

REL 2300: World Religions
Michael Muhammad Knight
TR 9:00-10:15
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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:00

In this course we will examine religious traditions through an historical lens, investigating the contexts and processes through which the category of “religion” (and its conceptual offspring, the notion of “world religions”) comes to exist in its recognizable form. Particular attention is paid to the significance of European colonialism and globalization for the ways in which contemporary concepts of religion are constructed both within religious communities themselves and in the academic study of religion. As case studies, we will focus on Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. While introducing these traditions, we will investigate the dominant prejudices, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that produce “world religions” as a category and inform their academic study.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Required Texts

- Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*
- Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*
- Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*
- Additional readings are provided online via the course site

Grading and Assignments

Religion in the Media paper: 15%

Reading Notes: 15%

Midterm: 30%

Final: 30%

Professionalism: 10%

Reading Notes

The readings for each session are to be completed for the date under which they are listed. Over the course of the semester, you are responsible for submitting 10 “reading notes” on dates of your choosing. These assignments do not receive letter grades, but are marked as complete or incomplete. A reading note consists of a 6-point bulleted outline, provided in 12 pt font, **single** spaced, **not** more than one page, with full header (name, REL 2300, date) and bibliographic citation. Reading notes are due **in hard copy at the start of class**. Email attachments are not accepted. In its 6 bulleted points, a reading note covers the following:

1. **Thesis:** in as close to one sentence as possible, explain what the author is arguing.
2. **Evidence/methodology:** how does the author prove her/his argument?
3. **Quote (properly attributed and cited):** use the author’s own words to illustrate the main or secondary points of the reading.
4. **New Terms/Concepts (if applicable):** did the article introduce or draw upon unfamiliar terms or concepts?
5. **Critique:** are there any elements of the reading that you find problematic? Anything that could have been discussed further?
6. **Conclusions:** observations, informed reflections, connections between this reading and lectures or other course materials?

Religion in the Media paper

For this short paper (in the proximity of 700 words, with word count noted on first page), you will employ concepts of the course to engage a treatment of religion in popular media. Email attachments are not accepted.

Midterm and Final

The midterm and final exams will each consist of a take-home paper, 1450 words of content (double-spaced, with word count noted on first page), in response

to a prompt that will be provided two weeks in advance. The midterm and final are both to be submitted in hard copy. Late submissions without justification (illness or emergency) are penalized by 2.5 points per day. Email attachments are not accepted.

Grading Scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	< 60

Professionalism

This includes attendance, which will be taken at every session, and your contribution towards a productive classroom environment. Everyone starts with a perfect score: points are lost for missing sessions, disrupting sessions, undermining class discussion, unexcused late work, inappropriate email etiquette, using phones during class, and other forms of unprofessional conduct. For this course to be successful, the classroom needs to be a site of mutual respect and support.

1% of this score includes participation in the federally required course activity (see below).

Federally Required Course Activity

Per federal financial aid regulation, students must engage in a course's academic activity to receive federal aid for that course. Please take the online

syllabus quiz to meet this requirement. The quiz counts for 1% of your professionalism grade.

Safe Zone and Title IX Statement

I have pledged to affirm the identities of and provide resources to people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

I am committed to the safety and well-being of everyone in our campus community, and therefore willing to be a resource for your concerns beyond this course. If you come to me for non-course-related concerns, I will protect your confidentiality within the limits of the law. As a member of the faculty, I am legally required to report information concerning sexual discrimination and misconduct. Please become familiar with your rights and resources, including access to confidential counseling, at <http://osrr.sdes.ucf.edu/titleix>.

Disability Accommodation

Students with disabilities who may need academic accommodation should contact me as soon as possible. Please become familiar with UCF resources for student accessibility at <http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/>.

Course schedule (subject to change):

Tuesday, August 22: introduction to the course

Thursday, August 24: introducing the study of religion

- King, "Sacred Texts, Hermeneutics and World Religions"
- McCutcheon, "The History of 'Religion'"

Tuesday, August 29: historicizing Judaism

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, introduction and ch. 2

Thursday, August 31: rabbinical authority

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, ch. 4, 5

Tuesday, September 5: Jewish intellectual traditions

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, ch. 7, 8

Thursday, September 7: mysticism

- King, “The Power of Definitions: A Genealogy of the Idea of ‘the Mystical’”

Tuesday, September 12: Kabbalist traditions

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, ch. 9

Thursday, September 14: Jewish reform and reconstruction

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, ch. 10 and conclusion

Tuesday, September 19: genealogies of comparative religion

- Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, ch. 1

Thursday, September 21: comparative religion and ideas of race

- Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, ch. 5-6

Tuesday, September 26: secularism

- Nelson, “The Secularization Myth Revisited: Secularism as Christianity in Disguise”

Thursday, September 28: magic, religion, and science

- Styers, *Making Magic*, ch. 1
- **Religion in the Media paper due**

Tuesday, October 3: rethinking Islam

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, preface and ch. 1

Thursday, October 5: Islam as “world religion”

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, ch. 2

Tuesday, October 10: locating the center

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, ch. 3

Thursday, October 12: constructing “Islamic tradition”

- Gruber, “Images of the Prophet Muḥammad *In* and *Out* of Modernity: The Curious Case of a 2008 Mural in Tehran”

Tuesday, October 17: Sufism and the problem of “Islamic mysticism”

- Heck, “Sufism—What is it Exactly?”

Thursday, October 19: the Ascension

- Van Ess, “Vision and Ascension: Sūrat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muḥamad’s mi’rāj”

Tuesday, October 24: Islam and materiality

- Zadeh, “Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates Over the Material Qur’ān”

Thursday, October 26: “folk religion”

- Gray-Hildenbrand, “The Appalachian ‘Other:’ Academic Approaches to the Study of Serpent-Handling Sects”

Tuesday, October 31: genealogies of Hinduism

- Kumar, “Introducing Hinduism: The Master Narrative”

Thursday, November 2: Hindu revivals and reforms

- Martin-i-Pardo, “The Articulation of a French Civil Hinduism”
- **Midterms due**

Tuesday, November 7: constructing/contesting Hindu authenticities

- Jain, “Who is to Say that Modern Yoga Practitioners Have it all Wrong? On Hindu Origins and Yogaphobia”
- Doniger, “Sacred Cows”

Thursday, November 9: defining boundaries

- Katz, “The Identity of a Mystic: The Case of Sa’id Sarmad, a Jewish-Yogi-Sufi Courtier of the Mughals”

Tuesday, November 14: Introducing Buddhism

- Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, ch. 4

Thursday, November 16: Buddhist modernities

- Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism”

Tuesday, November 21: Buddhism in translation

- McMahan, “Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism”

Thursday, November 23: no class

Tuesday, November 28: Religion in Japan

- Josephson, “The Invention of Japanese Religions”

Thursday, November 30: conclusions

Thursday, December 7: finals due by 9:50 a.m.