REL 243 – World Religions
Fall 2012
CLASS SYLLABUS

Vital Information

Course Text:  *Experiencing the World’s Religions*, Michael Molloy, 5th edition

Instructor:  xxx
Office:  Red Mountain campus, Palo Verde (P) building, Room xxx
Voice Mail:  480 – 654 – xxx
Email address:  xxx @ mesacc.edu
Office Hours:  Monday and Wednesday 1:30 – 2:30 pm
Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 – 10:00 am
Friday (at Acacia Village) 6:30 – 7:30 am

Website for class information and assignments:
www.mesacc.edu/xxx

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Course Objective

As the world gets smaller through increased technology in the areas of media, the Internet, and international commercialism, more and more we see ourselves on this planet as citizens of one global village – a community of people with a wide diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, and histories, yet all of us having similar needs and questions. Who am I? Why am I here? How can I find real and sustaining happiness? Is there something “out there” beyond what my senses perceive? What happens when I die? How am I to live with others? Are there some values in life which are always right, or is right and wrong something that each person perceives it to be, and so, different for different people?

In this class, we will seek to discover how these kinds of questions, and others, have been answered by various cultures through their religious beliefs and expressions, and we will study these answers with the view that every person’s search for meaning is a valid search, worthy of our respect and understanding, even though other people’s answers may be very different from our own.

Student Responsibilities

Students will read this syllabus and be familiar with its content – and yes, there will be a short quiz relating to the student’s knowledge of this syllabus.

Students will obtain the textbook and read the assigned pages as listed on the Class Schedule.

Students will attend each and every class and will appear in class on time.

Students will be responsible for printing and answering the seven (7) worksheet packets found on the instructor’s website.

Students will complete all assignments and will turn them in to the instructor for grading by the due date as listed on the Class Schedule. Students will turn in all assignments at the beginning of the class period at the instructor’s table at the front of the room. Students will take two exams (midterm and final) on the scheduled dates as listed on the Class Schedule. Students should inform the instructor either before or the day of their absence on exam days so that a makeup exam may be scheduled.

Students will turn off their cell phones during the class period. Students will not “text” during the class period.

No recordings of class lectures will be allowed without expressed permission from the instructor.

Students who may have disabilities, including learning disabilities, should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss accommodation needs.

Instructor’s Teaching Style

First of all, I am NOT your Church School teacher or Seminary instructor! Mesa Community College is a public-supported institute of higher education, not a faith-based institution. Therefore, this is a college academic course on various religions of the world, not a faith-based comparative religions class contrasting our “true and right” beliefs to the beliefs and practices of “those other people.” Each of the faith traditions in this course will be presented in such a way as to portray the meaning, value, and worth that each of these religions bring to their followers and practitioners.

This is a lecture-based course, primarily because of the wide scope of ideas and information to be covered in one semester. Students are free to ask questions during class, but discussion time will be limited due to the vast amount of material to be covered.

Because this class is lecture-based, it is my responsibility as the instructor to make the lectures interesting and stimulating. As we study each religion, I will teach in a “sympathetic” manner (i.e., “As a Jew, I believe...” or “As a Buddhist, I believe...”). I teach in this manner to allow the students to learn the material in a sincere, personal way, and to allow the students to put a human face to the different traditions of which they may be unfamiliar. I will also present this material in a way that may be understood and applied to our American culture.

Also, to present the lectures in a manner that students may relate to on a more personal level, I tend to deliver ideas and information through the use of stories, a time-proven tradition used by many of the great religious teachers. In the telling of these stories, on certain (and very few) occasions, I may use a strong word to emphasize an idea or thought. Please understand – I am not a profane man, but on certain and infrequent occasions, I may use a mild vulgarism. If you as a student find these infrequent expressions to be offensive, please come see me! I do wish to be respectful of your lifestyle and I do not wish for my style of instruction to be an impediment to your learning experience. At the same time, I wish for you to share with me the same respect by allowing me the freedom to teach in a way I feel most meaningfully expresses the ideas and concepts in these different traditions. As the semester draws on, you will find that I am an entertaining and thought-provoking teacher, but also a man who is most respectful of the various faith practices and beliefs.
Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. Since there is a lot of material to be covered, each and every class is important. An attendance sheet will be placed on the counter in the back of the room at the beginning of each class for students to sign in. **Students who do not sign the attendance sheet will be considered to be “unexcused” absent** — even if the student is sitting in the front row for the entire class. Attendance is kept by signing the attendance sheet. Students do not receive points for attending class, but students will lose points for not attending the class or not signing the attendance sheet when the class meets. The instructor will deduct 5 points from the maximum attendance score (200 points) for each excused absence and 20 points for each unexcused absence.

An EXCUSED absence will be recorded when the student contacts the instructor (by voice mail, email, or previous class time) before or the day of the absence — not later. An “excused” absent will receive no deduction of points from any assignments due the day of the absence as long as the student brings the assignment to the next class.

An UNEXCUSED absence will be recorded when the student fails to sign the attendance sheet or fails to contact the instructor about an absence. An unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from the attendance score AND will result in a deduction of 20 points from any assignment that may be due on the day of the unexcused absence.

The instructor retains the right to withdraw or fail a student from the course for too many absences, excused or unexcused. A student having more than 3 unexcused absences or 6 absences (excused and unexcused) will be dropped from the class unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor.

Students are responsible for finding class lecture notes from their classmates for the days they are absent.

If an assignment is due the date of the student’s absence, that assignment may be turned in at the next class; however, points may be deducted from this assignment if the absence is unexcused (see the Worksheet Packets and Exams section of this syllabus).

**Important** — You are responsible for contacting the instructor if you are unable to attend class — your grade may depend upon it!

Writing Assignments – Format Instructions

There are several writing assignments for this course. These papers should follow a standard format.

- Papers are to be typed (not handwritten), double-spaced, no larger than 12pt font size, with 1” margins on each of the four sides
- No folders or binders are to be used in presenting these papers – simply staple the pages together in the upper left corner

Papers (and all assignments) are to be turned in by the due date as found on the Class Schedule. Papers may be turned in after the due date, however, late assignments WILL incur a penalty. If a student turns in an assignment the class after an “excused” absence, there will be no penalty and no points deducted. If a student turns in an assignment the class after an “unexcused” absence, an automatic 20 points will be deducted from the assignment. Also, an additional 20 points will be deducted from the assignment’s total score for each class day after the due date for assignments turned in late.

Writing Assignments – “Religion in the News” Articles

During the semester, each student will be required to turn in eight (8) news articles dealing with religion in various areas of life, such as religion and politics, religious practice in contemporary society, religion and social values, etc. These articles may come from daily newspapers, weekly news magazines, and Internet news websites (msnbc.com, cnn.com, religionnews.com, etc.). Students will print out or photocopy these articles and include them with a 1-2 page paper covering the following criteria:

- A short review of what is reported in this article
- What in the articles piqued the student’s interest in submitting this particular article

These papers should be news articles about religious events, people, and/or practices taking place currently in the global society — do not report on news that is three years or older. These papers are NOT to be “informational” articles (such as found in an encyclopedia) nor are they to be “devotional” articles about religion (such as, “How my faith in God kept me from harm”). These are to be “news” articles about religion — students should ask themselves whether or not CNN would report such an article in its broadcasts. These papers should be at least one FULL page long — points WILL be deducted from papers that are less than a full page or printed with larger than 12 pt font.

Four (4) of these articles will be due before midterm (and will NOT be accepted after midterm) and four (4) articles will be due before the end of the semester. See the Class Schedule for the due dates for these articles.
Writing Assignments – Worship Visit Paper

Students will be required to write a 3-4 page paper, describing their visit to a place of worship different from their own previous worship experiences or current worship tradition (or their family’s tradition). For example, a Roman Catholic student may wish to visit a Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Latter-day Saint, or a Protestant Christian Pentecostal place of worship.

Please see the Local Places of Worship link on the instructor’s website for suggestions, addresses, and tips on visiting. PLEASE READ THE “TIPS ON VISITING” SECTION ON THIS LINK PAGE BEFORE ATTENDING A WORSHIP SERVICE! Students are not limited to the places of worship listed on this link – the places of worship listed are suggested places that have been visited by students in previous semesters and most of these places are located within 10 miles of the MCC campuses. Feel free to attend any place of worship that one may choose – just make sure it is different from your previous worship experiences.

DO NOT TAKE NOTES DURING THE WORSHIP SERVICE! Remember, these are worship services – under no circumstances should students do anything that may distract the faith community from the worship experience. Also remember that as a student, you are representing Mesa Community College – please act with decorum and respect.

The worship paper should focus on the following 3 (three) observations:

- A summary of what took place in the service (what was said and done during the service, how did the congregation participate in the service, physical layout of the worship area, etc.);
- The student’s perceptions of similarities and differences from his/her own previous worship experiences;
- A description of how that particular worship service portrayed the divine (if any). How did the prayers, chants, songs, or speakers describe who/what was being worshiped? DO NOT ASSUME that because familiar terms used to describe the divine mean that your understanding and the views of the worshipers there are the same – listen carefully as to how the divine is described and depicted (holy, powerful, forgiving, spirit, being, etc.). DO NOT ASSUME that words and terms mean the same thing in all traditions! For example, “God” is one being and has no physical form in Judaism and Islam; “God” is one being, but consists of three persons (Trinity) in Roman Catholic Christianity; “God” has a physical form (Heavenly Father) in the Latter-day Saints (Mormon) tradition; “God” is not a being, but the one unifying force of all life, revealed in hundreds of forms in devotional Hinduism; “God” is the unknown, yet experienced “otherness” of life in many indigenous traditions. Just because people may use the same terms does NOT mean that they mean the same thing as you understand them, so please do not write that the people worshiped “God” – this doesn’t tell me how they (or you) understand the divine.

Worksheet Packets and Exams

The majority of work in this course is the worksheet packets. These packets are designed to help the student to better understand the various religions covered in this course and to help the student prepare for the exams. The information needed to answer the questions in these packets will be found in the textbook, in class lectures and videos, and in various Internet sites.

Seven (7) worksheet packets (about 10-12 pages each) are to be downloaded and printed from the instructor’s website. Please be sure to print out the correct packet as listed on the “Class Schedule.” Students should plan on 5-10 hours to complete each worksheet packet.

These packets will be turned in for grading at the beginning of class and placed in the class folder at the instructor’s table at the front of the room on the scheduled dates as listed on the Class Schedule. Corrected assignments may be picked up on the counter at the back of the room.

IMPORTANT – 20 points will be deducted for each class day in which the packets are turned in later than the scheduled due date (this does NOT apply to students with an “excused” absence on the due date). Please note that assignments turned in at the end of the class period or late on the due date WILL be considered late!

EVEN MORE IMPORTANT – Students may work together in completing these packets and may compare their answers before turning in their packets. This is called cooperation. However, if I see any students simply copying the answers from someone else’s packet because they didn’t do the work, that student and the student who allowed their packet to be copied will both receive 0 points for their worksheet packet. CAUTION – Students are discouraged from “working together by a division of labor,” i.e., one student answers the True-False questions, while another student’s answers the Multiple Choice questions, and then share their answers with each other. This practice results in a student turning in someone else’s work – and that is academic dishonesty! Copying someone else’s answers or turning in someone else’s work and claiming it as one’s own is CHEATING! And it makes me wonder about a student’s integrity if that student is willing to cheat – in a RELIGION CLASS!

Two (2) exams (midterm and final) will be given on scheduled dates as listed on the Class Schedule. These exams may include true-false, matching, vocabulary definition, short phrase, multiple choice, and essay questions.
The student’s final grade will be based on one’s performance and accumulation of points on the following assignments:

(Due the first half of the semester)
- Worksheet packet #1A (General and indigenous traditions) 150 points
- Worksheet packet #2A (Hinduism) 150 points
- Worksheet packet #3A (Buddhism) 150 points
- Worksheet packet #4A (Chinese traditions) 125 points
- Belief-O-Matic quiz (beliefnet.com) 25 points
- Spiritual Type quiz (beliefnet.com) 25 points
- Syllabus quiz 50 points
- Four (4) “religion in the news” articles (25 points each) 100 points
- Attendance 100 points
- Midterm exam (over packets #1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A) 200 points / 1075 points

(Please note that none of these assignments will be accepted after the midterm exam is given)

(Due the second half of the semester)
- Worksheet packet #5A (Judaism) 150 points
- Worksheet packet #6A (Christianity) 150 points
- Worksheet packet #7A (Islam) 150 points
- Worship Visit paper 200 points
- Four (4) “religion in the news” articles (25 points each) 100 points
- Attendance 100 points
- Final exam (over packets #5A, 6A, and 7A) 300 points / 1050 points total – 2225 points

The following grading scale will be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>91.0 – 100%</td>
<td>2025 – 2225 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82.0 – 90.9%</td>
<td>1825 – 2024 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73.0 – 81.9%</td>
<td>1625 – 1824 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64.0 – 72.9%</td>
<td>1425 – 1624 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>less than 64.0%</td>
<td>less than 1425 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Extra Credit Assignments

Sometimes a student may fare poorly on a couple of assignments. If this should happen to you, don’t get too anxious. That is why I offer a LOT of extra credit opportunities; in fact, a student may be able to make up an entire grade-and-a-half by doing extra credit. As an instructor, I figure that if you, the student, are willing to do some extra work, you should be rewarded for it.

Students may earn up to:
- 10 points (maximum of 70 points) for answering two of the extra credit essay questions at the end of each worksheet packet. Students may also earn extra credit points in the True/False section of each of the worksheet packets.
- 10 points (maximum of 20 points) for each of the beliefnet.com quizzes that a friend or family member fills out and signs (only one friend or family member for each of the two assignments).
- 40 maximum points for the “Job” assignment, discussing God and human suffering.
- 75 maximum points for the “sects” religious board game play offered in class.
- 100 maximum points for Worksheet Packet 0A-X (found under “Worksheet 8A” on the instructor’s website). This packet is a fun one, as the student tries to match politicians, vocal artists, comic book heroes, etc., with their particular religious tradition. This packet will be due the first half of the semester and will NOT be accepted after its due date. Please see the Class Schedule for when this packet is due.
- 150 maximum points for Worksheet Packet #8A-X (found under “Worksheet 8A” on the instructor’s website). This packet covers some of the religious traditions mentioned in the textbook that we may or may not discuss in the class lectures. This packet will be due the second half of the semester and will NOT be accepted after its due date. Please see the Class Schedule for when this packet is due.
- Other extra credit opportunities may arise during the semester and will be announced in class.
Miscellaneous Items

Not everything in the textbook will be discussed in class and not everything discussed in class will be found in the textbook. Besides, academic performance, students should exhibit the qualities of honesty and integrity. Any form of dishonesty, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or academic dishonesty may cause the student to be subject to disciplinary action. Please refer to the Mesa Community College Student Handbook for information regarding institutional policy and due process procedures.

The instructor reserves the right to change any or all course requirements, class schedules, and/or class syllabus. Any changes will be announced in class.

Any questions regarding scores, grades, classroom activities, teacher and student dynamics, must first be handled between the student and instructor. Department chairs and/or deans will NOT be involved until the student and instructor first meet to discuss needs, complaints, or alternatives.

MCC Early Alert Referral System (EARS)

Mesa Community College is committed to the success of all our students. Numerous campus support services are available throughout your academic journey to assist you in achieving your educational goals. MCC has adopted an Early Alert Referral System (EARS) as part of a student success initiative to aid students in their educational pursuits. Faculty and staff participate by alerting and referring students to campus services for added support. Students may receive a follow-up call from various campus services as a result of being referred to EARS. Students are encouraged to participate, but these services are optional.

Early Alert web page with Campus Resource Information can be located at http://www.mesacc.edu/students/ears or at the Early Alert” section at the MyMCC link from MCC’s home page.

Official Statement from the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at MCC

Official Statement of Approach

The Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at Mesa Community College offers courses in “religious studies,” as distinguished from “religious education.” Whereas religious education seeks to strengthen a person in his/her own particular tradition, religious studies seeks a perspective from outside all traditions in pursuit of an understanding of the historical, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of various traditions. While the beliefs of religions are taught in our classes, our instructors do not evaluate the truth claims of these traditions, nor do we privilege or denigrate any particular religion.