State College does not discriminate against any person in its programs, activities, policies, or procedures on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, marital status, religion, age, gender, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, disability, or veteran status.

All questions or inquiries regarding compliance with laws relating to non-discrimination and all complaints regarding sexual misconduct or discrimination may be directed to Amanda Reed, Executive Director of Human Resources/Title II/504/Title IX Coordinator and Employment Equity Officer, Gulf Coast State College, 5230 W. US Highway 98, Panama City, FL 32401; 850-769-1551, ext. 3516. Rules, policies, fees, and courses described in this catalog are subject to change without notice.

## Student Support Resources

Gulf Coast State College is committed to providing you with the resources you need for success as a student and beyond. View all the [academic and student support resources](#) provided at GCSC on the [Student Services web page](#).

## Course Technology & Support

To successfully participate in this online course, students must have basic computer and digital information literacy skills and meet the following technology requirements:

- Computer: Up-to-date web browser that supports the Canvas learning management system; please refer to the system requirements for compatibility and information on using the Canvas app on mobile devices.
- Internet Speed: Minimum bandwidth of 8 Mbps upload/download speed to effectively engage in online activities and access multimedia.
- Office 365 software: Available for free download through GCSC Information Technology Services (ITS).
- If you need technical support, contact the ITS Help Desk, available 24/7 at (850) 913-3303.