

GE2135: WORLD RELIGIONS

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

World Religions

Subject Code

GE - Gateway Education

Course Number

2135

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

GE Area (Primary)

Area 1 - Arts and Humanities

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

AIS4027 Religions and Society in Asia

PIA4027 Religions and Society in Asia

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

“I often say that if I headed back to college today, I would major in comparative religions rather than political science ... because religious actors and institutions are playing an influential role in every region of the world.” John Kerry, former United States Secretary of State.

This course is an introduction to the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam. The course examines the historical evolution, fundamental doctrines and beliefs, practices, institutions and cultural expressions of these religious traditions.

How do people in each tradition articulate the central symbols, tenets, and practices of their faith in the context of the questions and challenges of the modern world? How do people in each tradition think about their own faith in the light of the diversity of other religious traditions? Is religious diversity and difference a problem? What is the spectrum of religious perspectives within each tradition? The course also deals with some of the essential differences and similarities which exist among each religious tradition, and points to the uniqueness of each of them.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Develop a working familiarity with major religious traditions throughout the world and be able to discuss and compare varying theological/cosmological ideas and concepts. Students will also be able to compare various historical and contemporary religious and ethical perspectives through reading and discussion.	x	x	
2	Critically analyse and interpret selected religious texts, beliefs, rituals, practices, and organizations using sociological theories, concepts, and methods to demonstrate knowledge of the intersections between religion and selected contemporary issues, including ethical, social, political, economic, and cultural issues.	x	x	x
3	Describe how and why religions develop and change as societies change.	x	x	x
4	Demonstrate knowledge of the various ways that religious communities are organized, and be able to evaluate how organizational structures affect religious life.	x	x	x
5	Develop the ability to think both empathetically and critically about conflicting religious claims	x	x	

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lecture	Major theoretical approaches to religion are covered in lectures, with examples. Students learn theories and concepts through attending lectures, and through readings and participation in discussions. Students will become familiar with some features or aspects of the world religions covered in the course.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
2	Group discussions, group presentations, and debates	Students will work in groups to lead class discussions and make presentations on specific topics	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
3	Quiz	Each student, working alone, will sit for a quiz to demonstrate mastery of the course material	1, 2, 3, 4	
4	Field trips, field trip reports	Students will visit places of worship or religious sites, and in some visits may be able to experience rites and ceremonies of religious groups. Discussions with one or more believers will be arranged.	1, 2, 3, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Class participation and In-class presentation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	40	-	No
2	Quiz (mid-term)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	40	-	No
3	Fieldtrip paper (individual paper)	2, 4, 5	20	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

1. Class participation and in-class presentations

Criterion

Active and informed participation in class/class etiquette
Presence and communication
Organization and quality of material presented
Group presentation
Reporting of the findings of the field research exercise

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Evidence of excellent conceptual and critical thinking reflected in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Ability to comprehend and critique lectures and reading materials. Student is able to make sophisticated arguments and draw insightful conclusions about the key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, as well being able to extend the different theoretical models in a clear and precise manner. Excellent presentation with conceptual clarity and understanding, high quality data and informant interviews, and excellent use of material

Good (B+, B, B-)

Evidence of good ability to think conceptually reflected in class discussions group participation, written work, and in the quiz. Major themes of the lectures and readings are understood. Student is able to form plausible arguments and reasonably convincing conclusions about key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the theories that underpin them. Good presentation with conceptual clarity and understanding, good quality data and informant interviews, and good use of material

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Evidence of incomplete/marginal ability to analyze material presented in lectures and discussion groups. While the student has regularly attended class, performance has been below class average demonstrating only a general understanding of lectures and reading materials as shown in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Student cannot make sustained arguments or reach convincing conclusions. Fair presentation with conceptual clarity and understanding, adequate quality data and informant interviews, and adequate use of material

Marginal (D)

Evidence of limited comprehension of the lectures or reading materials. The student was marginal in class discussions. Limited participation in discussions, and group work. The course-work was of a low standard and the quiz result was weak. Student has a very limited grasp of key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and the theories used to explain them have not been understood. Lack of conceptual understanding, presentation of some data and informant interviews

Failure (F)

Little or no effort put into the course. The student has failed to demonstrate even a minimal capacity to analyze issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and the related theories. The student has missed a number of classes and participated little, if at all, in class discussions and group activities. Course-work, if submitted, has been of a poor standard or plagiarized. The quiz result was poor. Failure to conduct the fieldwork and lack of coherent and logic in the data presentation

Assessment Task

2. Fieldtrip paper

Criterion

Completion of readings and writing assignments

Application and demonstrated comprehension of theories and approaches covered in the course
Demonstrate ability to collect qualitative and quantitative data from the field trip
Ability to integrate the concepts and models from the module in the fieldtrip report
Ability to analyze the observational and informant interview data

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Evidence of excellent conceptual and critical thinking reflected in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Ability to comprehend and critique lectures and reading materials. Student is able to make sophisticated arguments and draw insightful conclusions about the key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post- colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, as well being able to extend the different theoretical models in a clear and precise manner. Excellent ability to collect observational and informant interview data and excellent ability to integrate the theories and concepts with the data collected in the fieldtrip report.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Evidence of good ability to think conceptually reflected in class discussions group participation, written work, and in the quiz. Major themes of the lectures and readings are understood. Student is able to form plausible arguments and reasonably convincing conclusions about key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post- colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and have a broad understanding of the theories that underpin them. Good ability to collect observational and informant interview data and good ability to integrate the theories and concepts with the data collected in the fieldtrip report.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Evidence of incomplete/marginal ability to analyze material presented in lectures and discussion groups. While the student has regularly attended class, performance has been below class average demonstrating only a general understanding of lectures and reading materials as shown in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Student cannot make sustained arguments or reach convincing conclusions. Fair ability to collect observational and informant interview data and fair ability to integrate the theories and concepts with the data collected in the fieldtrip report.

Marginal (D)

Evidence of limited comprehension of the lectures or reading materials. The student was marginal in class discussions. Limited participation in discussions, and group work. The course- work was of a low standard and the quiz result was weak. Student has a very limited grasp of key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post- colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and the theories used to explain them have not been understood. Lack of coherent understanding of concepts and fieldtrip methodology and marginal quality of the data collected

Failure (F)

Little or no effort put into the course. The student has failed to demonstrate even a minimal capacity to analyze issues and debates concerning colonialism, post- colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and the related theories. The student has missed a number of classes and participated little, if at all, in class discussions and group activities. Course- work, if submitted, has been of a poor standard or plagiarized. The quiz result was poor. Failure to collect fieldwork data and failure to understand the appropriate concepts in fieldwork research

Assessment Task

3. Quizzes on lectures and readings

Criterion

Quality and demonstration of knowledge gained from readings and lecture notes.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Evidence of excellent conceptual and critical thinking reflected in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Ability to comprehend and critique lectures and reading materials. Student is able to make sophisticated

arguments and draw insightful conclusions about the key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, as well being able to extend the different theoretical models in a clear and precise manner.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Evidence of good ability to think conceptually reflected in class discussions group participation, written work, and in the quiz. Major themes of the lectures and readings are understood. Student is able to form plausible arguments and reasonably convincing conclusions about key issues and debates concerning colonialism, post-colonial societies, issues of identity, and other historical and contemporary dynamics discussed during the module, and have a broad understanding of the theories that underpin them.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Evidence of incomplete/marginal ability to analyze material presented in lectures and discussion groups. While the student has regularly attended class, performance has been below class average demonstrating only a general understanding of lectures and reading materials as shown in class discussions, group participation, written work, and the quiz. Student cannot make sustained arguments or reach convincing conclusions.

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Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Comparative religion; Buddhism; Hinduism; Christianity; Islam; Taoism; Confucianism; Religion and social conflict; Religion and politics; Religion and gender; Religion and culture.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Fisher, Mary Pat, and Robin Rinehart. 2016. Living Religions. (Boston, MA: Pearson).

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Ahmed, Leila. 1992. Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate. New Haven: Yale University Press.
2	Bowie, Fiona. The anthropology of religion: an introduction. Malden, MA ; Oxford : Blackwell Pub., 2006.
3	Cannell, Fenella. Power and Intimacy In the Christian Philippines. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999
4	Ehrman, Bart. 2011. The New Testament: An Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings. New York: Oxford University Press.
5	Flood, Gavin D. An Introduction to Hinduism. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

6	Formichi, Chiara. 2012. Islam and the Making of the Nation. Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam In Twentieth-century Indonesia. Leiden: KITLV.
7	Komjathy, Louis. 2013. The Taoist Tradition: An Introduction. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
8	Lopez, Donald S., Jr., ed. 1996. Religions of China in Practice. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
9	Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved In the Language of Pluralism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
10	McDaniel, Justin Thomas. 2011. The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk : Practicing Buddhism In Modern Thailand. New York: Columbia University Press.
11	Schimmel, Annemarie. 1975. Mystical Dimensions of Islam. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
12	Schussler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1994. In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins. New York: Crossroads.
13	Wang, Robin. 2003. Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period Through the Song Dynasty. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Annex (for GE courses only)

A. Please specify the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that the course is aligned to and relate them to the CILOs stated in Part II, Section 2 of this form:

Please indicate which CILO(s) is/are related to this PILO, if any (can be more than one CILOs in each PILO)

PILO 1: Demonstrate the capacity for self-directed learning

1, 2, 3

PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology

1, 2, 3

PILO 3: Demonstrate critical thinking skills

1, 4

PILO 4: Interpret information and numerical data

1, 2

PILO 5: Produce structured, well-organised and fluent text

2, 3, 4

PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills

2, 3, 4

PILO 7: Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team

2, 4, 5

PILO 8: Recognise important characteristics of their own culture(s) and at least one other culture, and their impact on global issues

1, 2, 5

PILO 9: Value ethical and socially responsible actions

1, 2, 5

PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation

1, 2, 4

B. Please select an assessment task for collecting evidence of student achievement for quality assurance purposes. Please retain at least one sample of student achievement across a period of three years.

Selected Assessment Task

Comparative Site Review

*This assignment requires a works cited page! 1800-2100 words

The comparative site review requires visiting two religious services, comparing their services, rituals, symbolism, and theology. You must choose one service from each of the following two groups:

Category I

1. One service should be from an Eastern tradition such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sikh, or any other indigenous Asian ritual.

Category II

2. Another service must come from any sect of Judaism (Kabbalah, Orthodox, Reform, etc.), Islam (Sufi), Christianity (Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant sects), Unitarian Universalism, Humanist/Secular meetings, or other religion not previously mentioned (such as Zoroastrianism, Santeria, etc.).

Here is what your paper must include in order to receive an A grade:

1. Fundamental beliefs (important if you are visiting a sectarian group, and note differences in belief and practice from its parent group), and sources of authority or basis for the religion or sect (such as inspired scriptures, teachers, direct revelations, and the like).

Specify both the religion and the sect or branch you have visited (e.g., Hinduism: Shiva, Vishnu, Hare Krishna; Judaism: Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative, Reconstructionist; Buddhism: Pure Land, Nichiren, Tibetan, Mahayana, Theravada; Islam: Nation of Islam, Sunni, Shia, etc.)

2. Why is the religion here in Hong Kong? Whose needs is the religion/sect meeting? Narrate the reasons for the appearance of sect in Hong Kong.

3. What psychological role does this particular religion fulfill for its followers? (sense of community, absolution of guilt, mystical experience, hope, relief from anxiety stress – or maybe it creates stress with guilt?). How does the theology play into the psychology? Is it a theology of love, guilt, submission, etc.? How does this sect/religion feel about or treat outsiders or those of different traditions? What psychological impact does this have on its adherents and what are the consequences for the larger community?

4. Describe art, symbols, images, cultic objects (including sacred scriptures, if of artistic or aesthetic merit) of the religion – and most importantly, their meaning and importance! Explain how they were used in the building/service. Remember, all kinds of things may have importance – such as the direction the building is facing, the colors used, any symbols.

5. Distinctive dress, articles of clothing, of members and/or clergy of the religion you witnessed during visit. Inquire as to whether normally there is a distinctive dress, etc. in other locations. Include how much adaptation or concessions to "Hong Kong" ways of worshipping you witnessed during your visit (for this you may also have to tap a knowledgeable person for information).

6. Forms of ritual, worship/liturgy, special ceremonies, particular/distinctive practices that you saw practice during your visit. Be sure you can describe the flow of the service and what rituals were performed.

7. Describe how what you saw and heard impacted you; did visit enhance your appreciation for that particular religious faith and/or for religion in general; did you feel you were "worshipping"?; did anything strike you in a negative way?; what was the most positive result of your visit?

8. Finally, be sure this is a COMPARATIVE paper! Discuss the similarities and differences (do not say there aren't any) between the services you attended. You may also draw in comparisons with your own religious/secular background. The paper should be 1800-2100 words.

Your paper should include proper citation and a works cited page that does NOT include Wikipedia or any other encyclopaedic or non-scholarly web site.