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The American
University of Florence**SYLLABUS**Rev. 7
June 2023
Academic AffairsFormat revised 2023
Syllabus revised in 2023**SAS – SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES****SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
COURSE TITLE: WORLD RELIGIONS
COURSE CODE: LARSWR280
3 semester credits**1. DESCRIPTION**

This is an introductory comparative study of the world's major religions including: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the religions of China and Japan. The course will examine a significant number of specific themes in all religions studied such as: the nature of this world and the universe, the relationship between the individual and the transcendent, ultimate reality, the meaning and goals of worldly life, the importance of worship and rituals, the importance of devotion to the master or guru, ethics and human action. Excerpts from important texts of each tradition will be analyzed such as *The Bible*, *The Torah*, *The Koran*, *The Upanishads*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Tao Te Ching*, *The Dhammapada*, *The Confucian Canon*.

2. OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Recognize and define the specific concepts and ideas of the different religious traditions.
2. Identify the most important religious figures and texts of each tradition.
3. Describe their historical context and development.

Through the comparative study of the most important religions of the world, students will gain a better understanding of the different views of the world that characterize our human existence and develop equal respect for each one of them. In the process of studying non-Western religious thought, students will be encouraged to practice alternative forms of thinking and to examine and question their own personal beliefs regarding spirituality and religion.

3. REQUIREMENTS

There are no prerequisites for this course.

4. METHOD

This course consists of lectures, class discussions, and projects. Mediums for instruction used will include, but are not limited to, interactive and hands-on activities which challenge thought processes, academic texts and studies, videos, slides, guided problem solving, and experiential and/or field learning activities where applicable.

5. TEXTBOOK – FURTHER READINGS – RESOURCES

TEXTBOOK (Copy available at the university library):

1. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, HarperOne, 2009 edition
2. Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, Harper San Francisco, 1995

The textbook is mandatory for successful completion of the course.
Where applicable, additional materials, handouts and/or notes will be provided by the instructor.

FURTHER READINGS

(Books listed below are available at the university library)

- *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, 2000
- Wayne Teasdale, Dalai Lama, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, The New World Library, 1999
- Regina Wentzel Wolfe, Christine E. Gudorf, *Ethics and World Religions - Cross-Cultural Studies*, Orbis Books, 1999
- Titus Burckhardt, Lord Northbourne, *Sacred Art of the East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, Fons Vitae, 2002
- Louis Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000
- Gary E. Kessler, *Western Ways of Being Religious*, Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View, California, 2000
- Roger Schmidt, *Exploring Religion*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, Second Edition, 1988
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (edited by Michael D. Coogan), Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 2001
- *The Desert Fathers* (translated by Helen Waddell), Ann Arbor Paperbacks, University of Michigan Press, 2011
- *The Torah - The Five Books of Moses*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1992
- *The Upanishads*, Penguin Classics, 2004
- *The Dhammapada*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 2006
- *The Tao Te Ching*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1990
- Confucius, *The Analects*, Penguin, 1979
- *Paramahansa Yogananda, Autobiography of a Yogi*, Self-Realization Fellowship, 2010
- *The essential Dalai Lama - His Important Teachings* (edited by Rajiv Mehrotra), Penguin-Viking, 2005
- Suzuki Shunryu, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 2011
- Hesse Hermann, *Siddhartha*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 2005

LIBRARIES IN FLORENCE

Please consult the posted schedules for official opening times of the university library. Also note that the library is for consultation only and it is not possible to borrow materials. The library is equipped with a scanner and internet access so that you may save or email a digital copy of the pages needed. Students may also utilize additional libraries and research centers within the local community:

BIBLIOTECA PALAGIO DI PARTE GUELFA

Located in Piazzetta di Parte Guelfa between Piazza della Repubblica and Ponte Vecchio. Please consult the library website for hours of operation:

http://www.biblioteche.comune.fi.it/biblioteca_palagio_di_parte_guelfa/

BIBLIOTECA DELLE OBLATE

Located in via dell'Oriuolo 26. Please consult the library website for hours of operation:
www.bibliotecadelleoblato.it

THE HAROLD ACTON LIBRARY AT THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FLORENCE

Located in Lungarno Guicciardini 9. Please consult the library website for hours of operation. This library requires a fee-based student membership. For information: www.britishinstitute.it/en

6. FIELD LEARNING

Please consult your Official Registration for any mandatory field learning dates. Field Learning Activities cited in Official Registrations are an integral part of the course and also include an assignment that counts towards your final grade, details will be provided on the first day of class.

7. COURSE MATERIALS

No additional course materials are necessary.

8. COURSE FEES

Course fees cover course-related field learning activities, visits, and support the instructor's teaching methodologies. Book costs are not included in the course fee. The exact amount will be communicated by the instructor on the first day of class.

9. EVALUATION – GRADING SYSTEM

10% Attendance
10% Class participation
10% Assignment
20% Final reflection paper
20% Midterm Exam
30% Final Exam

A = 93-100 %, A- = 90-92%, B+= 87-89%, B = 83-86%, B-=80-82%, C+ = 77-79%, C=73-76%, C- =70-72%, D = 60-69%, F= 0-59%, W = Official Withdrawal, W/F = Failure to withdraw by the designated date.

10. ATTENDANCE – PARTICIPATION

Academic integrity and mutual respect between instructor and student are central to the academic policy and reflected in the attendance regulations. Student presence is mandatory and counts toward the final grade.

Absences are based on academic hours: 1 absence equals 3 lecture hours.

Two absences: 6 lecture hours, attendance and participation grade will be impacted.

Three absences: 9 lecture hours, the final grade may be lowered by one letter grade.

Four absences: 12 lecture hours, constitutes automatic failure of the course regardless of when absences are incurred.

Please note:

- The above hours refer to lecture hours. Please note that the contact / credit hour policy in the academic catalog includes additional distribution ratios according to delivery category. Ex: 1 absence equals 6 FL/SL/Lab hours or 9 EL hours.

- Hours may be distributed in different formats according to the academic course schedules.

LATE ARRIVAL AND EARLY DEPARTURE

Arriving late or departing early from class is not acceptable. Two late arrivals or early departures or a combination will result in an unexcused absence. Travel is not an exceptional circumstance.

TRAVEL (OR DELAYS DUE TO TRAVEL) IS NEVER AN EXCUSE FOR ABSENCE FROM CLASS.

It is the student's responsibility to know how many absences are incurred. If in doubt, speak with your instructor!

Participation: Satisfactory participation will be the result of contributing to class discussions by putting forth insightful and constructive questions, comments and observations. Overall effort, cooperation during group work, proper care of work space and tools, responsible behavior, and completion of assignments will be assessed. All of the above criteria also apply to Field Learning and site visits.

11. EXAMS – PAPERS – PROJECTS

Assignments and class participation:

These components for a total of **20%** of the final course grade.

Students will be asked to: read some sections in the textbooks, navigate on websites suggested by the teacher, visit religious buildings on their own, reflect about a documentary watched in class or at home and answer a list of questions or write their personal reflections about them.

Students are expected to come to class with their answers and reflections to be shared with the rest of the class during class discussion.

Midterm exam:

Counts for **20%** of the final course grade.

FORMAT: list of multiple-choice questions, fill in the blank exercises, short definitions and short questions summing up to 100 points in case of all perfect answers. Students will be tested on the material and assigned home readings covered in class up to the date of the midterm.

Paper:

Counts for **20%** of the final course grade.

Students will write a final reflection paper (more specific guidelines about the paper will be given in class)

Length requirement for paper: **4 pages** (font size: 12, 1.5 line space)

Final exam:

Counts for **30%** of the final course grade.

FORMAT: it will consist of a list of multiple-choice questions, fill in the blank exercises, short definitions and short questions summing up to 100 points in case of all perfect answers.

Students will be tested on the material and assigned home readings covered in class in the second part of the semester.

12. LESSONS

Lesson 1	
Meet	In class
Lecture	<p>Presentation of the course; introduction to the class syllabus; info about assignments, exams and paper.</p> <p>Introduction to the concept of religion: the seven aspects that define a religion.</p>

	Christianity: the Christian concept of God and mankind; the figure of Jesus. Christ and the Early Church; the Arian controversy and the Council of Nicea.
Objectives	Introduce the students to the course content and requirements. Analyze the main general concepts that characterize Christianity.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp. 317-339

Lesson 2	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Christianity: the Schism between Eastern and Western Church; Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.
Objectives	Learn the specific characteristics that distinguish the Orthodox and Protestant Churches from the Catholic Church. Become familiar with the historical events and theological disputes that provoked the separation.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp. 339-363 Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp. pp.227-253 1. Summarize the most important stages of Jesus' life 2. What are, in your opinion, the most important messages we receive through 3. Jesus' words? (Parables and sayings)

Lesson 3	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Judaism: the Jewish concept of God and mankind; the Covenants with God; the <i>Torah</i> and the <i>Talmud</i> ; the history of the Chosen People.
Objectives	Analyze the main concepts that characterize Judaism.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp. 271-316 Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp. 176-191 1. What are the main characteristics of the Jewish God? 2. How is the physical / material world considered in the Torah? 3. What do they mean when they refer to themselves as the "chosen people"? 4. What is the meaning of suffering and acceptance in Judaism? 5. Explain the meaning of the Covenants between God and, respectively, Noah, Abraham, Moses. What is the symbol for each one of the Covenants?

Lesson 4	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Judaism: The Jewish calendar; main Jewish traditions and celebrations. We will watch the documentary: “Inside Jerusalem’s Holiest Places” (National Geographic) to understand the importance of the city for the three monotheistic religions.
Objectives	Understand the origins and meaning behind the main Jewish traditions and celebrations. Learn the reasons why Jerusalem is considered a sacred city by the three monotheistic religions and understand the roots of the conflict still taking place in the area.
Readings/ Assignments	Please visit the Synagogue and Jewish Museum and write a 3 pages report about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how different the outside and interior structures of the synagogue are from a Christian church - specific Jewish symbols you saw inside the synagogue - objects that caught your attention inside the museum (two rooms upstairs) - your own personal comment about your experience in the Synagogue Remember to show an ID card at the entrance to receive the students discount on the ticket. THE SYNAGOGUE and JEWISH MUSEUM – Via Farini, 6 (Close to the Sant'Ambrogio Market) For opening hours and other info please visit the website: https://www.firenzebraica.it/synagogue-of-florence/?lang=en

Lesson 5	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Islam: Muhammad and the other prophets, the Koran and the message of Allah, the duties of the believer. We will watch a documentary about Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) – Discovery Channel
Objectives	Analyze the main concepts that characterize Islam. Understand the importance of the Hajj in the Muslim world and become familiar with the different stages of the pilgrimage.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, “The World's Religions”, pp. 221-257 Philip Novak, “The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions”, pp. 282-299 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the Five Pillars of Islam? 2. Summarize the main stages of the life of prophet Muhammad. 3. Write your own personal reflections about the documentary about Jerusalem we

	watched in class.
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Lesson 6	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Islam: Women and Islam. Controversial issues related to Muslim immigration in Italy and Europe. We will watch the short movie “French for Foreigners” showing the current debate about the legitimacy of the Islamic veil and of religious symbols in public places.
Objectives	Become familiar with different opinions concerning the legitimacy of the Islamic veil in European countries. Become familiar with other issues related to the rights of immigrants, currently being discussed in Italy.
Readings/ Assignments	Philip Novak, “The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions”, pp.299 (section 7)-311 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find in the text the main points regarding women contained in the Koran and write your personal reflections about them. 2. Read the articles (concerning Muslim immigration in Europe) uploaded on the course site and summarize the main points. 3. Write your personal comments and observations about the documentary about the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) we watched in class. 4. Write about other aspects of the religion that caught your attention.

Lesson 7	
Meet	In class
Lecture	MIDTERM EXAM

Lesson 8	
NA	ACADEMIC BREAK

Lesson 9	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Hinduism: brief history of the Hindu civilization; the concepts of <i>karma</i> and <i>samsara</i> , <i>Brahman</i> , <i>Atman</i> , <i>moksha</i> and the Hindu world-view; the main gods of Hinduism; sacred sounds: mantras and the OM.
Objectives	Analyze the main concepts that characterize Hinduism. Become familiar with the most important gods.

	Understand the function of Hindu sacred music by listening to some samples.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions," pp. 12-26 and pp.50-59 1. What are the main stages of a man's life according to the Hindu mindset? 2. How is the Indian social system organized? What are the consequences of such a structured social system? 3. How are fame, wealth and power considered?

Lesson 10	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Hinduism: sacred Hindu texts (<i>Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita</i>); four different kinds of yoga. We will watch a part of the documentary "Sacred India – The Guardians of the Ganges" (The life of the Sadhus, the Holy Men of Hinduism; the Khumb Mela, the most important Hindu pilgrimage).
Objectives	Understand the variety of practices and experiences that characterize religion in India by: analyzing different kinds of texts; learning about the practices involved in the different kinds of yoga; learning about the lifestyle of the ascetics (Sadhus).
Readings/ Assignments	Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp.10-15 (sections 9 a, b, c, d, e, f, g) and pp. 24-30 <u>"Katha Upanishad"</u> : 1. Who is Nachiketas and what is he asking the God of Death about? 2. What are the two paths a man can take in life, according to the God of Death? 3. How is the Atman defined? 4. What happens when someone practices Yoga? <u>"Bhagavad Gita"</u> : 1. Who is Arjuna? What are his doubts about? 2. What does God Krishna teach him about death and rebirth? 3. How does Krishna define the Atman? 4. What are the main qualities of an illuminated person? How does he live?

Lesson 11	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path; the concept of <i>samsara, karma, rebirth</i> and <i>nirvana</i> ; the <i>Hinayana</i> (Inferior Vehicle) and the <i>Mahayana</i> (Great Vehicle); the concept of <i>Arhat</i> and <i>Bodhisattva</i> . The life of Prince Siddhartha

	Gotama, the Buddha.
Objectives	Analyze the main concepts that characterize Buddhism.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp. 82-99 Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp.50-65 1. Summarize the most important stages of the life of the Buddha. 2. Why was Buddha critical of authority, ritual and moot points? 3. Write your personal reflections about the Kumbh Mela video we watched in class.

Lesson 12	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Zen Buddhism: the Flower Sermon, the practice of <i>zazen</i> and <i>koans</i> . Tibetan Buddhism: the figure of the XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso; Tantra practices and deities; the meaning and function of <i>mandalas</i> .
Objectives	Learn about the main differences between the different forms of Buddhism, in particular Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp. 119 (Big Raft and Little)-139 Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp.98-99 (Zen Koans) and pp.102-103 (The Wisdom of Zen Masters) <u>Zen Buddhism:</u> 1. What happened during Buddha's Flower Sermon? 2. What is <i>zazen</i> ? And what is a <i>koan</i> ? <u>Tibetan Buddhism:</u> Navigate through the Dalai Lama's website www.dalailama.com , read the following sections and answer the questions: The Dalai Lama / Brief Biography / Three Main Commitments / Messages: 1. What do you find most inspiring in the life, commitments and messages of His Holiness the Dalai Lama? 2. What is your favorite message? Explain why.

Lesson 13	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Philosophical Taoism: the legendary figure of Lao-Tse and the <i>Tao Te Ching</i> ; the concept of <i>Tao</i> , <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> , <i>Wei Wu Wei</i> .
Objectives	Learn about the key concepts of Taoism and the Taoist ideal of life.

Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp.196-218 Philip Novak, "The World's Wisdom - Sacred Texts of the World's Religions", pp. 146-164 1. What are the most inspiring suggestions we can learn from the <i>Tao Te Ching</i> in order to improve our daily life? 2. Which chapter is your favorite one? Explain why.
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Lesson 14	
Meet	In class
Lecture	Confucianism: the figure of Confucius; the Scriptures of Confucianism; the Cardinal Virtues.
Objectives	Learn about the key concepts of Confucianism and its impact on Chinese Society.
Readings/ Assignments	Huston Smith, "The World's Religions", pp.154-193 1. How did Confucianism start? What was Confucius' main purpose/project? 2. What are the basic (ethical) principles underlying Confucianism? 3. How did Confucianism impact on Chinese society?

Lesson 15	
Meet	In class
Lecture	FINAL EXAM