



WBUonline
School of Christian Studies

UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success and service to God and humankind.

COURSE NUMBER & NAME:

PHIL/THST 5333 World Religions

TERM & DATES:

Fall 1 2024 Aug 7—Sept 30, 2024

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. J. M. Givens Jr.
Professor of Theological Studies
Director of Online Christian Studies Programs

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Office phone: 806.291.1166 (assistant 806.291.1160)
WBU Email: jgivens@wbu.edu
Mobile phone: 806.292.3957 (please reserve for emergencies)

OFFICE HOURS, BUILDING & LOCATION:

Flores Bible Building office suite
Office Hours will be posted in the Instructor Info section of Blackboard

COURSE MEETING TIME & LOCATION:

Asynchronous interaction with specific deadlines managed through [Blackboard](#)

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

Research in the origin, personalities, historical development, and basic thought of major religions of the world.

PREREQUISITE:

None

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND RESOURCE MATERIAL:

| Title | Editor/Author | Publisher | Ed | Year | ISBN |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----|------|---------------|
| <i>Invitation to World Religions</i> | Jeffrey Brodd, et al. | Oxford | 4th | 2021 | 9780197543788 |
| <i>Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions</i> | Gerald McDermott | InterVarsity | | 2000 | 9780830822744 |

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| Bible | Any modern translation recognized by mainstream Christianity |
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NOTE: There are Automatic eBooks already in the Blackboard classroom – click on the menu link for information. Should you wish to purchase a print copy remember to opt out by the date listed in Blackboard.

1. INTERNET EQUIPPED COMPUTER

- A. Must conform to [minimum recommended settings](#) identified by WBUonline
- B. Should use compatible browser and have [correct settings](#) as recommended by Blackboard
- C. Must utilize WBU [student email account](#) for official university communications

2. WBU BLACKBOARD COURSE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

- A. All assignments and other class issues will be available through [Blackboard](#).
- B. WBUonline technical support can assist you with log in issues, such as username and password.
- C. Contact to technical support is available on the login page of Blackboard. Support is 24/7 support by phone and available also by chat or creating a case.

3. WBU MABEE LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER

- A. Use the [LRC website](#) to search for book (sent via priority mail), articles, online articles and e-books, and other resources.
- B. The website also has tutorials for using their services.
- C. [Email](#) the Distance Learning Librarian with questions on LRC and assistance identifying/securing resources for papers.

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

1. Terry Muck & Frances S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century*, Baker
Explores issues related to Christian witness to other faith traditions.
2. Gerald McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church*, InterVarsity
Explores perspectives from the Bible and early Christian theologians on the existence of other faiths and how Christians should approach these faiths in witness and interaction.
3. James W. Laine, *Meta-Religion: Religion and Power in World History*, University of California
Explores the interaction of religions and world powers from Alexander the Great and Ashoka through the modern era.

COURSE OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES:

The student will:

1. identify the fundamental beliefs and define the basic vocabulary of the major world religions
2. discuss the significant historical events, persons, and groups related to the origin and development of the major world religions

3. identify areas of commonality and difference between Christianity and the other major world religions which might promote an effective witness
4. create a presentation that informs classmates about a religious belief system, an application of a religious concept or practice, or a theological understanding of revelation
5. encounter and interact with adherents of other faith communities

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance for online courses is defined fully in the [university catalog](#).
2. Students are expected to participate in all required instructional activities in their courses.
3. Student "attendance" in an online course is defined as active participation in the course as described in the course syllabus (completing weekly assignments).
4. Students aware of necessary absences must inform the professor with as much advance notice as possible in order to make appropriate arrangements.
5. Any student absent 25 percent or more of the online course, i.e., non-participatory during 2 or more weeks of an 8 week term, may receive an F for that course.
6. Any student who has not actively participated in an online class prior to the census date for any given session is considered a "no-show" and will be administratively withdrawn from the class without record. To be counted as actively participating, it is not sufficient to log in and view the course. The student must be submitting work as described in the course syllabus.
7. A student with excessive non-participation may also have a Predict Report filed with student's WBU email and appropriate administrative personnel.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Read Wayland Baptist University's [policy on academic integrity](#), as you will be held to it in this course. There is a no tolerance for plagiarism or academic dishonesty.

No use of any generative AI tools permitted.

1. Students are required to create and produce all work themselves or with assigned group members. Any work submitted that has used an AI generative tool like ChatGPT will be in immediate violation of the academic integrity policies for the course and WBU.
2. All assignments must be fully created, designed, and prepared by the student(s).
3. Any work that uses generative AI will be treated as plagiarism.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university. The Disability Services Coordinator and Academic Coach serves as the coordinator of students with disabilities and must be contacted concerning accommodation requests (office (806) 291-1057. Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING CRITERIA:

1. *Blackboard Scavenger Hunt.* The hunt is designed to help familiarize you with the essential features of Blackboard. **Complete by Wednesday of Week 1 (3rd day of class). 1 point** will be deducted each day for **late submissions**.
2. *Weekly Reading Quizzes.* Students will take quizzes over chapters in Brodd text. Quizzes may be repeated as students' desire and the highest grade for each quiz will be retained.
3. *Weekly Discussion.* Student interaction through class discussion enhances learning and understanding. Discussion will be over the Brodd text and often another reading. Discussions will help students understand one or more aspects of the religion more fully. Initial posts should be substantive, informative, and should enhance the learning experience for the student and colleagues. Interaction is expected, so subsequent responses to student posts or to instructor inquiries, and questions to others about their posts to gain clarity or deeper understanding will be part of the evaluation. See weekly grading rubric and the Course Info section of the course in Blackboard for detailed description of expectations.
4. *Weekly Investigations.* Students will have the opportunity to explore selected aspects of each religion in more detail through additional readings, web content, videos, and other means. The intent of these explorations is to allow students the opportunity to engage areas of interest as well as to see how the religion is lived out or impacts practitioners. Interaction with classmates is not expected but reading their posts would be informative. See weekly grading rubric and the Course Info section of the course in Blackboard for detailed description of expectations.
5. *Class Presentation.* Students will create a 10-20 minute presentation about a religion, an application of a religious concept or practice that would benefit Christians, or an understanding of revelation as it relates to the existence of other religions. Presentations will be based on the two textbooks as assigned by the instructor. Presentations will be created using presentation software and uploaded to YouTube. Most presentations will be due at the end of week 6 for classmates' review on week 7. A few presentations may be assigned for a different week, depending on the number of graduate students. See the Course Info section of the course in Blackboard for detailed description of expectations.
6. *Reflective Paper.* Students will write a 5-8 page reflective paper. Students will discuss their personal view, in dialogue with McDermott's arguments, about revelation and the religions, specifically why "truth" seems to exist at some level within other religious traditions. You will also address McDermott's contention that Evangelicals can learn from the religions. Regardless whether you agree with McDermott's arguments or not, you will conclude the paper by selecting a religion studied this term and discussing specific beliefs and practices within that religion that could be used as a bridge for effective Christian witness to the good news of Jesus as the Christ.

7. *Field Trip.* Students will attend worship services/meetings of other faiths to provide an opportunity to encounter "real-life" adherents of other religions rather than just scholarly statements/analysis of these religions. A 4-6 page report will be submitted for the visit, briefly describing the visit but primarily focused on a comparison of the experience with your own beliefs and how the religion was described in our text. See the Course Info section of the course in Blackboard for detailed description of expectations. **One field trip is required.** **Extra credit** will be available to students for additional field trips with accompanying reports.

MAKEUPS. Students should **plan early** to complete the required trips. Organizations must be approved by instructor **prior** to attendance. Students need to **contact instructor immediately** if they foresee that they will have difficulties completing this assignment so that the instructor can assist in resolving the issue or in developing an alternative exercise.

8. *Examination.* There will be a final exam for the course. The questions will be over reading assignments, handouts and other material provided by the instructor and classmates, as well as class discussion and independent research. Further instructions will be posted on Blackboard prior to the exam.

MAKEUPS. Students **must** secure prior permission to take the exam at a time other than the scheduled testing period. Because the testing is given over a period of time, late testing will **only** be allowed in the most unusual of circumstances. Lack of preparation or planning does not constitute an emergency situation.

9. *Extra Credit.* As stated above, additional field trips may be completed (including reports) for extra credit in the course. In addition, students "on the bubble" between two grades will be evaluated for overall community development during the term. How frequent/helpful were their interactions on the weekly discussion board? How much did they participate in non-graded discussions, such as prayer requests or religion in the news? How much additional effort did they demonstrate on assignments such as the scavenger hunt? These could help push a student over the edge of a grade break.

GRADING CRITERIA

University Grading Scale

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| A | 90-100 |
| B | 80-89 |
| C | 70-79 |
| D | 60-69 |
| F | below 60 |

Procedure Used for Computation of Final Grade

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|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Blackboard Scavenger Hunt..... | 5% |
| 2. Weekly Reading Quizzes | 15% |
| 3. Weekly Discussion | 15% |
| 4. Weekly Investigations..... | 10% |
| 5. Class Presentation | 15% |
| 6. Reflective Paper | 10% |
| 7. Field trip report..... | 10% |
| 8. Examination | 20% |

Grade Appeal Statement: Students shall have protection through orderly procedures against prejudices or capricious academic evaluation. A student who believes that he or she has not

been held to realistic academic standards, just evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course by using the student grade appeal process described in the Academic Catalog. Appeals may not be made for advanced placement examinations or course bypass examinations. Appeals are limited to the final course grade, which may be upheld, raised, or lowered at any stage of the appeal process. Any recommendation to lower a course grade must be submitted through the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee for review and approval. The Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee may instruct that the course grade be upheld, raised, or lowered to a more proper evaluation.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

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| Week 1 | An Invitation to the Study of World Religions – Brodd ch 1 |
| Week 2 | Hinduism – Brodd ch 4 |
| Week 3 | Buddhism – Brodd ch 5 (possible grad presentation) |
| Week 4 | Judaism – Brodd ch 11 |
| Week 5 | Islam – Brodd ch 13 (possible grad presentation) |
| Week 6 | Sikhism – Brodd ch 7 |
| Week 7 | Grad Presentations: Native American Religions, African Traditional Religions, Jainism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism (possibly others) |
| Week 8 | Field Trip Report, Reflective Paper and Final Exam |

INSTRUCTOR'S CONFESSIONAL STATEMENT

The following will help you understand the instructor's view about World Religions. It is the instructor's belief that God is triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son is the Word of God, bearing witness and revealing the Father to the world (John 1:18). The Spirit enables humans to understand and act upon the revelation of the Word of God (John 16:13). The Word gives light to every human in the world (John 1:3), though never as clearly as in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's final Word (Heb 1:2). In Jesus, the Word became flesh (John 1:14), and we have beheld the fullness of God (Col 1:19), the exact representation of his being (Heb 1:3). Without this final revelation in Christ, the Spirit is limited in helping humans hear and understand the witness of the Word of God that comes to every human (Eph 3:5). With the proclamation of the gospel, however, the Spirit of God is poured out on all flesh in power (Acts 10:45). Thus, it is central to the Christian life to bear witness to the Word of God, so that all might know him and respond to him (Acts 1:8).

The finite and fallen nature of humans causes them to struggle to rightly understand the witness of Word and Spirit apart from the good news of the reign of King Jesus (Acts 17:27-28). Yet to one extent or another, they have glimpsed parts of the glory of God. Whatever is true in other religions is there because of the work of Word and Spirit preparing the way for the coming of the true light (John 1:3). When Jesus' good news comes, those who lived by the light step into this fuller light so all may see that it is God who has been at work (John 3:19-21). Some of the perspectives on truth found in other religious traditions can enhance our own

Christian faith, as all of our cultures reflect to one degree or other the image of God and are a means to prepare us to be a people from every tribe & language & people & nation (Rev 5:9).

The instructor is also committed to the historic position of Baptists that religious liberty is for all . . . including his students. ☺

Let them be heretics, Turks [i.e., Muslims], Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them.

- Thomas Helwys, British Baptist and author of *The Mystery of Iniquity*, the first defense of religious liberty in the English language; quoted in *Baptist Theologians* by Timothy George and David Dockery (1990, p. 15).

The liberty I contend for, is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration, is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest, to grant indulgence; whereas, all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians. Test oaths and established creeds should be avoided as the worst of evils.

- John Leland, Virginia Baptist and advocate for the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; quoted in *Baptist Ways* by Bill Leonard (2003, pp. 130-31).

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Few topics are as important as this course for Christian witness in the 21st Century.
2. This will be a great class if you enjoy learning and are willing to participate.
3. Minor changes may occur to the syllabus before start of term. **Use syllabus in Blackboard.**