

Syllabus for UWXRE101

Introduction to Religion

NOTE: This syllabus document contains the basic information of this course. The most current syllabus is available in the full course.

Course Description

What is religion? Who does religion, and how does it happen? How do we study religion across history and in the modern world, and how have other scholars of religion studied this phenomenon? This course introduces students to the field of Religious Studies as it has been practiced historically and as it is practiced today, with a particular focus on the study of religion in the modern world. By critically reading excerpts from classic theorists of religion alongside recent case studies, students in the course will learn about a wide variety of methodologies in the study of religion.

Different from the study of theology (a method of studying religion from within a church-affiliated program), the academic study of religion (a.k.a. “comparative study of religion”) requires that we observe multiple religious traditions (including our own), critically analyzing the texts, rituals, and beliefs produced and performed by religious individuals and communities without asserting that any is correct or incorrect. As a General Education course in the University of Wisconsin system, and a Humanities course in the Collaborative Associate’s Degree (AAS), you will develop the **skills** required for a liberal education: **to read carefully, to think critically, to speak confidently, to work collaboratively, and to write clearly.**

Prerequisite(s)

None

Course Outcomes

Upon completing this course, you will be able to do the following:

- Recognize various scholarly approaches to religions.
- Identify the differences between scholarly, devotional, and other lay understandings of religions.
- Employ different methods to compare religious traditions.
- Explore relationships between religion, secularity, and modern cultural contexts.
- Examine the forces of oppression and alienation within and between religious groups and the cultures and societies in which they exist.

Course Requirements/Components

Dialogue Papers

The final assignments of the course consist of two Dialogue Papers. These papers are the capstone for the Home Traditions Project that runs throughout and underlies all of our other coursework. The Dialogue papers are worth 150 points each. The first Dialogue Paper engages your assigned Home Tradition with a statement from one of the 5 “World Religions.” Students choose which of the 5 to write and reflect upon, responding as someone from their Home Tradition might. The first Dialogue Paper should be roughly 1,000 words (3 double-spaced pages) in length. The second Dialogue Paper asks students to compare and contrast their own personal worldview—their values, beliefs, and understanding of the world—with the worldview they discovered in their Home Tradition. The second Dialogue Paper should reflect deeply on the experience of working with your Home Tradition, and the similarities and differences you’ve found between it and your own views. The second Dialogue Paper should be roughly 1500 words (5 double-spaced pages).

The Dialogue Papers comprise the last two Lessons for our course, and are a capstone reflection on the work we’ve done in REL 101.

Unit Essays

At the conclusion of Units 1, 2, and 3 you will write a Unit Essay. Each of the three Unit Essays consist of prompts that engage your Home Tradition with the material from the preceding lessons. Students choose any two (2) prompts from a list of four (4), and write an approximately 500 word response to each, for a total of 1,000 words (roughly 3 double-spaced pages). Each Unit Essay is worth 100 points, for a total of 300 points for the course. The prompts for each essay are found under the Assignment pages on Canvas, and also located the modules for each Unit.

Discussions

In the lessons where a Unit Essay or Dialogue Paper is not due, our work will take place through discussions, as you engage with your Home Traditions, interact with your fellow students and reflect on the topic. There will be two parts to each discussion: an Initial Post and a Reply Post.

Your Initial Post is your response to the discussion prompt. The prompts are designed to engage your understanding of the material and, most of the time, a perspective from your Home Tradition regarding it. Your initial post should take approximately 300 words and be posted to the lesson’s discussion forum by the corresponding Wednesday night. Initial posts are worth up to 30 points.

Your Reply Post is your response to a classmate—usually a classmate from a different Home Tradition group. You are only responsible for making one reply post per discussion, but your post should engage carefully, respectfully, and substantially with your classmate’s post. Reply posts should take approximately 100 words and are worth up to 10 points.

Grading

The following grading scale will be used to evaluate all course requirements and to determine your final grade:

Percent	Letter Grade
93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
77-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
67-69%	D+
60-66%	D
59 and under	F