

**AMERICAN COLLEGE OF THESSALONIKI**

**HUMANITIES 210: RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD**

**Instructor:** Dr. Nikolaos Dimitriadis  
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**Texts:**

1. Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. McGraw-Hill, 2018.
2. *Scriptures of the World's Religions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Editors James Feiser and John Powers. McGraw-Hill, 2008.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND AIMS:**

In this course we will study a majority of active religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity (in conjunction with some time spent on Judaism), Islam—exploring these traditions through considering their perceived origins, their main beliefs and practices; and reading from their sacred texts and literatures. Through reading, discussion, and visual and other appreciations of artistic renditions of religious world-views, we will gain valuable understanding of traditions other than our own, as well as enhanced awareness of our own, thereby contributing to our broadened and deepened awareness of ourselves and our world. In other words, I see the benefits of this course as being both personal and universal.

**Globally:**

*“We live in a fantastic century. I brush aside the incredible discoveries of science, and the razor’s edge between doom and fulfillment onto which they have pushed us, to speak of the new situation among peoples. Lands across the planet have become our neighbors, China across the street, the Middle East at our back door. Young people with backpacks are everywhere, and those who remain at home are treated to an endless parade of books, documentaries, and visitors from abroad. We hear that East and West are meeting, but it is an understatement. They are being flung at one another, hurled with the force of atoms, the speed of jets, the restlessness of minds impatient to learn the ways of others. When historians look back on our century, they may remember it most, not for the space travel or the release of nuclear energy, but as the time when the peoples of the world first came to take one another seriously.”*

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, p. 7

**Personally:**

*“Religion alive confronts the individual with the most momentous option life can present. It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles, peaks, and deserts of the human spirit. The call is to confront reality, to master the self.”*

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, p. 9

**INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

**Students completing this course should be able to:**

1. Demonstrate an ability to identify, discuss, and offer verbal and written analyses regarding distinguishing elements of each of the world religions studied, such as in relation to doctrines, texts, practices, etc.
2. Demonstrate an ability to identify, discuss, and offer verbal and written analysis regarding common elements among the world religions studied, such as in relation to ethical values espoused, etc.

3. Be able to compare and contrast theological and/or philosophical concepts in a comparative reflection on these world religions
4. Describe practices and rituals associated with each of the religions studied
5. Identify cultural contexts and geographical dispersion of the world religions studied

### **Approximate Plan for the Semester:**

#### **Week 1: September 24-28**

##### **Religion and Hinduism**

Introduction to the course

Introduction to one another

In-class writing

**Molloy:** Ch. 1, "Understanding Religion",

"First Encounter", Etymology, Key characteristics among religions

Conclusion: Ch. 1, Patterns among religions, key terms

**Molloy: Ch. 3, "Hinduism,**

Oldest living religion, key scriptures, metaphor of banyan tree, trimurti

#### **Week 2: October 01-05**

**Molloy:** Important concepts of the Upanishads; "Om"--the most sacred sound

**Fieser and Powers:** "Creation of the Universe", 11-12; "Prayer to Agni", p. 15;

"Sacrifices Cannot Lead to the Ultimate Goal", p. 25;

"The Beneficial Effects of Drinking Soma", 16-17;

"Yama's Instructions to Naciketas", 22-24

"Self-Effort and Liberation", 26-27; "Maya", 27; "That Is You", 28

"The Bhagavad-Gita: Arjuna's Refusal to Fight"

ARRANGED MEETING: **A Yoga Instructor.**

#### **Week 3: October 8-12**

##### **EXAM 1**

**Molloy: Ch. 4, "Buddhism",**

Life of Buddha, Three Marks of Reality, Four Noble Truths

Three Poisons and their Remedies, Noble Eight-fold Path

Compassion and the Bodhisattva,

#### **Week 4: October 15-19**

**Fieser and Powers:** "The Life of the Buddha", 86-89; "The First Sermon", 89-90; "The Buddha's Good Qualities", 90-91; "Nirvana", 92;

"Questions That Should Be Avoided", 93-95; "The Buddha's Last Days and Final Instructions", 101-102; "Why The Bodhisattva Works Alone", 108-109; "The Bodhisattva's Vows of Universal Love", 116;

"The Lotus Sutra: Parable of the Burning House", 112-114; "Samsara and Nirvana Are One", 188;

#### **Week 5: October 22-26**

##### **MIDTERM EXAM**

**Molloy: Ch. 6, "Daoism and Confucianism",**

Yin/Yang Symbol, Types of Harmony

**Week 6: October 29- November 02**

Lao-Tzu, Tao-te-Ching, 5 Key Images,  
**Fieser and Powers:** “The Daodejing”,

**Week 7: November 5-November 9**

**Doaism and Confucianism** Molloy: Ch. 6,

**Fieser and Powers:** “Selections from the *Analects*, 162-167; handout of other Analects  
**EXAM 3**

**Week 8: November 12-16**

**Judaism and Christianity**

**Judaism:**

**ARRANGED MEETING : Visit at the Synagogue**

**Molloy:** 1<sup>st</sup> Abraham and the Abrahamic Religions

2<sup>nd</sup> Torah selections, Patriarchs and Matriarchs

**Fieser and Powers:** “Creation”, “Covenant With Noah”, “Covenant With Abraham”,  
“Mosaic Covenant”, 278-286; “Davidic Covenant”, “Psalms”, 291-296; “Proverbs”, 298-  
299

**Christianity: Molloy, Ch. 9, 343-362**

**Week 9: November 19-23**

**Christianity**

**Molloy:**

The Two Great Commandments, New Testament Structure

Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism

**Fieser and Powers:** “Sermon on the Mount”, 349-354; “Good Samaritan and Prodigal  
Son”, 354-356; Gnostic Gospel of Thomas”, 378-382; “Gnostic Gospel of Mary”, 382-  
384

**ARRANGED MEETING: Visit at Christian Churches. Meeting with the Bishop.**

**Week 10: November 26-30**

**Islam and Sufism, Molloy, Ch. 10,**

Life and Teachings of Mohammed, Five Pillars of Islam

The Qur’an, Selections, Exoteric and Esoteric Interpretations, Sufism: Islamic Mysticism

**Week 11: December 3-7**

**Fieser and Powers:** “Opening”, 427; “Revealed Qur’an”, 432-33; “Jesus the Prophet”,  
438-439; “Five Pillars of Islam”, 441-443; “Final Revelation”, 447-448; “Night Journey”,  
449-451; Sufi Writings, 469-475.

**Teaching, Learning, Assessment Methods:**

In the course of the semester we will utilize a variety of ways of approaching course materials, and so class meetings will take a variety of forms. Among these will be a bit of ‘lecture’ or orientation on my part, discussion, question and answer, group work, group presentation, individual presentation, in-class written responses to readings and other materials, some video clips, occasional quizzes, and exams.

**Your Final Grade will be based on the following:**

- **3 exams** (10%, 20%, 10% ) (outcomes 1,2,3,4,5)
- **Written work** (includes two 2-page reflection pieces (10%))
- **Participation** (20%, learning outcomes 1, 4, 5)
- **Final exams 30%**

\***PARTICIPATION** includes the following:

- preparedness for active participation in every class session*, meaning reading the assigned texts thoughtfully, preparing questions and comments to share in class with others, bringing assigned readings with you to class, responding to questions and comments
- performing actively* in group work and group presentations
- performance on in-class writing assignments and/or quizzes
- attendance
- generally giving your best to all we do

**NOTE:** NUin students will write an additional paper of five pages in length, due at the end of the semester. This will be autobiographical in nature, weaving content from the course with travel experiences. To this end it would be advisable to keep a journal of your experiences throughout these eleven weeks, recording thoughts, insights, experiences, visual details, etc.

About Course Policies:

**Regarding Academic Integrity:**

All academic divisions at ACT, both undergraduate and graduate, will apply the following policy on academic integrity:

“A student committing an act of Academic Dishonesty in a given course will receive an F (0 percentage points) in the assignment where the academic infraction took place. If a student commits an act of Academic Dishonesty for a second time in the same course, this student will receive a failing grade in that course.

The individual faculty is responsible for enforcing the policy in a conscientious manner, for reporting all cases to the Academic Standards & Performance Committee (AS&PC) for record-keeping and for informing the affected students of their right to appeal the faculty’s decision to the AS&PC. Faculty must also insert the college’s policy on Academic Integrity in their course syllabi.”

**Special Accommodations:**

If you have specific physical, psychological, or any other learning disabilities that you believe may require accommodations for this course, you should visit the Dean’s office by bringing the appropriate documentation.

**Regarding Attendance:**

**Maximum Allowed Number of Absences**

The maximum allowed number of absences for all ACT courses stands at 6 (six) hours per course, which corresponds to 6 one- hour classes.

### **Excusing Absences**

To excuse absences for good cause (such as medical reasons or personal crises), the student should contact the Registrar's office and, ahead of time or at the latest within a week from the time the absences took place, provide written proof of the cause of the absences. The documents submitted are then evaluated by the Assistant Dean, who decides whether there are valid grounds for excusing the absences.

### **Successful Attendance**

A student is considered to have successfully attended a course if he/she has attended 75% of the course lectures. Thus, the maximum number of absences (excused or not) stands at 11 hours (11 classes) for courses. In case of an unsuccessful attendance, the student is administratively withdrawn from the course. The student has the right to appeal the decision to be administratively withdrawn from a course due to excessive absences and seek reinstatement. In this case, the student, within three working days, must fill in a 'mitigating circumstances' form in the Registrar's office, where the reasons of the appeal should be explained. Following this, a formal hearing of the Academic Standards and Performance Committee (ASPC) takes place. The decision of the Committee is final.

### **Regarding Presentations:**

If you are assigned to present material in class and you do not come to that class or you come not prepared for your presentation, you will fail that portion of the course and will not be asked again to present to the class.

### **Regarding the Overall Plan:**

I will make adjustments to reading assignments as seems appropriate as the semester unfolds, so be sure to take note at the end of each class regarding assignments for the following class.

**Office Hours:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10:00 – 11:00 or by appointment.

Location: My office

### **NUin Grading Scale:**

Grade Description	% points	US Letter Grade	US point grade
Excellent	95-100	A	4.0
Very Good (high)	90-94	A-	3.67
Very Good (low)	85-89	B+	3.33
Good (high)	80-84	B	3.0
Good (low)	75-79	B-	2.67
Satisfactory (high)	70-74	C+	2.33
Satisfactory (low)	65-69	C	2.0
Fail	0-64	F	0

