

PHIL 1304 • WORLD RELIGIONS SYLLABUS

Instructor: Jae Jerkins
University of Texas at Tyler

Course Syllabus
Spring 2026 Edition

INSTRUCTOR INFO

Email: jjerkins@uttyler.edu

Office: Online Only

Office Hours: Over Zoom, Weekday Evenings, by appointment only

Course Overview | PHIL1304

• This is an introductory course that studies the world's major religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This course will evaluate the student's ability to objectively describe how these traditions historically functioned within their own unique cultures as well as how they practically function within the modern Western world.

• Prerequisites: None

REQUIRED TEXTS | PHIL 1304

Religion Matters, by Stephen Prothero (2nd Edition)

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES | PHIL 1304

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to...

1. Define the basic terms in the academic study of religion
2. Demonstrate knowledge of beliefs, practices, values, and terminology of major world religions
3. Appreciate the philosophical questions each religion addresses
4. Understand the different problems and solutions each religion raises.
5. Trace the historical developments and cultural expressions of world religions
6. Appreciate different religious ethical teachings.
7. Articulate key conceptual distinctions in world religions
8. Read and analyze religious texts
9. Communicate respectfully with people from other cultures
10. Discuss the questions raised by the phenomenon of religious diversity

EVALUATION METHODS | PHIL 1304

- Our course contains 4 Modules. Each module will have quizzes, a discussion post, and an exam
- Instructions for assignments can be found by clicking their respective links on the Modules page
- Due dates for all assignments can be found on the Course Homepage & Course Calendar
- There are 14 quizzes. Your 12 best will be graded — worth 36% of your overall course grade
 - You will have two attempts to take quizzes, with the highest score being kept.
 - Canvas will automatically drop your two lowest quiz grades

These policies are a guide for the course and are subject to change with advance notice.

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- Quizzes must be completed, not merely begun, before the deadline. Every attempt you want counted must be fully completed and submitted before the deadline passes.
- Quiz questions are presented one at a time (backtracking is allowed), and quizzes are time-limited at an average of about one minute per question — plan to know the material rather than look it up as you go.
- There are 4 Discussion Posts. Your 3 best will be graded — worth 24% of your course grade
 - Canvas will automatically drop your lowest Discussion Post grade
 - Each Discussion Post will require you to **respond to two other students' posts**
 - Please note: an insufficient word count in the initial or response posts will have a negative effect (up to and including a zero) for all grading areas in the rubric (see below)
- Your 4 assigned Exams are worth 40% of your course grade (each exam is 10%)
 - *While notes during exams are not prohibited, there will not be adequate time to research each question during the exam. Students are expected to adequately prepare for exams in such a way that notes are not necessary (ie. there's no expectation of note use for exams).*
 - *To further prevent AI use during exam taking: exam questions will be offered one at a time (backtracking is allowed), questions and answers are shuffled, and all exams are time limited (at an average of one minute per question).*
 - Exams may only be taken once (ie. no retakes).
 - Exam 1 covers Module 1. Exam 2 (Midterm) covers Mods 1 & 2.
 - Exam 3 covers Module 3. Exam 4 (Final Exam) covers all course material (Mods 1-4).
 - AI use is prohibited on all exams.
 - Exams must be completed, not merely begun, before the deadline. Beginning an exam before the deadline is not sufficient; it must be fully completed and submitted before the deadline to count.
 - Exams will include multiple-choice and true/false questions and will evaluate your understanding of the key terms listed on each Section Overview page, which are colored green in the lectures. You are responsible for knowing which test to take, what sections it covers, and when it is offered. check the Course Schedule or Course Calendar for the availability dates of each test.
- Your final course grade is the sum of the Quizzes (36%), Discussions (24%), and Exams (40%).
- As several grades are dropped from your course grade, **this course does not offer extra credit** and only offers assignment extensions for very rare, bonafide, valid emergencies

DISCUSSION POST RUBRIC	
0-24 %	There is an <i>Initial Post</i> of at least 150 words that addresses the prompt in meaningful, scholarly ways.
0-12 %	The grammar and spelling of the <i>Initial Post</i> is polished, and American English conventions are followed well.
0-20 %	The required two key terms in the <i>Initial Post</i> are clearly and accurately defined (10% each), showing an understanding of the relevant lectures.

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DISCUSSION POST RUBRIC	
0-16 %	There are 2 <i>Response Posts</i> of 50 words each — both addressing the prompt in meaningful, scholarly ways.
0-8 %	The grammar and spelling of the two <i>Response Posts</i> are polished, and American English conventions are followed well.
0-20 %	The two response posts are both responding to another student's initial post in an academically engaging, descriptive, non-normative manner.

Grading Scale | A: 90-100; B: 80-89; C: 70-79; D: 60-69; F: below 60.
No extra credit is offered, but a few assignment grades may be dropped.

GENERAL COMPUTER USE STANDARDS

- Online coursework requires a webcam and daily access to high-speed Internet & Google Chrome
- Students are responsible for maintaining access to all required tools, technology, and materials.
 - Deadline extensions will not be granted due to technical issues or loss of Internet access
 - See *Distance Education Standards* for details
- My Email Hours are 9am – 3pm, Monday through Friday (excluding holidays)
- Emails sent after 3pm or on weekends will not receive a response until the next business day.
 - Note: I will not be available at night (when assignments are due) to answer emails. Plan to work —and ask questions — well ahead of deadlines.
- Online correspondence must be respectful and professional, akin to a business or legal communication. Inappropriate behavior will result in immediate disciplinary action.
- Students must use their official school email to verify their identity. Please include the course and section number in the subject line to indicate which grade book you're in.
- Students must maintain the necessary technical skills, equipment, and Internet access to complete this online course. This is a key requirement of an online course.
- Internet outages are a risk for anyone working online. *Plan to work well ahead of deadlines to mitigate this risk. Remember, an Internet loss or outage will not result in a deadline extension.*

DISTANCE EDUCATION STANDARDS

- UT Tyler requires daily access to a computer with high-speed Internet for online courses.

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- Students are responsible for meeting all course requirements, including submitting assignments on time, *regardless of location or personal commitments*. No exceptions will be made due to travel, residence, job, or technical issues, as **Internet access is fundamental to this course**.
- If your job, location, or personal life prevents you from meeting *all course expectations* due to limited Internet access, travel disruptions, paperwork delays, or technical problems such as power or Internet outages, I recommend withdrawing and retaking the course when you can offer the course your full participation. *Again, extensions will not be granted for these issues*.
- For technical concerns related to Canvas or other online issues, promptly contact the appropriate support service before assignment deadlines. You may email itsupport@uttyler.edu or go by the **University Service Center**, USC 118 (3410 Varsity Dr) for technical assistance.
- Enrollment in this course confirms your ability to meet all online requirements — including participating in scheduled Zoom meetings (which require high-speed Internet) if deemed necessary by your instructor.

LATE GRADING POLICY

All assignment deadlines are listed on the Course Homepage and the Course Calendar. ***Due dates for all assignments are firm.*** Quizzes and Exams must be completed before their deadlines and are ineligible for credit after the deadline has passed. Discussion Posts *may be accepted late with a 10% grade reduction per hour*. That is, if an assignment is due before 11pm and it is turned in between 11pm and 11:59, it loses 10%. (Yes, submitting at **11:00:00 pm Central Standard Time is late.**) Midnight to 12:59 is an additional 10%, and so on. Assignments turned in more than ten hours late (without a valid excuse) are not eligible for credit.

Be aware that successfully managing your time and digital life are significant parts of your grade. If you choose to wait until the last day to submit an assignment, then you risk something occurring that prevents you from submitting it successfully. *This is your choice and your risk to manage*. But please know when you are deciding how to spend your time that **a last-minute emergency will not grant you an extension**. Again, the due dates for all assignments are firm.

GRANTING LATE WORK EXTENSIONS

While rare, excused absences for an online course must be negotiated with the instructor the *first weekday* you are available. Valid reasons for excused absences include an **unscheduled emergency hospital visit** for you or a dependent, a documented **childcare emergency**, lifecycle events (eg. weddings and funerals), **a crime or vehicular collision** (eg. robbery, assault, car wreck), **jury duty**, or mandatory **military service**. *This is the level of emergency that will be excused for missing a deadline.*

- All absences require an official note of absence, if requested, to be excused (eg. a hospital note or police report)
- Official college functions are excusable *before* due dates with a college sponsor's email
- Make-up work *must* be completed within 7 days of a student's absence
- All make-up work must be completed before Finals Week begins
- Unexcused absences include traveling, vacations, business trips, mission trips, or extending your travel plans into Final Exams. You will also not be given an extension due to poor planning, general transportation issues (eg. missed ride/flat tire/dead battery/other non-emergency vehicle concerns), computer problems, legal action, an illness for which you don't have a doctor's note,

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or changes in responsibilities at home, work, or school. Extensions will also not be granted due to work schedules, lack of technical knowledge, lack of research or writing ability, lack of good judgment, or because you found the course materials confusing — come by office hours or email me before a deadline to clear up any confusion. These policies aim to keep our course fair and consistent for everyone.

GENERAL SCHEDULE

See the Course Homepage for an updated, detailed schedule, including the Final Exam deadline

Module 1: Foundations

Read Lecture Notes & Prothero's Religion Matters Ch 1 and 11

Module 2: Asia

Read Lecture Notes & Prothero's Religion Matters Ch 2, 4, 3, 9, and 8

Module 3: Abraham

Read Lecture Notes & Prothero's Religion Matters Ch 5, 6, and 7

Module 4: Modernity

Read Lecture Notes (No Textbook Readings)

COURSE AI POLICY

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI is permitted only for specific assignments or situations, and appropriate acknowledgment is required. This course has specific assignments where artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT or Copilot) are permitted and encouraged. When AI use is permissible, it will be clearly stated in the assignment directions, and all use of AI must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. *Otherwise, the default is that AI is not allowed during any stage of an assignment.*

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

A first case of academic dishonesty (eg. plagiarism, group work, inappropriate use of AI) will earn you a zero for the assignment. A second case earns you an automatic "F" for the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to *UT Tyler Judicial Affairs* to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be

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careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase. You may use A.I. to study in this course, but you cannot use it to write your post for you. You must be the sole author of your posts.

RELIGION in PUBLIC SCHOOL

This course does not seek to establish, reproduce, or legitimize any particular sectarian view of religion (cf. [Abington v. Schempp, 1963](#)). Rather, **we will aim for an academically rich, religiously neutral, nonsectarian view of religion**. This course will explore religion broadly — for its historical and cultural value, not in a devotional, celebratory, or doctrinal manner (cf. [Doe v. Human, 1989](#)). Our course lectures aim for objective, non-sectarian, research-based analysis. *Your class comments and written assignments are expected to reflect these scholarly ideals*. Rest assured, I will not evaluate your work based on your personal beliefs or lack thereof.