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**SYLLABUS**

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**Course description:** This course is an introduction to the three monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which trace their origins to the region we refer to today as the Middle East. All three share a belief in a single god and all three have texts that reveal the will of that god. Their similarities, however, are accompanied by differences: historical, cultural, and practical. Our purpose in the course is to study these religions in an objective manner and to investigate larger questions about the role they play in human culture. Our perspective will be a comparative one, and we will proceed by first understanding the basic tenets and foundations of each faith and then looking at the ways in which the founders, adherents, and texts of each tradition relate to or are influenced by their counterparts in the sister traditions. Such a course will necessarily require mastery of basic data, however, our primary work will consist of close readings of original texts from each tradition and the development and application of critical thinking and writing skills. We will also be conducting site visits and hear from members and leaders of the three traditions.

**Course outcomes:** The course has several goals. First, it aims to provide students with a basic “literacy” about these three traditions; this will require learning key terms and dates for each religion. Second, the course acquaints students with how each of these traditions has changed over time. Third, it introduces students to the comparative study of religion and how scholars compare religious phenomena across cultures. Here, our comparison will be organized around the rubrics of *Sacred Text*, *Sacred Beings*, *Sacred Space*, and *Sacred Time*. This course will hopefully raise our understanding of historical and political events and sensitize us to other ways of seeing and constructing identity. While we will attempt to “get inside the heads” of practitioners, it is important to emphasize that the approach will be a social-scientific academic one, and as dispassionate and objective as possible.

**Integrative Studies in the Arts & Humanities:** **Mission and Goals:** The mission of Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities is to help students become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts of literature, theater, music, and arts; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world.

* Cultivate habits of inquiry and develop investigative strategies from arts and humanities perspectives;
* Explore social, cultural, and artistic expressions and contexts;
* Act as culturally aware and ethically responsible citizens in local and global communities;
* Critically assess, produce, and communicate knowledge in a variety of media for a range of audiences;
* Recognize and understand the value of diversity and the significance of interconnectedness in the classroom and beyond.

**Texts:** We will often analyze and discuss the day’s readings in class. This means that you must bring the readings with you: if we are discussing a book that day, bring the book; if we are discussing a reading posted on D2L, please print out and bring to class.

• Primary textbook: John Corrigan, Frederick Mathewson Denny, Carlos M. N. Eire, and Martin S. Jaffee. *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2012.

• Readings on D2L

• Scripture: Over the course of the semester you will be required to read sections of the respective scriptures of each tradition and bring those readings with you to class. If you already own English translations of any of these you do not need to purchase another; however, if you do not, I can make the following recommendations:

* Tanakh (Hebrew Bible): The New Jewish Publication Society translation (NJPS, 1985) is available online at <http://taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-Gen-1>. The older Jewish Publication Society (1917) translation of the Hebrew Bible is available online at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm>. If you would like to purchase, I recommend *The Jewish Study Bible* (ISBN 9780195297515), which incorporates the 1992 revision of the NJPS as well as helpful notes.
* Christian Bible (Old Testament and New Testament): For Christian scriptures, we will be using the New Revised Standard Version of the Christian scriptures (online at <http://bible.oremus.org>), which is standard in most academic study of Christianity. If you would like to purchase a NT the fourth edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* is highly recommended (ISBN 978-0195289565), or for a translation that provides notes and essays setting the New Testament and the rise of Christianity in its Jewish context, consider *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (ISBN 9780195297706).
* Qur’an: For the Islamic material, one of the better contemporary translations is by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, which is available through ebrary on the MSU Library website at <http://site.ebrary.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/lib/michstate/docDetail.action?docID=10271441>. Arberry’s translation of the Muslim sacred book is available on the web free of charge at <http://arthursclassicnovels.com/koran/koran-arberry10.html>. If you would like to purchase a copy, the Haleem translation (ISBN 9780199535958), it is available online at minimal cost (<$10).

Copies of relevant texts that may provide background or serve as resources for your final project will be on 2-hour reserve in the Main Library.

**Assignments:**

* 30% Class participation (attendance, in-class responses, discussion, site visits and “experiences”)
* 20% Midterm
* 20% Final group (3-person) project presentation.
* 30% Final exam

There are two examinations in the course: a midterm (in class on Tuesday, February 27) and a final examination (Wednesday, May 2 from 10:00am–12:00pm.). It will be logistically impossible to offer alternative times for the midterm or final exam, so do check with family about travel plans, for example, so that the date does not conflict with other commitments. In the case of illness or other compelling difficulties, please consult with the instructor. It is each student’s responsibility to see that the exam times indicated are clear of other obligations.

**Classroom culture:** An environment of trust and collaboration leads to the best learning. This will manifest itself in the course in several ways…

1) Participation: This course is “participatory.” I will lecture, ask you questions, work together with you on the course texts, and have you work in small groups. Classroom activities will vary. Again, my goal is to make this course collaborative.

2) Responsibility: Establishing an environment of trust and collaboration means that you will each individually need to take responsibility for good discussions. This means doing your reading on time, and it means being aware if you are contributing more or less than others. Please do your part to make this class a fun, challenging, and collaborative place to learn.

3) Sensitivity: The study of religion can be a very delicate topic. Students should be sensitive in regard to the beliefs and opinions of others with whom they may disagree. The academic study of religion creates space for discussing all religious ideas and beliefs, as well as questioning those ideas and beliefs.

4) Engagement: As the course integrates lecture with interactive work, active engagement during class sessions is essential. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 2% from the overall final grade, and four such absences will result in failure of the course. Excusal of absences will require appropriate documentation from the Olin Health Center or from an academic adviser.

5) Electronics: In order to promote an atmosphere conducive to learning and your engagement with your fellow students, laptops and cellphones may not be used during class and should be stored out of sight. If you have a special learning reason for in-class use of a laptop, please speak with me in advance.

6) Honesty: All academic assignments must represent the student’s original work and adhere to strict standards of academic probity. Transgressions of this policy will result in failure of the course and formal notification of the student’s Dean. (See below, “Academic Integrity”).

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

**Resources for Students**

*The Writing Center* offers students an opportunity to meet with one-on-one with a consultant while they are engaged in the process of writing class assignments. Appointments can be made up to two weeks in advance. The main Writing Center is located in 300 Bessey Hall, with satellites in the neighborhoods. There is also an online consulting available via Twiddla that allows you and your consultant to view your work together in real-time, talk about it via in-browser chat or audio, and edit it directly. For information about the various services, appointments and satellite locations, see <http://writing.msu.edu/>.

*The ESL Writing Lab* will assist international students with all aspects of their work in IAH courses, including understanding of course readings to be used in writing papers, planning and revising papers, and proofreading. See <http://elc.msu.edu/esl-lab/> for more information and instructions on making appointments.

*The Learning Resource Center***,** located in 202 Bessey Hall, offers academic support seminars and workshops, consults with students about study and learning styles and time management, and provides one-on-one tutoring in such areas as critical reading. For a more detailed description of LRC services and hours, see <http://lrc.msu.edu/>.

**Drops and Adds**

The last day to add this course is 1/12/18. The last day to drop this course with a 100% refund and no grade reported is 2/2/18. The last day to drop this course with no refund and no grade reported is 2/28/18. All deadlines are at 8 p.m. on the given day. You should immediately make a copy of your amended schedule to keep for verification purposes.

**Online SIRS Evaluation Policy**

Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves “grade sequestration,” which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. I hope, however, that you will be willing to give me your frank and constructive feedback so that I may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

**Attendance/Absence**

Engagement and discussion of the material is an essential component of the course and thus your attendance at every class meeting is required and your active participation is expected and will be reflected in your final evaluation. Please let me know in advance if you will not be able to attend any sessions.

**Academic Integrity**

A liberal arts education is founded on the principle of intellectual honesty and trust. All academic assignments must represent the student’s original work and adhere to strict standards of academic probity as specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, [*Protection of Scholarship and Grades*](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations); the all-University Policy on [*Integrity of Scholarship and Grades*](http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.asp?Section=534); and [Ordinance 17.00](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/student-group-regulations-administrative-rulings-all-university-policies-and-selected-ordinances/examinations-ordinance-17-00), Examinations. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not plagiarize material from other sources or submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use www.allmsu.com or other social media websites to complete any course work in this course. Violation of this policy will result in summary failure of the course and formal notification of the student’s academic dean, who will include the report in the student’s academic record and may impose further sanction (e.g., suspension from a unit or program. If you have any questions about the integrity of your work, please consult with me before submission.

The Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU) has recently launched the Spartan Code of Honor academic pledge:

*“As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do.”*

For more information on the honor code and to take the pledge yourself, please go to: <http://honorcode.msu.edu/>. Please see <https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/index.html> for further information regarding academic integrity at MSU and the academic dishonesty reporting system.

Consistent with MSU’s efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, I use a tool in D2L called Turnitin OriginalityCheck to compare a student’s work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student’s work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a “similarity score.” The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student’s work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool. Students should submit assignments to be screened by OriginalityCheck without identifying information included in the assignment (e.g., the student’s name, PID, or NetID); the system will automatically show identifying information to the course faculty when viewing the submissions, but this information will not be retained by Turnitin.

**Limits to Confidentiality**

Assignments submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University’s student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me:

* Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child
* Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff
* Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center <http://counseling.msu.edu/>

**MSU Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy**

Michigan State University is committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information on reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, University policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the Title IX website at [www.titleix.msu.edu](http://www.titleix.msu.edu).

**Communication with the Instructor**

Finally, it is important that we all bear in mind that education is a two-way street. I’d like to encourage you to relay to me in timely fashion any concerns you may have about the conduct or content of the course, whether they be of a specific or a general nature. Please feel free to speak to me in person before or after class, schedule an appointment during my office hours or otherwise, e-mail me (please include the course number in the subject line), or call me on the phone—either home or office (if the matter is pressing, please call me at home as I check messages there regularly).

**Course Schedule[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Assignment** |
| Week 1 — Introduction to Comparative Religious Studies | | |
| Tue 1/9 |  |  |
| Thu 1/11 |  | William E. Paden, “Comparative Perspective in the Study of Religion” (D2L)  Clifford Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System” [D2L]  Talal Asad, “Religion as an Anthropological Category” [D2L] |
| Week 2 — Scripture and Tradition | | |
| Tue 1/16 |  | “Preface”, vii-xi; Chapter 1: “Scripture and Tradition in Judaism,” pp. 1–19 |
| Thu 1/18 |  | Chapter 2: “Scripture and Tradition in Christianity,” pp. 20–39 |
| Week 3 — Scripture and Tradition (cont.)/Monotheism | | |
| Tue 1/23 |  | Chapter 3: “Scripture and Tradition in Islam,” pp. 40–52 |
| Thu 1/25 |  | Chapter 4: “Monotheism in Judaism,” pp. 55–76 |
| Week 4 — Monotheism (cont.) | | |
| Tue 1/30 |  | Chapter 5: “Monotheism in Christianity,” pp. 77–100 |
| Thu 2/1 |  | Chapter 6: “Monotheism in Islam,” pp. 101–112 |
| Week 5 — Authority | | |
| Tue 2/6 |  | Chapter 7: “Authority in Judaism,” pp. 115–128 |
| Thu 2/8 |  | Chapter 8: “Authority in Christianity,” pp. 129–144 |
| Week 6 — Authority (cont.)/Worship and Ritual | | |
| Tue 2/13 |  | Chapter 9: “Authority in Islam,” pp. 145–156 |
| Thu 2/15 |  | Chapter 10: “Worship and Ritual in Judaism,” pp. 157–173 |
| Week 7 — Worship and Ritual (cont.) | | |
| Tue 2/20 |  | Chapter 11: “Worship and Ritual in Christianity,” pp. 174–190 |
| Thu 2/22 |  | Chapter 12: “Worship and Ritual in Islam,” pp. 191–202 |
| Week 8 — Ethics | | |
| Tue 2/27 | Midterm | |
| Thu 3/1 |  | Chapter 13: “Ethics in Judaism,” pp. 205–218 |
| Week 9—Spring Break | | |
| Week 10 — Ethics (cont.) | | |
| Tue 3/13 |  | Chapter 14: “Ethics in Christianity,” pp. 219–240 |
| Thu 3/15 |  | Chapter 15: “Ethics in Islam,” pp. 241–250 |
| Week 11 — Ethics (cont.)/Material Culture | | |
| Tue 3/20 |  | Chapter 16: “Material Culture in Judaism,” pp. 253–272 |
| Thu 3/22 |  | Chapter 17: “Material Culture in Christianity,” pp. 273–294 |
| Week 12 — Material Culture (cont.)/ Religion and the Political Order | | |
| Tue 3/27 |  | Chapter 18: Material Culture in Islam,” pp. 295–307 |
| Thu 3/29 |  | Chapter 19: “Religion and the Political Order in Judaism,” pp. 309–325 |
| Week 13 | | |
| Tue 4/3 | TBD | |
| Thu 4/5 | TBD | |
| Week 14 — Religion and the Political Order (cont.) | | |
| Tue 4/10 |  | Chapter 20: “Religion and the Political Order in Christianity,” pp. 326–345 |
| Thu 4/12 |  | Chapter 21: “Religion and the Political Order in Islam”, pp. 346–356 |
| Week 15— Project Presentations | | |
| Tue 4/17 |  |  |
| Thu 4/19 |  |  |
| Week 16 — Project Presentations | | |
| Tue 4/24 |  |  |
| Thu 4/26 |  |  |
| Week 16 |  | |
| Wed 5/2 | Final exam 10:00am–12:00pm (in regular classroom) | |

1. Note: This is a somewhat barebones outline and is subject to change. More details and additional material will be provided as we proceed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)