# REL2300: Introduction to World Religions

## Course Syllabus

**Welcome**

**Fall 2025 (3 credit hours)**

**Instructor:** Dr. Vasudha Narayanan - vasu@ufl.edu

104 Anderson Hall | (352) 392-1625

Distinguished Professor, Department of Religion
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm

**Teaching Assistants:**

Laura James - ls.ahrens@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1.00pm-2.00 pm

Prathik Murali - prathikmurali@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Fridays 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm

**Meeting Time:** None - Asynchronous Online Class (strict deadlines outlined below)

***\*\*Please be advised that you must use Canvas for all course communications; please include Dr. Narayanan and the TAs on every message.\*\****

**Course Description**

Introduces key themes, figures, and sacred texts in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the religions of South and East Asia. We will look at the history and key moments in the religions, scriptures, beliefs, and practices, the Athens-Jerusalem heritage of Christianity and Judaism, and see how some of these religions are present in Florida.

**Course Learning Outcomes**

When you complete this course, you will be able to:

- Explain basic worldviews, rituals, and beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Chinese religions, Japanese religions, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Indigenous Religions.

- Recall and describe the category of r*eligion* and identify key definitions. Problematize the category of *religion* and determine your own working definitions.

- Identify the social, political, and cultural factors that come into play in the formation and understanding of a given religion.

- Equipped with this knowledge of different religious traditions and the contexts in which they thrive, identify your own vantage point, as well as engage with different cultures and countries in an informed and respectful manner.

- Investigate and illustrate the presence of selected religious institutions in Florida.

The course engages with the western canon in a number of ways including highlighting concepts and themes in a number of ways that emerge from:

- The Hebrew Scriptures (in the study of Judaism) such as the connection between the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israelite Religion,

- The New Testament (specifically the Four Gospels, as seen through the lecture by Dr. Richard Horner).

- Students will become familiar with the history and beliefs of Christianity, the historical Jesus, and relationship between Western Ethics and Christianity.

**Gen Ed Humanities Objectives & Learning Outcomes**

Humanities courses afford students the ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy, and must include selections from the Western canon.

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the relevant factors that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

Please see the following links for more on GE area-specific objectives: undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/general-education/gen-ed-program/subject-area-objectives

and GE area-specific student learning outcomes: undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/general-education/gen-ed-courses/structure-of-gen-edcourses/slos-and-performance-indicators/student-learning-outcomes

**\*\*All learning objectives are provided within the individual modules throughout the course.\*\***

**Course Readings and Required Texts**

- A Concise Introduction to World Religions: Fourth Edition-Edited by Roy C. Amore, Amir Hussain, and Willard G. Oxtoby. Oxford University Press 2019. ISBN-13: 9780190919023

***Please do not use any other edition. The content and page numbers will be different.***

\*\*Other supplemental materials, such as videos, will be provided on Canvas.\*\*

**Materials and Supplies Fee: N/A**

**Instructional Methods**

There are readings, videos, and other materials corresponding to each course module, but this course is designed to be as interactive as possible. So, as a member of this class, you will be required to contribute to weekly discussion posts and peer responses based on the material for each week. You will also be required to complete quizzes that will test your comprehension of the material in each course module. The deadlines for all assignments and quizzes are clearly stated in Canvas (in the Calendar). There will be a midterm and final exam, and a final paper (project). Please see the **Modules** tab in Canvas to view all videos, readings, and other course materials.

***\*\*It is recommended to use Canvas using Chrome on a computer and not a mobile device\*\****

**Course Requirements and Policies**

*Quizzes*

Weekly quizzes will be administered in Canvas on Saturdays. You can access them through the Modules tool, in the *Modules* page, or through *Assignments*. With the exception of the first quiz, which is due two days after the course starts, quizzes will open at 12:00am on Sunday of the week that they are due, and will close at 11:59pm on the day that they are due (i.e., opens on Sunday, August 24th at midnight, and closes on Saturday, August 30th at 11:59pm). The first quiz will cover the *Syllabus* and *Start Here* sections. You are responsible for completing your quizzes by 11:59 pm on the due date. Quizzes are non-cumulative and are worth **20%** of your overall grade.

Once you have completed the readings and discussion and viewed the lectures for that week, make sure you study this material thoroughly. After you've learned the material, you

should be ready to begin. The quiz is timed, so you must know all the material before you start **(i.e., there will not be enough time to look up each answer in your notes, so you should prepare as if your notes were not available to you)**. You will have 10 minutes to complete each quiz.

If you are still taking the quiz when the due time passes, you will not be allowed to finish it – the system will auto-submit your quiz. Thus, you MUST finish the quiz before the deadline. No makeups are permitted, except for medical or family emergencies.

**\*\*If you have any technical issues regarding your quizzes and/or other assignments, you must contact the UF Computing Help Desk immediately at 352-392-4357, option 2. Once you have done so, email your instructor and TA with the details of your problem along with your Help Desk ticket number. -- Please do not contact the instructors without the help desk ticket number.\*\***

Before taking your first quiz, view the [Canvas video tutorial on taking quizzes.](#)

*Online Discussion Posts*

Every week, students are expected to write a minimum of two posts on the online course discussion forums in Canvas. **This assignment opens each week on Monday and closes on Saturday at 11:59 pm.** The first post will respond to the course readings and/or lectures required for that week. The first post must be uploaded **before Thursday, at 11:59 pm.** The second post will respond to a classmate and must be submitted **before Saturday at 11:59 pm.** Students should feel free to post about a topic from the readings and/or videos for that week that most interests them. A few example topics and questions will also be made available to students should selecting a topic prove too difficult.

\*\*Grading for online discussion posts: For credit, the reflection post must be submitted by the appropriate deadlines. Both the initial post and the peer response are required for full credit. Each discussion assignment is worth 2 points. One point will be docked if you do not respond to another student's post. Half a point will be docked if your post lacks a citation (see below). ***You will receive no credit for late or missing posts.***\*\*

In every initial post, you must cite (at least) one of the videos and/or the texts corresponding to the appropriate Module. **All initial posts must include precise in-text citations**. **The citation must be from the text or video assigned to the particular module. You must mention sources and include page numbers and/or video-stamps.** The Chicago author-date style is recommended, but other formats (such as MLA or APA) are also accepted. Please review these conventions and utilize them in your posts.

All posts should be articulate, thorough, and adhere to the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling of the English language. They should be respectful, well-written, and carefully edited, and should exhibit your analytical thinking. You are welcome to go beyond the minimum requirements and respond to multiple students, but you should post at least one response to another student in addition to your original post. Your response must be thoughtful! A simple "*I agree*" or "*I like what you wrote*" will not suffice. Instead, both the initial post and response must contribute to and provide something substantive for a helpful discussion to receive credit. While there is no maximum word limit for these posts, there is a minimum requirement of 250 words for the initial post and 150 words for the response.

Additionally, all posts should be courteous, academic, and non-aggressive. Please note that this course approaches religion from a scholarly perspective, not personal or theological. Be sure to review the information on the academic study of religion while completing your assignments. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated for any reason and could adversely affect your grade. While students may certainly be critical, responses and observations should be presented professionally and academically. Students are encouraged to make multiple (relevant) posts, although this is not mandatory. Discussion posts will comprise **30%** of your overall grade for the course. You can use audio, video, and/or written mediums of communication in the discussion section.

Please be warned that factual inaccuracies will result in a score of 0 for that particular discussion response. Please refer to https://guides.instructure.com/m/4152/l/50010-how-do-i-reply-to-a-discussion for guidance on replying to discussion posts.

*Project*

For this assignment, you should first choose a particular religion you wish to learn more about. The religion you select should **NOT** be one with which you are familiar. This means, for example, if you are Hindu or your family is Hindu, you should not choose a Hindu site of worship even if you consider yourself now to be non-religious. *If you belong to a particular denomination, do not choose another denomination within the same tradition*. The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand a different religious tradition in ways that cannot be fully explained through a textbook or video. It also allows you to learn about the various cultures and traditions that are available in your community. It is advised that you begin this project as soon as possible because, unlike similar observation papers, this paper includes several parts.

*For the detailed assignment, see* https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/512420/assignments/6124241.

The project consists of several parts, including a 6+ page reflection paper that summarizes your findings. It is advised that you begin this project as soon as possible since it includes several parts. This project is worth **20%** of your total grade. **No late papers will be accepted. The project is due Wednesday, November 19, at 11:59 pm.**

*Midterm Exam*

This course will conduct a **midterm exam that will be administered online via Canvas on Wednesday, October 15**. You will have from 12:00 am to 11:59 pm on exam day to start and complete the exam. Please make sure to start your exam with enough time to finish it, as the exam will close at 11:59 pm, regardless of whether you have completed it. The exam will cover the first half of the class (Modules 1-7), and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and other question types. Once started, students will have 40 minutes to complete it. The midterm exam will comprise **15%** of your overall grade for the course.

Final Exam

This course will conduct a **final exam that will be administered online via Canvas starting from Saturday, December 6, to Wednesday, December 10. The exam will be available from midnight on the first day that it is open until 11:59 pm on the day that it is due.** Please make sure to start your exam with enough time to finish it, as the exam will close at 11:59 pm on the due date, regardless of your completion status. This exam will only cover the second half of the class (Modules 8-11), and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and other such short-answer question types. Once started, students will have 40 minutes to complete it. Just like the Midterm, the final exam will comprise **15%** of your overall grade for the course. Additional details on the final exam will be provided later in the semester.

All course activities will be conducted via Canvas (elearning.ufl.edu).

**Course Schedule**

Under the 'modules' tab on Canvas, you will find all of the readings, videos, assignments, discussions, and quizzes for each module of the course, along with their respective due dates. The semester starts on **Thursday, August 21,** and you will be expected to engage with the course material right away.

Please note the following holidays observed by the University of Florida: **Monday, September 1 (Labor Day); Friday, October 17- Saturday, October 18 (homecoming); Monday, November 11 (Veterans Day); Monday, November 24- Friday, November 28 (Thanksgiving).**

**Course Technology**

Frequent access to a computer with a good broadband connection is required. See the Start Here section for details on the technology used in the class.

**Gator Evals**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: [1] The email they receive from GatorEvals; [2] Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or [3] The central portal at https://my-ufl.bluera.com. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students

Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results

**University Policies**

*Disability Accommodations*

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. See "Get Started With the DRC" Disability Resource Center webpage *(*disability.ufl.edu/get-started*)*. Students must share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office.

The Disability Resource Center will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation before submitting assignments, taking quizzes, or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

***Attendance***

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in the course are consistent with university policies. See catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policiesfor more information regarding the University Attendance Policies.

*University Policy on Academic Misconduct*

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the UF Conduct Code website for more information. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code.

**Note on Plagiarism**

A student shall not represent as the student's work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- Quoting oral or written materials, including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution

- Submitting a document or assignment that, in whole or in part, is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authorized by the student

- Unauthorized use of materials or resources

- Prohibited collaboration or consultation

- Submission of paper or academic work purchased or obtained from an outside source

All written assignments, including discussion posts and papers, must include the proper method of citation from the citation style of your choosing. Please see owl.english.purdue.edu/ow

For more information on how to cite your work. Please go through the guidelines for preventing plagiarism.

***The use of ChatGPT or other AI software is forbidden and goes against the university honor code.***


**Grading Breakdown**

**Quizzes:** 20%
**Discussion Reflection/Response Postings:** 30%
**Final Paper:** 20%
**Midterm Exam:** 15%
**Final Exam:** 15%

Please see the [Assignments](Assignments) tool for the points value of each assignment. Grades will be made available in the [Grades](Grades) tool shortly after each assignment is graded. If, at the end of the semester, your grade is within 1 point of the next letter grade, your grade will be rounded up.

**\*\*Please note: A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.\*\***

**Grading Scale**

GRADE POINTS

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/ Unsatisfactory 65-69

F/Fail- 64 and below

Refer to UF-Academic Regulations on Grade points here [catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies](catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies)

**Resources at a Glance**

**Health and Wellness**

*U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit the U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern, and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website

or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

*Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

*University Police Department*: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

*UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care, call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

*GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

*UF General Education Criteria Page*: All undergraduate students (except those transferring to UF with an A.A. degree from a Florida public college or an A.A. certificate from a Florida public state university) are required to complete UF's general education requirement to graduate—requirements listed here.

Academic Resources:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

- Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

- Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with library use or finding resources. Call 866-281-6309 or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.

- Academic Resources: 1317 Turlington Hall, Call 352-392-2010, or to make a private appointment: 352-392-6420. Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.

- Writing Studio: Daytime (9:30 am-3:30 pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138 | Evening (5:00 pm-7:00 pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help with brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information.

- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information.

- UF Student Success Initiative: Visit studentsuccess.ufl.edu for resources that support your success as a UF student.

**Campus Health and Wellness Resources:**

- UF Whole Gator Resources: Visit one.uf.edu/whole-gator for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.