



GRST 200: INTRODUCTION TO GLOBAL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

(Online – Winter 2020)

Instructor: Dr. Joshua A. Irizarry

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Duration: December 28, 2020 - January 22, 2021

Course Credits: 3

Course Description:

Religious expression has been an essential part of the human experience throughout recorded history. Among other things, religion has been a catalyst for social change and conflict, a means of expressing social and personal identity, a tool of political control and of revolution, and a statement of the way people and cultures understand their purpose and place in the world. Studying the way religion has influenced historical events, cultural frameworks, and personal experiences is an important avenue for understanding human society and interaction. A basic level of global religious literacy is therefore essential if one wishes to be a global citizen.

This course is an introduction to global religious studies, a field of study that draws from many different academic disciplines such as anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. We will be taking a multimedia approach to the material, using text, lecture, and film to enable students to recognize, understand, and appreciate the diversity of the world's religious traditions.

This class emphasizes the exploration of religious diversity and does not endorse or advocate for any single religion's beliefs, traditions, or worldviews.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of religious identities, how they come about, and how they are expressed;
- Identify key differences and similarities between worldviews, practices, ideas, and rituals across major global religions;
- Explain how major religious traditions have evolved and adapted across time (history) and space (geography);
- Recognize the internal diversity and complexity of individual religions;
- Develop an appreciative knowledge of different worldviews and faith traditions.

NOTE: This class is taught **asynchronously**, meaning that there are no scheduled class meetings. **All lectures, readings, and films will be available electronically on Blackboard.**

While this format allows you to work on your own schedule, it can also be risky since you are solely responsible for keeping up with the assigned class material.

Observing the assigned deadlines and keeping in regular communication with the instructor are crucial to your success in this class. Please contact me by e-mail (jirizarry@bridgew.edu) if you need assistance or would like to schedule a video conference call.

Grading:

Journal Responses: 80% (16 entries @ 5% each)

Each week, you will be asked to watch video lectures – approximately two hours per unit, broken into smaller segments. **Twice per lecture (and once per assigned film)**, you will write a short, prompted **journal response** (about 250 words, or approximately 1 double-spaced page) in the journal entry link provided on Blackboard. Unlike a discussion board, journal entries are private: **only you and I will be able to see your responses.**

These responses are your opportunity to reflect on and continue your engagement with the material. As you compose your response, consider the following: what were the most important things you learned from the lecture and reading? What insights did you have? What connections did you make? What questions do you have? What would you like to know more about?

Each journal response will be graded on a **0-2** scale:

- 0: Response **does not demonstrate** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 1: Response demonstrates **limited** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 2: Response demonstrates **active** engagement with lecture content and readings.
- 2+: Response demonstrates **exceptional** engagement with lecture and readings.
 - Every two 2+ responses earns a point of **extra credit**.

You must put thought and effort into your journal entry if you want full credit. The journal entries take the place of both attendance and participation, and are your primary means of engaging with the course material and with me. It's vital, therefore, that you put your thoughtful work into these entries if you want full credit. Your journal entries must *productively* and *substantially* engage with information you have learned from the readings, lectures, and videos. **Entries that do not meaningfully engage with the material will not get credit.**

Journal entries are due **every Wednesday and Sunday by 11:59pm EST (GMT -5)**, as listed in the course schedule. Entries received the following day will lose one point. Entries more than a day late or not at all will forfeit all points for that assignment and cannot be made up.

Final Assignment: 20%

A comprehensive assignment which will serve as the course final will be due **by 11:59pm on Saturday, January 23**. More information on this assignment will be provided during the semester.

Course Schedule: (all lectures, readings, and films are available on Blackboard)

Week 1 (December 28 – January 2)

Read: "What Is Religious Literacy?"
Video Lecture: "Course Introduction – Understanding Religion"
Film: "Sacred"

- **Unit 1** Journal Responses due **December 30**

Week 2 (January 3 – January 9)

Read: "Hinduism"
Video Lecture: "Understanding Hinduism"
Film: Sita Sings the Blues"

- **Unit 2** Journal Responses due **January 6**

Read: "Judaism"
Video Lecture: "Understanding Judaism"

- **Unit 3** Journal Responses due **January 10**

Week 3 (January 10 – January 16)

Read: "Christianity"
Video Lecture: "Understanding Christianity"

- **Unit 4** Journal Responses due **January 13**

Read: "Buddhism"
Video Lecture: "Understanding Buddhism"
Film: "The Buddha: The Story of Siddhartha"

- **Unit 5** Journal Responses due **January 17**

Week 4 (January 17 – January 23)

Read: "Islam"
Video Lecture: "Understanding Islam"
Film: "Inside Mecca"

- **Unit 6** Journal Responses due **January 20**

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE SATURDAY, JANUARY 24 by 11:59pm EST