

COURSE OUTLINE **Comparative Religions**

Course Description

RG 210. Comparative Religions. 3 hours credit. This course will enable the student to develop his or her historical understanding of seven of the world's major, living religions through his/her analysis of their origins and their historical development. These seven religions are Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Shinto. The student will analyze the principal and distinguishing features of these religions in terms of their primary customs, beliefs and practices, identifying the most outstanding characteristics of each of these religions.

Course Relevance

The formal, academic study of world religions provides students the opportunity to explore the diverse range of answers given to the most fundamental, ultimate questions of human existence. A course in "Comparative Religions" helps students to develop their skills in the areas of critical thinking, historical interpretation and written communication, all of which help to enhance students' skills in understanding complex issues. "Comparative Religions" provides students with the foundations for intellectual maturity and lifelong self-inquiry. It provides them with the foundations for the improvement of cultural awareness, with a deeper understanding of current world events, and with new insight into the highly human quality of such religions as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Shinto.

Required Materials

Molloy, M. (2010). *Experiencing the world's religions* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Sader, T. (2006). *Reading for interpretation: A brief guide to critically understanding religious exposition*. Mason, OH: Thomson Custom Publishing.

Learning Outcomes

The intention is for the student to be able to:

1. Analyze the origins and the historical development of seven of the world's major, living religions based on his or her own historical understanding of these religions.
1. Identify and analyze the principal and distinguishing features of these religions in terms of their primary customs, beliefs and practices.
2. Present his or her own views on these issues in discussion and/or written documents in a clear and precise manner.

Learning PACT Skills that will be developed and documented in this course

Through involvement in this course, the student will develop ability in the following PACT skill area(s):

Analytical Thinking Skills

1. Critical thinking

- The student will analyze three world religions, comparing and contrasting them in regard to their principal and distinguishing beliefs and practices, and the student will explain in detail his/her own view on what “religion” means to him/her and how it is relevant (or not) to his/her life.

Communication Skills

1. Creation and delivery of messages

- Through a variety of types of written work, the student will practice his/her writing skills, including his/her use of standard English wording and phrasing and his/her knowledge of standard English spelling and punctuation and grammar.

Technology Skills

1. General computer use

- Through the production of a major summative assessment task that requires that the text document be word processed and that the student make use of the internet to find information useful to his or her purposes, the student will use a computer to do research on his/her topic, to create a complete document, to make revisions in the document until it is in its final form and to produce a hard copy of the document to be turned in to the instructor.

Major Summative Assessment Task

These learning outcome(s) and the Learning PACT skill(s) will be demonstrated by:

1. Preparation of a five to seven page essay on the following topic: “Compare and contrast three world religions in regard to their principal and distinguishing beliefs and practices. Explain in detail what ‘religion’ means to you and how it is relevant (or not) to your life.”

Course Content

- I. Skills or Competencies - Actions that are essential to achieve the course outcomes:
 - A. Analyze the origins and historical development of seven world religions
 - B. Analyze their principal and distinguishing features
 - C. Identify their most outstanding characteristics
 - D. Provide evidence of the ability to perform the above skills in a research paper that is clearly and precisely written
- II. Themes - Key recurring concepts that run throughout this course:
 - A. Personal identity: Who am I?
 - B. Individual purpose: Why am I here?
 - C. Personal destiny: Where am I going?
- III. Issues – Key areas of conflict that must be understood in order to achieve the intended outcome:
 - A. Varied conceptions of the ultimate origin and identity of human beings
 - B. Varied perspectives on the question of the meaning and purpose of the existence of human beings

- C. Varied conceptions of the ultimate destiny of human beings
- IV. Concepts - Key concepts that must be understood to address the issues:
 - A. Buddhism
 - B. Christianity
 - C. Confucianism
 - D. Hinduism
 - E. Islam
 - F. Judaism
 - G. Shinto

Learning Units

- I. Introduction: What is "Religion?"
 - A. Various definitions of the term "religion"
 - B. Various approaches to the study of religion
 - C. Characteristics of a proper academic study of religion
- II. Buddhism
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- III. Christianity
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- IV. Confucianism
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- V. Hinduism
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- VI. Islam
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- VII. Judaism
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices
- VIII. Shinto
 - A. Origins and historical development
 - B. Principal and distinguishing features in terms of its primary beliefs and practices

Learning Activities

Independent and collaborative learning activities will be assigned within and outside the college classroom to assist the student to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Learning activities will be geared toward practices that will be useful not only in the comprehension and critical analysis of assigned class readings but also in the analysis of other types of written communications. The learning activities will emphasize the importance of good writing skills which is a benefit to students both inside the classroom and outside the college classroom in a variety of situations. Examples of activities which contribute to the learning process include: instructor lectures, class discussions, panel discussions, audio-visual aids, films followed by group discussion, guest speakers, daily exercises, reading assignments, handouts, study guides, field trips and individual conferences with the instructor. Other learning activities include: tests, both essay and objective (including quizzes, chapter or unit tests and comprehensive examinations), writing assignments (both inside and outside of class), research papers, student projects, student presentations, attendance and class participation. These methods and other methods deemed suitable may be used individually or in combination by all instructors.

Online and Blended course instruction is based on the use of the computer as a distance learning/ communication tool. This course also makes use of video tapes, a textbook and a study guide and may include other avenues to student learning as deemed suitable by the instructor.

Grade Determination

The student will be graded on the completion of the assessment tasks as well as additional learning activities employed at the discretion of the individual instructor.