Course Description
Welcome heretics! This course takes a historical approach to understanding the world’s major religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition to surveying the origins, central figures, key beliefs and practices, and major historical developments of these traditions, we will examine their encounter with modernity and their complicated place in today’s global, diverse, post-modern world. Finally, we will examine these traditions in their contemporary American context, looking at the lived experiences of believers on the ground and at the complex forces -- religious as well as social, political, and cultural – that shape their institutions, beliefs, and practices.

The overarching purpose of this class is to promote religious literacy. Accordingly, as a class we will suspend our judgment about the truth claims and the unique practices of these traditions. This classroom is not a platform for either propagating or attacking any particular religion, but a place for understanding and appreciating all of them. We are all heretics, so please respect one another’s heresy.

Prerequisites
Although this is an upper division course, it is also an introductory survey and assumes that students will have little or no previous exposure to the course content. The only prerequisite is an open mind and an interest in learning about the world’s religions.

For History majors, this course partially satisfies the “world history” requirement. It is also required for the minor in Religious Studies.

Course Materials
- Selected supplementary readings posted on Blackboard.

Student Learning Outcomes
Like most upper division liberal arts courses, this class fosters critical thinking and writing skills. However, as a survey course that exposes students to a specialized vocabulary and a tremendous amount of new material, it is primarily driven by content and memorization. Successful students will:
- Identify the key beliefs, practices, rituals, figures, and historical developments of the world’s major religious traditions. Measure: quizzes and exams.
- Understand how these traditions responded to and were shaped by their encounter with modernity. Measure: weekly writing and essay exams.
- Acquire a deep understanding of the beliefs, practices, rituals, and identity of one specific local religious community. Measure: research project.
- Develop participant-observation and oral interview skills. Measure: research project.
- Write thoughtful, concise, and polished formal essays. Measure: research project.
Policies

Classroom Conduct: Students are expected to be civil and respectful during class (see Course Description, above). Arriving late and leaving early are distracting; please be on time, and do not leave before the end of class unless you tell me in advance. Also refrain from excessive talking, sleeping, or using cell phones. You may use a laptop for taking notes as long as you do not distract your neighbors by using the internet.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Depending on the severity of the offense, cases of academic dishonesty may result in a zero on the assignment; repeat offenders may receive an F in the course. I will report all cases of academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Engagement and Success. See the writing guidelines handout for a more detailed discussion of plagiarism. For disciplinary procedures pertaining to academic dishonesty, see the Student Code of Conduct.

Attendance: Attendance is necessary for success in this class; it is also required. After your fourth absence you will lose two points from your participation grade for every absence, excused or unexcused. Use your four free passes wisely. Students who come to class after roll call will be counted absent unless they notify me of their tardiness immediately following the class to have the absence removed.

Graded Assignments

- Exams: There will be three exams in this course, two midterms and a final. Portions of the final exam may be cumulative, though most of it will cover material studied since the midterm. Tests will be based on the lectures and readings and will consist primarily of essay, short answer, and identification questions. Students who miss a midterm exam due to illness, family crisis, or extracurricular activity may take a make-up test if they: 1) notify the instructor in advance of the test; and 2) provide official documentation clearly explaining the absence. You are responsible for scheduling your makeup with me; you must do so within one week of the missed midterm exam. There is no make-up for the final exam.

- Weekly Writing and Quizzes: At least one class session each week (and sometimes both) will begin with a writing prompt or quiz on the assigned reading. The best way to prepare for these quizzes is to read the assignment carefully and study the terms and questions for that section of the chapter. There are no make-ups for missed quizzes and daily writing exercises, though you may replace missed or low quiz grades by completing one or more “optional experiential exercises” and submitting a one-page written reflection about your experience (what you did, how it went, problems you encountered, things you learned). See the Course Schedule for the exercises and due dates.

- Research Project: Because this is a survey course, most of our energy is focused on acquiring a surface knowledge of a broad range of religious traditions. In this assignment, however, you will get beneath the surface, digging deeply into the life of one specific religious community. Working with a partner, you will identify a local religious group, conduct research, observe worship, interview a member, write up your findings, and publicly present your work in a poster session at the end of the semester. See the separate handout for full details.

I use a standard grading scale: A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F=59 or below. Grades will be determined as follows:

- Midterm exam 1 20 points
- Midterm exam 2 10 points
Final Exam 20 points
Daily writing/quizzes 15 points
Research project 35 points
TOTAL 100 points

Blackboard
This course uses Blackboard to post grades and course materials (syllabus and supplementary handouts, lecture outlines, reading response questions, and study guides). You automatically have access to Blackboard by being registered for this class. To log on, go to https://iol.tamucc.edu. If you have problems logging on, please contact the Island Online Helpdesk at 825-2825.

Other Things You May Need to Know

Academic Advising
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Disability Services and Veterans
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Rm #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Grade Appeal Process
Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

Course Schedule
Please refer to the following schedule of events for assignments and due dates. It is subject to change. WRT stands for the textbook, World Religions Today, and BB stands for Blackboard.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>World Religions: Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern</td>
<td>Jan 22</td>
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<td>Jan 27</td>
<td>WRT, 1-37</td>
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<td>Judaism</td>
<td>Jan 29</td>
<td>WRT, 77-100 BB 1: Torah and Talmud</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>WRT, 100-114</td>
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<td>Feb 5</td>
<td>WRT, 115-128</td>
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<td>Optional experiential exercise: eat kosher for one day</td>
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<td>Feb 10</td>
<td>WRT, 129-145</td>
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<td>BB 2: Holocaust and Israel</td>
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<td>Feb 12</td>
<td>Guest speaker: Rabbi Ken Roseman</td>
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<td><em>Research report due</em></td>
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<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Feb 17</td>
<td>WRT, 147-174</td>
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<td>BB 3: Selections from the New Testament</td>
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<td>Feb 19</td>
<td>WRT, 175-184</td>
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<td>BB4: Martin Luther</td>
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<td>Feb 24</td>
<td>WRT, 184-201</td>
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<td>BB5: Modernism</td>
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<td>Feb 26</td>
<td>WRT, 199-217</td>
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<td>Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice silent awareness of God’s presence for at least one hour <em>or</em> unconditional charity for one day</td>
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<td>Mar 3</td>
<td><em>Midterm Exam 1</em></td>
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<td>Islam</td>
<td>Mar 5</td>
<td>WRT, 219-242</td>
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<td>BB 6: Selections from the Quran</td>
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<td>WRT, 243-263</td>
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<td><em>Participant-observation journal due</em></td>
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<td>Spring Break -- Mar 17-19</td>
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<td>Mar 24</td>
<td>WRT, 264-294</td>
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<td>Mar 26</td>
<td>WRT, 294-305</td>
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<td>BB 7: TBA</td>
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<td>Mar 31</td>
<td>Guest speaker: Imam Mohamed Algobashy</td>
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<td>Optional experiential exercise: practice Salat (Islamic prayer) for one day</td>
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<td><em>Oral interview questions due</em></td>
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<td>Hinduism and Buddhism</td>
<td>Apr 2</td>
<td><em>Midterm Exam 2</em></td>
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<td>Apr 7</td>
<td>WRT, 307-333</td>
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<td>Apr 9</td>
<td>WRT, 334-342</td>
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<td>Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice Karma Yoga (fulfillment of social duties) for one day</td>
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<td>Apr 14</td>
<td>WRT, 342-353</td>
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<td>BB 8: TBA</td>
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<td>Apr 16</td>
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<td>Apr 21</td>
<td>WRT, 399-429</td>
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<td><em>Oral interview transcript and permission forms due</em></td>
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<td>Apr 23</td>
<td>WRT, 420-441</td>
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<td>BB 9: TBA</td>
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<td>Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice mindfulness or Zen meditation for one day</td>
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<td>Apr 28</td>
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<td>Apr 30</td>
<td>WRT, 454-485</td>
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<td><em>Research papers due</em></td>
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<td>May 5</td>
<td><em>Poster presentations</em></td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td>Tuesday, May 13, 4:30-7:00</td>
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