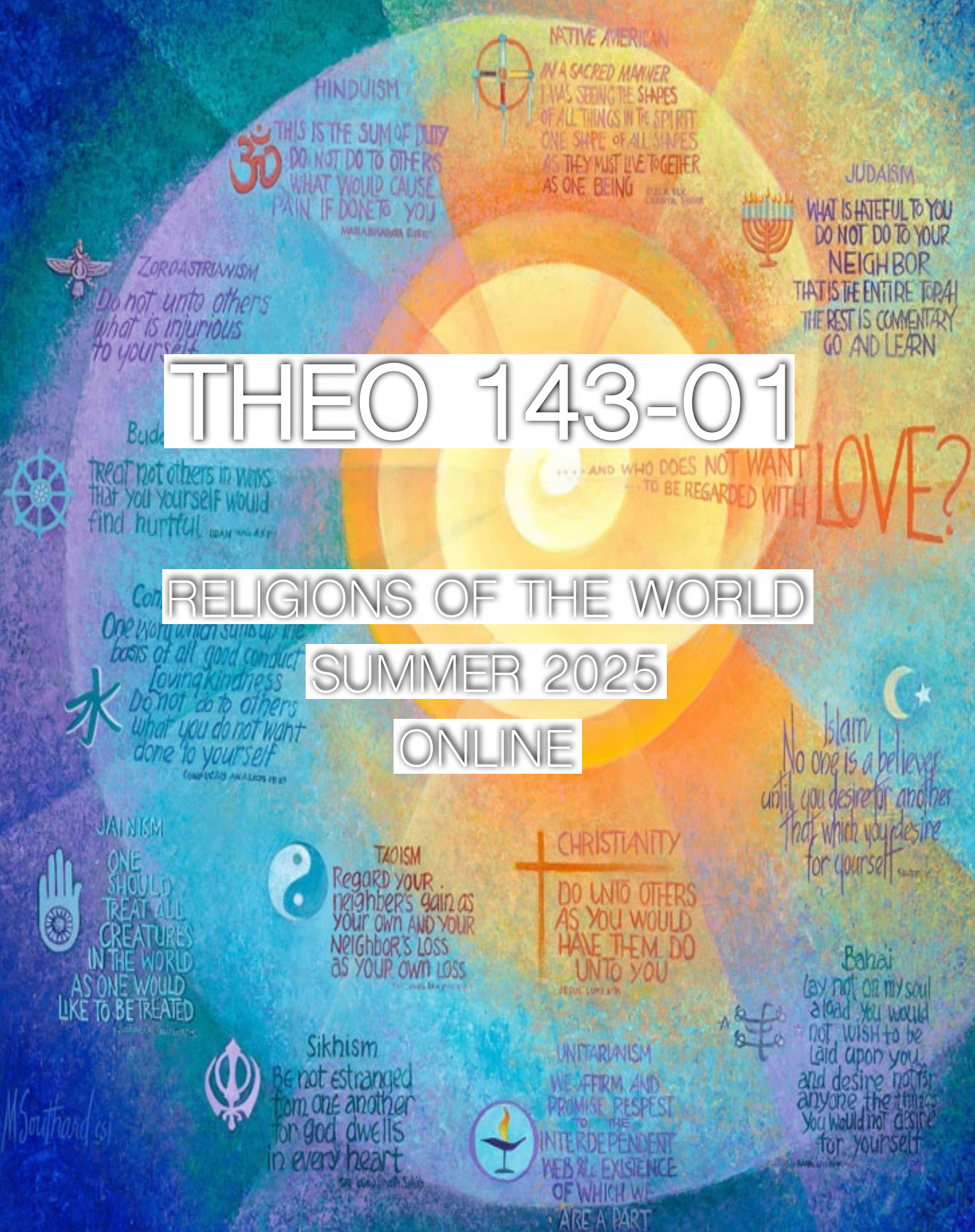


THEO 143-01

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

SUMMER 2025

ONLINE



FACULTY

Gregory D. Jones, Ph.D.

Department of Theology

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Zoom Hours for Students: M - F, by request

Gregory D. Jones, Jr., Ph.D. is an Adjunct Professor in the Theology Department at Duquesne University. He holds a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University, an M.A. in Theology from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and a B.A. in Broadcast Journalism/English from Virginia Tech. Greg has nearly two decades of experience in Broadcasting/Digital Communications and Christian Education for all ages. He also presents papers for "Religion and Culture" and related panels at various regional and national Pop-Culture Association Conferences. Greg also contributed a chapter to *The World of Final Fantasy VII* published by McFarland & Company. His top research interests involve exploring the theological value and meaning of play experiences, the interplay of religion, media, and popular culture, and interreligious relationality.

Mask Professor

Who knows what insights lurk in the hearts of students? The Mask Professor knows! Who...or what...is this avatar of ASCII...braver of bandwidth...citizen of cyberspace...denizen of digitization...educator of electronica...friend of filenames...gentleman of gigabytes...and more?! The Mask Professor cannot be defined, but only experienced -- hopefully as the digital professor for your awesome class, with a mask!

Scan this QR
Code to watch the
Video Syllabus!



COURSE INTRO

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Where is faith found on the earth? Today, we have faith experiences in religious institutions and in surprising contexts! The more we learn about our own traditions, the more we see how important it is to see the existence and validity of other religious traditions!

Thus, this course is an undergraduate survey of world religions. THEO-143-01 makes undergraduate students conversational about a variety of global religious characteristics. We will use readings, pre-recorded lessons, and films to promote interest and highlight religious themes.

This class teaches valuable habits which help you understand different religious viewpoints and relate to people whose worldviews are radically different from your own. These habits can help to open up new and excellent partnerships which help religious and non-religious people face pressing issues together.

2. COURSE PROCESS

How does my religious/non-religious viewpoint engage with differing viewpoints? This is the question that we will think, read, watch, play, and talk out in this course! Each week offers a four-part interactive class session.

- Watching the recorded presentation of the week's main topic in Canvas.
- Reading the assigned chapters from the course text.
- Writing a "Door Opener" response to the Reading Material.
- Completing ONE "Path" that reinforces the content of the recording and the reading.

3. COURSE GOALS

This course will hone your abilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to world religions:

Ability: Understand one's own view of God, humanity, and the universe.

Skill: Talk about one's own perspective in a way that is informed by people of other faiths.

Knowledge: Learn to identify the sacred texts, founders, and prayer practices of major world religions.

Attitude: Develop a friendly appreciation of the commonalities and distinctions of world religions.

In addition to these Instructional Objectives (IO), this course will help students grow in their abilities to:

- ⚡ Think in systematic and integrative ways about the vocabulary and concepts of world religions and global/cultural perspectives
- ⚡ Use theological resources to connect with one's personal beliefs/viewpoints and engage new ideas, and
- ⚡ better present and explain their own ideas in a way that is informed by – yet also distinct from – the insights of important academic, religious/spiritual, and cultural voices that they consult on a regular basis.

COURSE INFO



Image: "Celebrating the Treasure," by Mary Southard

4. COURSE TEXTS / MEDIA

(access to these and other readings are all found on Canvas, in the "Books and Readings" Module)

a) Feldmeier, Peter. *Encounters in Faith: Christianity in Interreligious Dialogue*. Winona: Anselm, 2011.

b) Excerpts from:

Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, & Charles Ess (eds). *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*. 2012.

McLaren, Brian D. *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to be Christian*. 2016.

Prothero, Stephen. *Religion Matters: An Introduction to the World's Religions*. 2023.

Shatzer, Jacob. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*. 2019.

c) *WORLD SCRIPTURE: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*



5. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

You need certain hardware/software for this course. Please reach out to your Advisor or contact Gumberg Library if you need help accessing...

- Devices for recording audio and video in MOV, MP4, M4V, WEBM format (tablet, computer, laptop, smartphone).
- Apps for creating and recording presentations (PowerPoint, Keynote, VoiceThread, Canva, Prezi, etc.).
- A reliable Internet connection for accessing Canvas and successfully uploading weekly assignments on Canvas.

Technical difficulties do not excuse you from completing Paths/Exams on time (see Course Conduct). If tech difficulties occur while turning in Paths, please contact the IT Service Department first, and include my email address to the ticket as well.

Gumberg Library Phone: (412) 396-6130

Gumberg Library Email: ask@duq.libanswers.com

IT Service Desk Contacts: <https://www.duq.edu/about/departments-and-offices/cts/contact-the-it-service-desk.php>

Please do not wait until the last minute to complete assignments!

- Once the due date passes, assignments are locked in Canvas
- Contributions sent through the comment box, through links (no Google Drive files!) or email are not accepted.

GRADING

6. COURSE ACTIVITIES

All students start at zero and build points toward their grade, rather than start with a perfect score and lose points for mistakes. This approach emphasizes the paths to successful learning, rather than emphasizing the mistakes.

Here is the list of the activities that you can do to earn points towards your final grade, followed by the grading scale. Please note that the point totals shown for each activity are the maximum points possible; you don't automatically get all the points just for turning something in or "giving a good effort;" you have to do well to earn the maximum points!

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Door Openers | 12 pts (12 door openers x 1pt) |
| Path 1: Quiz-Taking | 120 pts (12 quizzes x 10pts) |
| Path 2: Video-Vocabbing | 180 pts (12 video vocabs x 15pts) |
| Path 3: Film-Versation | 180 pts (12 film-versations x 15pts) |
| Path 4: World-Scripturing | 180 pts (12 world-scripturings x 15pts) |
| Path 5: Outthink the AI | 216 pts (12 outthinkings x 18pts) |
| Midterm and Final | 150 pts (75pt Midterm + 75pt Final) |
| GOAL | 325 points |

The following is the Grading Scale, with the Grades Explained:

Student exceeded expectations:

| | |
|----------------|----|
| 325+ points | A |
| 324-300 points | A- |

Student met expectations skillfully and carefully:

| | |
|----------------|----|
| 299-275 points | B+ |
| 274-250 points | B |
| 249-225 points | B- |

Student met some expectations, needs to improve in some areas.

| | |
|----------------|----|
| 224-200 points | C+ |
| 199-175 points | C |

Student met few expectations / Minimum Points needed to pass

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 174-160 points | D |
|----------------|---|

Student did not meet expectations.

| | |
|--------------|---|
| 159-0 points | F |
|--------------|---|

⚠ **Crucial detail: When looking at your grade on Canvas, please only look at your Total Points, and ignore any calculated percentage. The calculated percentage is NOT your grade.** ⚠

6.1 DOOR OPENERS

Each "Path" is a way to earn points. Paths best begin with the "Door Opener," which rewards you for reflecting on the Recorded Lesson and deciding how to engage the Course Content for the week. Notably, these Door Opener points are the way that your overall Point Total is "rounded up" at the end of the course.

Each Recorded Lesson poses a question called the "Door Opener" (DO). Each week, you can write a brief response (at least 2 sentences) to the DO. This shows that you watched the lesson, this earns 1 point, and this "opens the door" to complete a weekly activity.

Each week, send jonesg3@duq.edu one email with your DO response and your one chosen path for the week. Please feel free to adopt the format below for your own email, with the Subject Line "ROW25 Door Opener [insert week number here]"

Dear Dr. Jones,

Here is my response to this week's DO: [insert your brief response here]. Also, I am taking [insert one Path here] this week, in order to learn more about this week's key topics.

*Sincerely,
[Your Name]*

6.2 PATHS - Point Activities to Help Students

⚠️ **Crucial Explanations About Taking Your One Path:** Please do not try to take all the Paths each week. Please choose one, and only one, Path each week. If you take more than one Path in one week, only the first completed Path earns points – all others will earn 0 points. ⚠️

You can take one different Path each week. For example, you can do Quiz-Taking one week, Video-Vocabbing another week, Film-Versation the next week, World-Scripturing after that, and Outthinking the AI later on. Or, you can take the same Path each week. For example, you can do Quiz-Taking each week (**NOTE: Quiz-Taking each week does not lead to an A**).

Basically, taking the one Path earns points, while not taking one Path forfeits points. Please try not to continually choose to not take one Path each week. **This is the most important thing you will read in the Syllabus: The surest avenue to success is consistently striving to earn the most points possible on the Paths (particularly, taking Path 5) each week, as healthily and realistically as you can.**

Brief descriptions of each Path are listed below (See Canvas for more information. Remember, please choose only one Path each week).

PATH 1: QUIZ-TAKING (up to 10 points): Take open book quizzes to show what you learned from the Recorded Lessons and Reading Material.

PATH 2: VIDEO-VOCABBING (up to 15 points): Record your own audio-and-visual explanation of the key vocabulary words for the current week's readings, in your own words.

PATH 3: FILM-VERSATION (up to 15 points): Watch the week's movie (see 8. Course Schedule). Record a 2-3 minute audio-visual that explains how one character from the movie changed your understanding of the people in that week's religion, and how certain scenes depict the religion's problem, solution, techniques, and exemplars.

PATH 4: WORLD-SCRIPTURING (up to 15 points): Read the week's one or two chapters in the World Scriptures (see 8. Course Schedule) which address several topics. Focus on ONE of those topics. Then, record your own 2-3 minute audio-and-visual that 1) lists the religion of the week's problem, solution, techniques, and exemplars, 2) talks about how these connect to the topic from the World Scripture you selected, and 3) talk about how two scriptures listed under the topic illustrate one element of the religion of the week's (problem, solution, technique, or exemplars).

PATH 5: OUTTHINKING THE AI (up to 18 points): Read an AI-generated answer to a prompt related to the key concept for the current week. Record your own audio-and-visual response to this AI content.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Please make Recorded Paths *longer than 1 minute and shorter than 5 minutes*.
- There is a "Path Templates" Module on Canvas to help make your Paths.
- There is a "Path Recording Checklist and Guides" Module to help you record your Paths.

SCORING EXPLANATION:

Turning in Paths 2-4 on Canvas/On Time = 10 Standard Points (13 points for Path 5)

+1 TIME - for staying within 2-3 minutes

+1 READING - for displaying 3 or more strong and accurate quotations of Reading Material and Class Content, with citations (example: "Cite your sources" (Jones, 7).

+1 HUMANITY - for appearing on-screen

+1 CREATIVITY - for recording your audio-visual answer as a presentation (PowerPoint, Keynote, Canva, etc.) with multiple slides containing pictures/graphics, movie clips, music, etc.

+1 CURIOSITY - talking about what interests you and why, or what confuses you and how you helped yourself to understand the concept.

= TOTAL POINTS

MIDTERM & FINAL EXAM: There is also a Week 6 Midterm and a Week 12 Final (see Canvas for details). There are no make-ups except for the following reasons: important college sports events (with supporting official request from the athlete's college supervisor), very serious health conditions (with official report from a doctor) or death in student's family. It is the student's responsibility to communicate any of these reasons to the professor before the due date of the exam.

REDEMPTION PATH!

If you mess up on one Path, fully complete the Redemption Path by the end of the semester. This will replace the lowest score you earned on a previous Path with 18 points. The guide to completing the Redemption Path is available on Canvas, in the "Redemption Path" Module.

PATHS



COURSE CONDUCT

8. COURSE POLICIES

Please pursue befitting professional behaviors. Avoid behaviors unbefitting for the college environment.

"Blank" File Policy: If a student turns in a blank file, a corrupted file where the audio or video freezes in places, a video that has no audio, a video that is an audio-only blank screen, the wrong file in the wrong place, an "unreadable file type," a Google Drive link (especially one that does not provide immediate access to the file) or does not succeed in successfully uploading a difficult or slow-to-load file on Canvas or an email that was scheduled to send but did not actually get delivered, and the right file isn't turned in before the due time, the student earns a "0" as a result.

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy: Students are required to adhere to the Duquesne University Academic Integrity Policy, as explained [here](#). If you plagiarize on a paper, submit material completed for a different course, or are caught cheating on a quiz or exam, you will receive a "0" for that grade. Offenders may also be reported to appropriate University personnel, such as the Office of the Dean or the Office of Student Conduct, who may take further disciplinary action. This includes:

- Plagiarism (copying someone else's work) or asking someone else to do your work for you is prohibited.
- Using AI text generators (such as ChatGPT) to produce text/video counts as plagiarism by the standards of this course.
- "Spinning" existing text by running it through translation or thesaurus software also counts as plagiarism.

Communication: Please use the [Student Question Form](#) to send me your questions or concerns. If you have to email me directly, I gently request that you follow the Email Guide on Canvas.

Grade Grubbing: Please do not do this, as explained [here](#) (from Mark Tomforde, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs).

Late Policy: Any Path turned in past the due time earns 0 points. Yet, everyone has one extension request to use when you cannot complete a Path before the due time. This one extension request grants 24 hours to turn in a Path past the due time. Please email the request to jonesg3@duq.edu before – and not after -- the due time. Extension requests are for Normal Paths ONLY, not Exams or Redemption Path. Please feel free to use the format below for your own extension request, with the Subject Line: "ROW25 Extension Request [insert week number here]."

Dear Dr. Jones,

I am using my one extension request for 24 more hours to complete this week's [insert Path here]. I understand that it is now due at 11:59pm on Monday. I also understand that after this, I can only ask for an extension due to important college sports events (with supporting official request from the athlete's college supervisor), very serious health conditions (with official report from a doctor) or death in my family. I will communicate any of these reasons to you before that due time.

*Thank you,
[Your Name]*

Student Concerns: Students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations if needed. Please contact the Office of Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412.396.6658) to register for such accommodations. Once I receive official notification from that university office, the accommodations will be arranged. These accommodations will not be granted retrospectively.

The explanation for why we are doing everything this way: You read through each week's Reading Material, so that you can engage the weekly Paths skillfully and creatively, with your unique words and ideas. Doing the Paths (especially Paths 2, 3, 4, and 5) build your experience in explaining your knowledge and unique ideas logically and creatively, to not only prepare you for the Midterm and Final, but also, to prepare you for what you need to do in your future roles in your family, community, and career. Over the span of several years, I have designed this course process to ensure that you will have content (which you built for yourselves) from this class to carry with you, beyond this semester, across college, and over the diverse terrains of your lives.

9. COURSE SCHEDULE

This course occurs asynchronously over 12 weeks, from May 12 until August 1.

| Week/Mode | Topics/Recorded Lessons and Book Chapters | Activities |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Week #1 | May 12 - May 18 - Syllabus / Introducing the Multireligious World | Week 1 Movie: The Book of Eli |
| Watch: | "Syllabus Explained" & "And There Came a Day Unlike Any Other..." | Week 1 World Scripture (WS): Introduction: The Truth in Many Parts, Tolerance and Respect for All Belivers |
| Read: | McLaren, The Great Spiritual Migration, Ch.9 | |
| Week #2 | May 19 - May 25 - Christianity in a Multireligious World | |
| Watch: | "The Way of Salvation" | Week 2 Movie: The Shack |
| Read: | Feldmeier, Christianity in a Multireligious World, Encounters in Faith (hereafter, EF), ix-21. | Week 2 WS: Ch1.Ultimate Reality OR Ch2.Divine Law, Truth, and Cosmic Principle |
| Week #3 | May 26 - Jun 1 Masters and Mediators / Sikhism | Week 3 Movie: Kumare |
| Watch: | "The Way of the Guru" | |
| Read: | Masters and Mediators, EF, 47-69. | Week 3 WS: Ch3.The Purpose of Life for the Individual OR Ch4.The Purpose of Life in the Family and in Society |
| Week #4 | Jun 2 - Jun 8 Judaism | Week 4 Movie: Little White Lie |
| Watch: | "The Way of Exile and Return" | |
| Read: | The Jewish Vision, EF, 71-92. | Week 4 WS: Ch5.The Purpose of Life in the Natural World OR Ch6.Life Beyond Death in the Spiritual World |
| Week #5 | Jun 9 - Jun 15 Islam | Week 5 Movie: Sheikh Jackson |
| Watch: | "The Way of Submission" | |
| Read: | Islam, EF, 95-117 | Week 5 WS: Ch7.The Human Condition OR Ch8.Fall and Deviation |
| Week #6 | Jun 16 - Jun 22 Hinduism / Buddhism | Week 6 Movie: Sita Sings the Blues |
| Watch: | "The Ways of Devotion and Awakening" | |
| Read: | Hinduism, EF, 119-140; Buddhism, EF, 142-153. | Week 6 WS: SKIP Ch9 Ch10. Salvation-Liberation-Enlightenment |
| • • Midterm: | Midterm Exam | Midterm Due Jun 22, 11:59pm • • |
| Week #7 | Jun 23 - Jun 29 Zen Buddhism | Week 7 Movie: PK |
| Watch: | "The Ways of Awakening and Non-Attaining Mind" | |
| Read: | Buddhism (continued), EF, 153-166; Zen Buddhism, EF, 170-185. | Week 7 WS: Ch10.Salvation-Liberation-Enlightment OR Ch11.The Founder |
| Week #8 | Jun 30 - Jul 6 Zen Buddhism/Chinese Religiosity | Week 8 Movie: Hero |
| Watch: | "The Ways of Non-Attaining Mind, Ritual Propriety, and Flourishing" | |
| Read: | Zen (continued), EF, 185-192; The Chinese Spirit, EF, 196-216. | Week 8 WS: Ch12.Responsibility and Predestination OR Ch13.Self-cultivation OR Spiritual Growth |
| Week #9 | Jul 7 - Jul 13 Indigenous Traditions | Week 9 Movie: Whale Rider |
| Watch: | "The Way of Communion" | |
| Read: | Indigenous Culture and Spirituality, EF, 219-236. | Week 9 WS: Ch14.Faith OR Ch15.Wisdom |
| Week #10 | Jul 14 - Jul 20 The New Age Message | Week 10 Movie: Life of Pi |
| Watch: | "The Way of Non-Tradition" | |
| Read: | The New Age, EF, 239-257. | Week 10 WS: Ch16.Worship OR Ch17.Offering and Sacrifice |
| Week #11 | Jul 21 - Jul 27 Atheism / Transhumanism | Week 11: OMG |
| Watch: | "The Ways of No Way and Beyond Humanity" | |
| Read: | Prothero, Atheism, 493-534; Shatzer, What is Transhumanism? 39-54. | Week 11 WS: Ch18.Self-Denial and Renunciation OR Ch19. Live for Others |
| Week #12 | Jul 28 – Aug 1 Avatar Religion & Encountering Religious Otherness/ Pluralism | Week 12 Movie: Ready Player One |
| Watch: | "A Concluding Look at Future Interreligious Directions" | Week 12 WS: Ch20.Good Government and the Welfare of Society OR Ch21.Eschatology and Messianic Hope |
| Read: | Cheong, When Pinocchio Goes to Church, 97-114; EF, Interreligious Encounters 261-282. | Redemption Path Due July 31, 11:59pm |
| • • Final: | Final Exam | Final Due Aug 1, 11:59pm • • |

CONCLUSION

SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE THE
BONUS SYLLABUS QUIZ!!!

YOU CAN ALSO PRESS THE QR
CODE TO TAKE THE **BONUS**
SYLLABUS QUIZ!!!



10. I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITIES!

Overall, this course is a launchpad for your unfolding knowledge about the global religions. You will also cultivate the habits that you will adopt in the post-college phase of your life – earning and keeping track of the “points” (money) that you earn, refining your abilities to undertake some projects while avoiding others, discerning what you can and cannot realistically accomplish due to time constraints, and finding ways to accomplish tasks despite unfamiliar instructions or an overwhelming amount of information. These are skills that benefit students in any discipline!

Generally, being a student is about showing up, participation, effort, and distinguishing oneself in excellence. Many will show up for class, which is always the first half of the journey of learning! Most will participate by engaging the course material and assignments. A good amount of students will put forth a valiant effort by doing everything realistically and healthily possible to earn points toward a desired grade. The key is to understand that showing up, participation, and effort comprise the path toward earning the grade you desire, but not the guarantee. “A” students are the particular few who are willing and able to distinguish themselves by putting their personalized stamp of excellence (not perfection) on quizzes, reflections, presentations, etc. To be sure, everyone does not arrive at excellence at the same time, because everyone holds diverse strengths and weaknesses – and this is okay! As you progress through this course, please advance with this assurance – I have confidence in your abilities!