

REL 2300: World Religions
Michael Muhammad Knight
TR 12:00-1:15
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1:30-2:30

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*
- Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*
- Ernst, *Following Muhammad* (entire book is available as a downloadable PDF via the UCF library)
- Additional readings are provided online via the course site

Grading and Assignments

Four exams throughout the semester: 15% each (60% total)

Professionalism: 30%

Final Exam: 10%

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. To reward your

careful attention to this section, I offer a bonus point to the course grade of anyone who can tell me why medieval philosopher Avicenna had the power of invisibility (it's a joke that involves traditional Arabic nomenclature and modern sports-entertainment). 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 21: introduction to the course

Tuesday, August 23: introducing critical concepts

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

Tuesday, August 28: introducing the study of religion

- Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, ch.8

Thursday, August 30: Exam 1 (Introduction to Religious Studies)

Tuesday, September 4: historicizing Judaism

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

Thursday, September 6: rabbinical authority

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

Tuesday, September 11: Jewish intellectual traditions

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

Thursday, September 13: Kabbalist traditions

- Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, ch. 9

Tuesday, September 18: Jewish reform and reconstruction

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

Thursday, September 20: Exam 2 (Judaism)

Tuesday, September 25: genealogies of comparative religion

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

Thursday, September 27: comparative religion and ideas of race

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

Tuesday, October 2: rethinking Islam

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

Thursday, October 4: Islam as “world religion”

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, ch. 2

Tuesday, October 9: locating the center

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, ch. 3

Thursday, October 11: 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 16: Sufism and the problem of “Islamic mysticism”

- Heck, “Sufism—What is it Exactly?”

Thursday, October 18: Exam #3 (Islam)

Tuesday, October 23: genealogies of Hinduism

- Kumar, “Introducing Hinduism: The Master Narrative”

Thursday, October 25: Hindu revivals and reforms

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

Tuesday, October 30: 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 1: Introducing Buddhism

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

Tuesday, November 6: Buddhist modernities

- Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism"

Thursday, November 8: Buddhism in translation

- McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism"

Tuesday, November 13: Exam #4 (Hinduism and Buddhism)

Thursday, November 15: Religion in Japan

- Josephson, "The Invention of Japanese Religions"

Tuesday, November 20: Catch-Up Day (TBD)

Thursday, November 22: no class

Tuesday, November 27: science and religion

Thursday, November 29: conclusions

Thursday, December 6: Final Exam (10:00a.m.-12:50p.m.)