



Religions of the World



Image from cover of Vol. 9, Issue 2 of *The Arrow*

RELS 1401

An introductory survey of the basic issues in global religious & cultural traditions of the world with special emphasis on religious narratives & experiences, sacred literature, & theological/philosophical discourses. The course also considers the role of rituals & symbols in religious traditions. The content & assessments exercise students' ability to critically, reflexively, & if applicable, faithfully compare across cultures, religions, worldviews, & experiences.

Prof: axel marc oaks takacs (dr takacs)

1402 BB

MW 9:30AM - 10:45AM (ROOM TBA)

1402 DD

MW 11:00AM-12:15PM (ROOM TBA)

Canvas

This class relies heavily on the learning management system, Canvas. All of your daily readings, assignments, submissions, and due dates will be found on Canvas.

Readings that are not found in the required textbook will be made available as PDFs on Canvas, as well as links to videos and podcasts.

The course will be Modules-driven, that is, nearly ALL assignments will be found on the Modules page within their respective modules. Think of Modules like a “Unit” of the course.

The only assignments that are not found within Modules are the two in-class tests, the Creative Art Assignment, and the Final Exam.



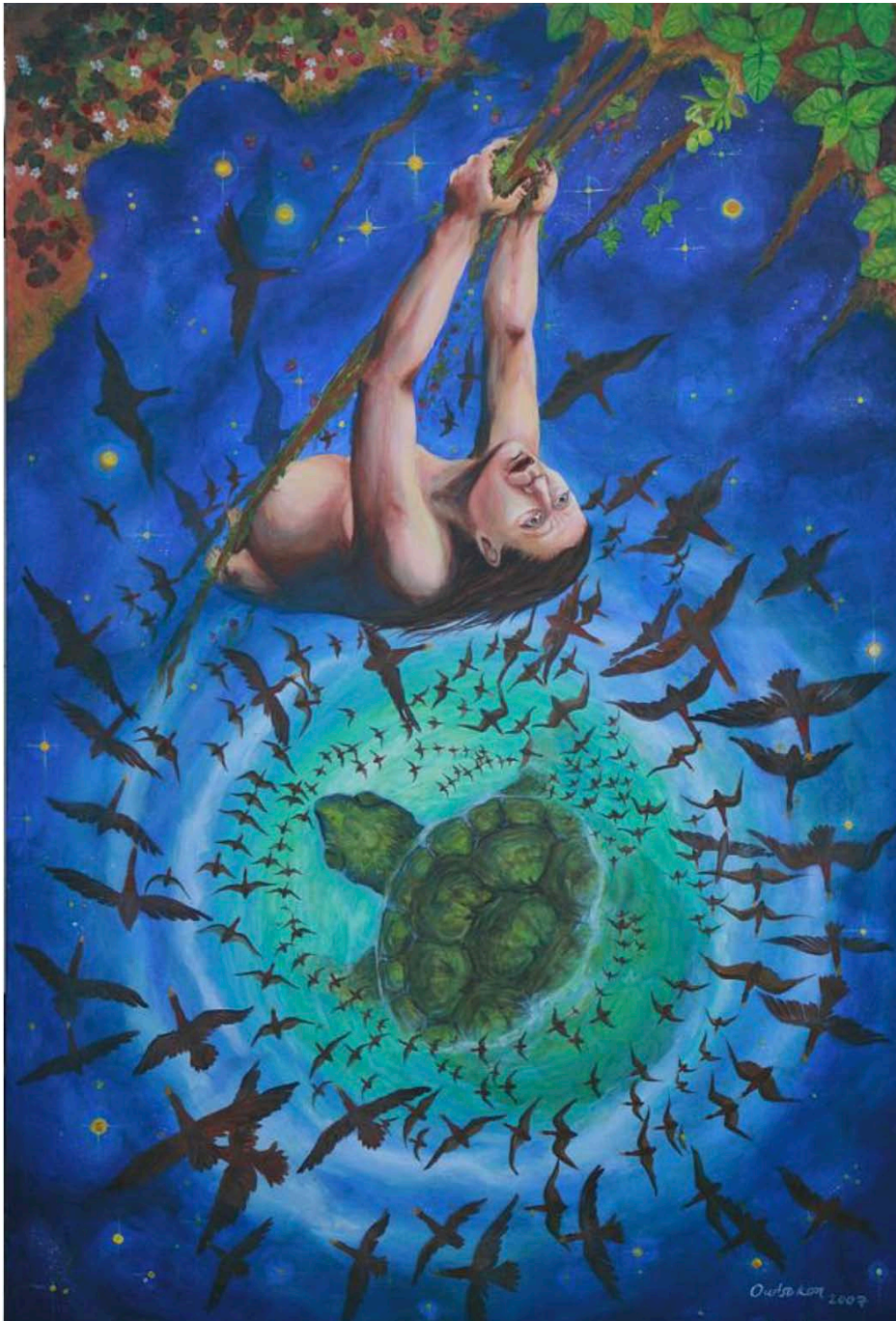
Mai, by Malvika Raj, a portrait of Savitribai Phule, one of the pioneers of modern education in India. Raj is a Dalit, Indian artist whose art is shaped by her experiences with caste-based discrimination in India. She employs traditional techniques to express themes relating to Dalit identity and the Buddhist religion

about this land

Seton Hall is located on Lenapehoking, the
unceded and ancestral lands of the Munsee
Lenape, indigenous peoples of Turtle Island,
what is now called the USA (NJ).

about the professor

dr takacs is a scholar of classical & post-
classical islamic intellectual & poetic traditions,
interreligious studies, and
a catholic comparative theologian



by Owisokon Lahache,
a practicing Iroquois artist (Mohawk, Turtle Clan)

How do I contact
dr takacs?

email
takacsax@shu.edu

office
Fahy Hall 328

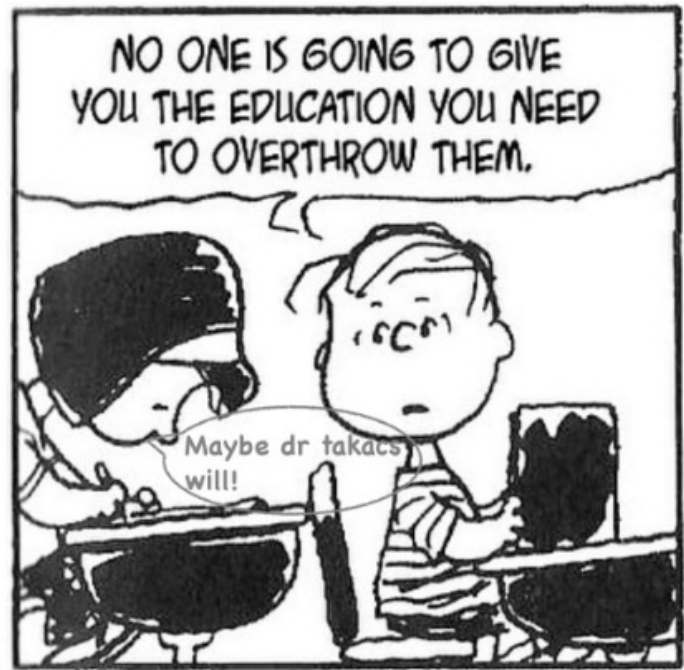
office hours
Tuesday
10AM-12PM

Thursday
2PM-4PM

Lunch Chats
M-F 12:30 - 1:45 PM
University Center
Dining Hall

~in-person~
~MS Teams~

**Education Is Not A Product.
The Students Are Not Customers.
The Professors Are Not Tools.
The University Is Not A Factory.**



Literacy, Intelligence, and Proficiency

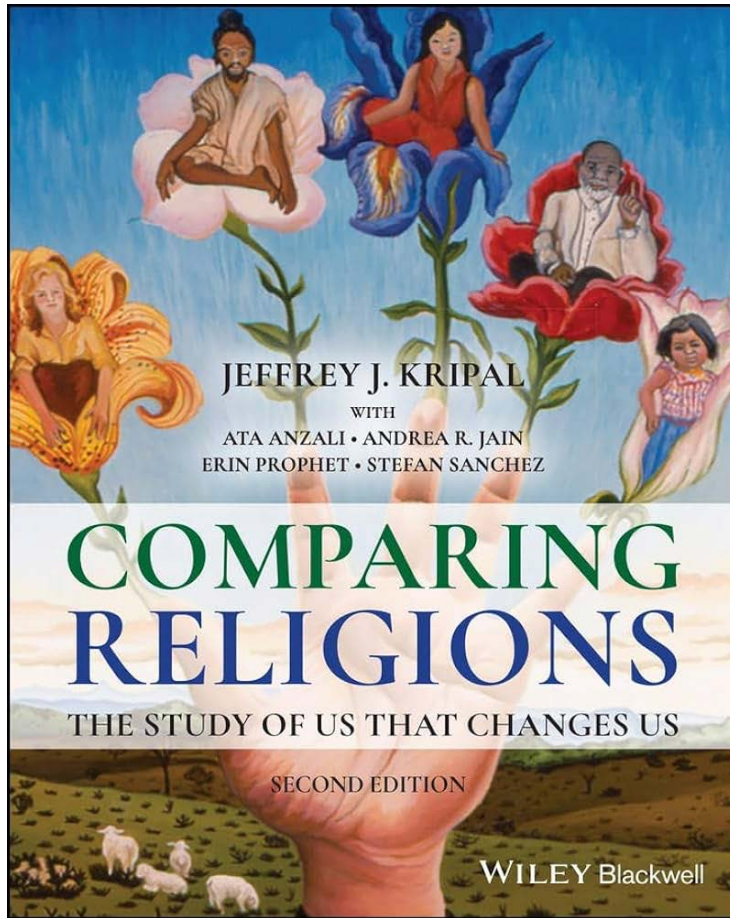
This class cultivates interreligious literacy, intelligence, and proficiency (see Christine Hong, *Decolonial Futures* [2021]). We will not “master” or “become competent” in the religions of the world.

Interreligious Literacy provides students with the basic building blocks for understanding inter- and intra-religious **diversity**. It enables us to identify and explain various religious and interreligious histories, contexts, traditions, theologies, practices, ethics, and values. It **comprehends the present in light of the past**.

Interreligious intelligence is the intellectual, social, and imaginative capacity to apply interreligious literacy to various contexts in one’s future. It enables us to employ interreligious knowledge in making judgments about the best course of action in any given diverse context. It is not neutral but grounded in **justice-oriented critical thinking** that seeks to construct a world in which religious pluralism and diversity is affirmed. It **imagines a future yet unknown**.

Interreligious proficiency is the practice of executing those judgments in the real world. Students develop **habits of mind, inquiry, and action** that shape how they relate to self and others in the context of a religiously diverse world. It is the **embodied practice** of interreligious intelligence and **constructs a future to be known**.

required book



There is one required textbook. Not only will you have assigned readings from these books, but in-class discussion, online responses, and written assessments will be taken from it. So it is very **much required**.

Comparing Religions: The Study of Us That Changes Us, 2nd Edition, Jeffrey J. Kripal with Andrea R. Jain, Erin Prophet, Stefan Sanchez, and Ata Anzali

ISBN: 978-1-119-65393-6 | March 2024 | Wiley-Blackwell | 528 pages



Other readings, videos, or podcasts—especially those surveying particular religious traditions—will be made available as PDF or some other digital format on Canvas.

other learning materials



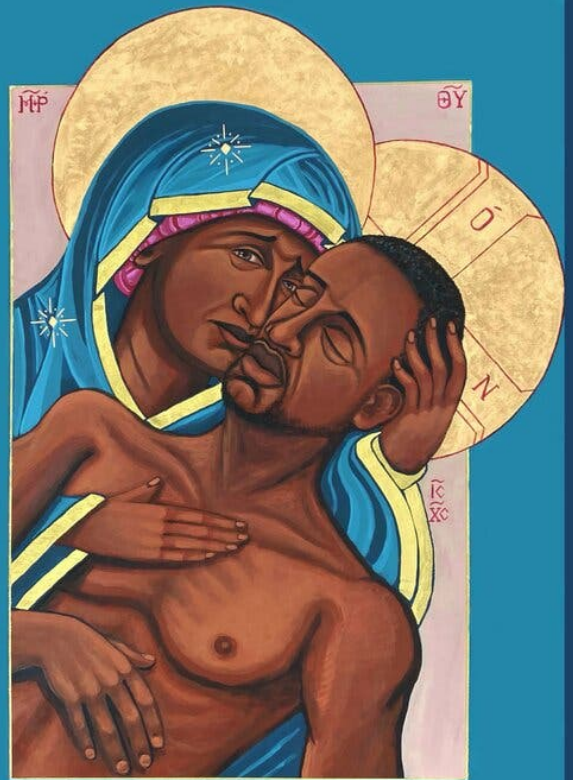
What are we doing?

- Syllabus Quiz (3%)
- In-Class Attendance, Participation, Engagement (9%)
- Pre-Class Discussion Posts (9%)
- Daily In-Class Reading Quizzes (9%)
- Creative Art Assignment (15%)
- Module Short Essays (15%)
- Two In-Class, Written Tests (20%)
- In-Class, Written Final Exam (20%)

What are the goals?

- survey and explain various religious traditions in comparison, including but not limited to Indigenous, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Jewish, and Islamic traditions.
- explore, comprehend, and apply various theories and methods in the study of religion
- explore and elaborate the value of comparison in the humanities
- survey and compare across religious and cultural traditions the meaning and value of religious narratives, religious experiences, sacred literature, and theological/philosophical texts
- express and employ feminist, queer, and decolonial critique to the study of religion
- develop interreligious and intercultural literacy, intelligence, and proficiency
- develop your own set of ideas and tools for Comparing Religions

"Mama" (2020),
a painting by iconographer Kelly Latimore,
based on one of George Floyd's last words.



"Coresist," by Rev. Abigail Clauhs
"Inspired by...Najeeba Syeed saying,
'We need interreligious scholarship
that is beyond coexistence and
dialogue. That gets to our need for
co-resistance,' I took a spin on the
infamous interreligious 'CoExist'
sticker to create a 'CoResist' one."



Humanities courses are not merely about names, places, and dates, they are about **critical thinking and the conceptualization of ideas**. Most importantly, humanities courses train an individual to **entertain an idea other than one's own**. They exercise the **imagination** in an attempt to enter into the ways in which **various human cultures** from different times and places have understood **what it means to be human**. Additionally, humanities classes explore questions of **power, inequality, inequity, justice, truth, beauty, goodness, and human flourishing**.

*philosophy, religion, history, literature,
theology, arts, anthropology, culture,
gender, languages, justice, truth, beauty,
imagination, ethics*

late policy

if you want feedback, then assignments need to be submitted w/in 24 hours of due date. No penalty up to 10 days late, after which highest possible grade is 70%

be a luddite

cell phones prohibited

laptops prohibited

take notes by hand

hold a physical book

gaze into the eyes of your neighbor
technology will always be with us, let's
take a break from it in this classroom
(aside from digital images, video,
podcasts, digital readings, etc.)

DSS

If you have a documented disability you may be eligible for reasonable accommodations in compliance with University policy, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and/or the New Jersey Law against Discrimination. To request accommodations or assistance, please self-identify with the Office for Disability Support Services (DSS), Duffy Hall, Room 67 at the beginning of the semester. For more information or to register for services, contact DSS at (973) 313-6003 or by e-mail at DSS@shu.edu.

just don't cheat

Cheating of any kind, but plagiarism in particular, destroys trust, disrespects the learning process, and mocks genuine intellectual engagement. The Department of Religion considers all cheating and plagiarism serious breaches of academic integrity, including use of ChatGPT and other AI text-generation systems.

If you cheat, you will be required to resubmit the work for 70% credit. In addition, you will write a 4-page reflective essay explaining why you cheated, what you could have done instead, and what strategies you will employ in the future to choose not to cheat.

Do you feel the need to cheat?



email me instead and let's work together to figure out why!

AI

There has been a significant increase in the popularity and availability of a variety of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

These tools are shaping the future of work, research, and technology. Like most technology, generative AI is neither good nor evil. However, used in the wrong way, it conflicts with academic integrity. To maintain a culture of integrity and respect, these generative AI tools should not be used in the completion of course assignments unless a faculty member for a given course specifically authorizes their use.

I will use AI-detection software and if it returns a positive you will be required to meet with me at once and explain your work without preparation, without notes, and in your own spoken words. If you fail to satisfy my expectations, you will earn a zero.

grading scale

A	93-100	C	< 78
A-	< 93	C-	< 73
B+	< 90	D+	< 70
B	< 88	D	< 67
B-	< 83	F	< 60
C+	< 80		

health & wellness

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers a wide range of therapeutic services designed to foster the psychological health and well-being of our students in order help them to thrive, develop, and achieve academic and personal success.

Students seeking services may call us at (973) 761-9500 to schedule an appointment during regular business hours, M-F, 8:45 a.m.-4:45 p.m.

CAPS is located on the second floor of Mooney Hall, Room 27. Mooney Hall is not an accessible building. We offer telehealth and/or can make arrangements to meet with you in an accessible and private location on campus.

Students with an urgent need to speak with a counselor may contact the **SHU 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Hotline at 973-275-Help (4357)**. This service is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

After Hours:

After Hours and on weekends, students experiencing a psychological **emergency** should call **CAPS at 973-761-9500** or the **SHU 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Hotline at 973-275-Help (4357)** to speak with a trained mental health counselor.

communication

My preferred communication method is via Canvas's messaging/email system. I will respond to students' messages sent M-F within 24 hours. I will respond to students' messages sent on the weekends within 48 hours. I will send weekly email updates regarding the upcoming face-to-face meeting and the online portions of the course.

You may also email me at takacsax@shu.edu, however you **must include the full course a with letters, ie., RELS 1402 DD, in the subject or body of the email; if you do not, I will *not* respond.**

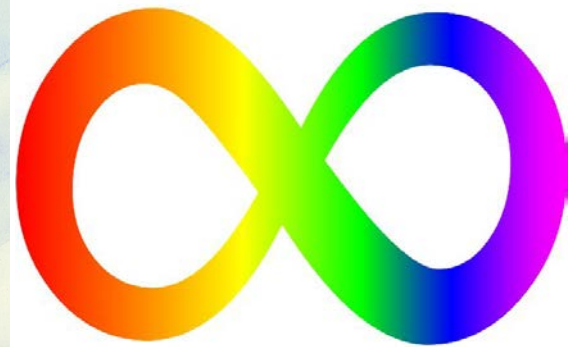


Quantum-Mystical Continuum:
A Cosmology for Soul Transcendence
by Mark Emery



UNDOC**UALLY**

**DIVERSE
INCLUSIVE
ACCEPTING
WELCOMING
SAFE SPACE
FOR EVERYONE**



**"Another World IS Possible," by
Ricardo Levins Morales**

Whatever your race, (ir)religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, trauma-informed knowledge and experience, neurology, country of origin, native language, immigration status, English-speaking capacities, socioeconomic status, dis/abilities—you, your views, your knowledge, and your experiences are valued and affirmed.

-alternative assignments and assessments are always possible-



inclusive learning environment

“Don’t talk about money, religion, or politics.”

In humanities classes we often talk about all these things, in addition to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, in various ways. That being the case, in this course all viewpoints are welcomed from all students, no matter your race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, country of origin, native language, immigration status, political party, or socioeconomic status.

Difference: However, as we’ll learn, our reception, perception, and conception of the world are all shaped by our experiences, histories, and identities. How a Muslim, heterosexual woman of color experiences and interprets the world in New Jersey is different from how a Christian, queer Asian man experiences and interprets the world in Toronto, both of whom are different from how an atheist, heterosexual white man experiences and interprets the world in Lima, Peru.

Sameness: And yet, **we are all human.**

An inclusive learning environment does not only mean being open to challenges from other viewpoints, being receptive to critique, and being civil in our discussion; it also means recognizing that some positions may more negatively impact one community over another in a disproportionate way.

A good first step is always to challenge ideas and positions rather than persons. However, it also means recognizing that some ideas and positions are inextricably bound to the embodied experiences of persons.

Discussion, debate, and conversation are messy; but we’ll all deal with its messiness together, humbly and with compassionate understanding.

We must recognize that no one is perfect and we all make mistakes that may offend someone when discussing religion, politics, and culture—even your professor!

But as a learning community, this is a space for growing and not for shaming or shutting people down.

inclusive learning environment

Adapted from Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning

- Allow everyone a chance to speak
- Listen respectfully and actively
- Criticize ideas, not individuals
- Commit to learning, not debating
- Avoid blame, speculation, inflammatory language
- Avoid assumptions about others, especially based on their perceived social group
- Be careful about putting other participants on the spot. *Do not demand that others speak for a group that you perceive them to represent.*
- Some sample statements:
 - It seems like what you're saying is...
 - "I wonder if..."
 - "I think that..."
 - "How did you come to that position..."
 - "Given your position, it follows that...Is that what you intended?"
 - "I don't get it. Can you help me understand what you're saying..."
- Be comfortable with silence, quiet reflection
- Do not interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking
- Raise your hand
- What is shared in the classroom or small-group discussion is confidential. Trust is key. Keep confidential any personal information that comes up in the conversation.

Listening

- Listen carefully and respectfully, without interrupting.
- Be aware that tone and body language are powerful communicators. Show respectful listening by facing and looking at the speaker, making eye contact, staying quiet, nodding, etc.

inclusive learning environment

Speaking

- Share briefly from your own experiences.
- Use “I” statements to state your views.
- Build on others’ comments. Acknowledge them, even if you disagree.
- Be careful not to generalize about people and/or experiences.

Be Courageous

- If you think something is missing from the conversation, do not wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself.
- If you find another’s statement to be problematic, do speak up.
- Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others will think about what you say.



“Giving Birth in a Prison Cell” (2022, oil on canvas), by MALAK MATTAR

Assignment and Assessment Details

Monday and Wednesday Attendance, Participation, and Engagement (9%)

Attendance: 27 points

Participation and Engagement: 6 points

Total: 33 points (weighted at 10% of your final course grade)

This class meets 27 times. If you show up to all the classes, you get 27/27 attendance points. Every class you miss, you lose a point. **Excused absences require documentation (ALWAYS).**

Excused absences:

- sickness or surgery
- mental health issues
- disability accommodation
- religious observances
- pregnancy-related events
- childcare responsibilities
- family emergencies (caregiving, funerals, etc.)
- volunteering to register voters or volunteering for a political campaign or ballot issue initiative (you are **allowed one absence** on this account)
- voting in local, state, or national elections, or volunteering to assist others to vote

READ CAREFULLY

If you attend all classes but do not meet participation and engagement expectations, you would earn a 27/27 and a 0/6, for a total of $27/33 = 81.8\%$, or a B- (weighted at 9% of your final course grade).

This class also requires active engagement and participation. The more you participate, the closer to that 6/6 participation points you will get.

How to do this?

1. **Come to class with three questions or comments from the assigned readings, podcast, and/or videos.** Just write down THREE points about the reading that intrigued you, puzzled you, illuminated you, confused you, etc. **DO THIS! I will ask you to share often.**
2. When we break into **small-group discussion, participate.**
3. Work on your **active listening skills** (eye contact and/or nodding and/or writing to take notes and/or doodling on a paper—NOT emailing, NOT social media-ing, etc.)
4. **IMPORTANT:** Students attending class **without the book** from which the assigned reading was taken will be considered **ABSENT**.
5. Raise your hand and ask a question whenever you want about anything. This is open season on “what the hell does this mean” and “I’ve always wondered why” type of questions and “one time, I saw the future in a dream” and “I had a near-death experience” comments.

Pre-Class Discussion Posts (9%)

Before every class, each student must submit a discussion post on Canvas that responds to three prompts. You must engage, with citation, the required reading at least once. 4 points = 1 point / question + 1 point for citing. **If you submit these during or after class meets, you will earn only 2/4 points.**

Lowest 4 posts will be dropped

What are two questions or comments you have from the readings or other assigned material?

What do you consider two of the most important points from the readings or other assigned material and why?

Personally, what piece of information do you find the most challenging or insightful? Or, what piece of information made you rethink a previous assumption the topic? What piece of information shaped how you relate to your own faith, worldview, values, assumptions, or beliefs?



Razaan Killawi | Detroit, MI | Humanity before Identity | Oil and acrylic paint on canvas

In Surah Al Hujurat 49:13 of the Qur'an, Allah says that humans were created among different groups of people so that we may get to know one another. This artwork depicts the internal and external duality of two people, invoking the idea that one's outer appearance may be distinct from one's inner core. Our deeper humanity takes precedence over any perceptions of differences we may have.

Daily In-Class Quizzes On Assigned Readings, Videos, and/or Podcasts (9%)

The first five minutes of class will be spent completing a written in-class quiz that covers the assigned readings or other materials for that class. **The quiz will be completed on Canvas, so you must bring you laptops for this.**

Lowest 6 quiz grades will be dropped

You will be tested on basic comprehension of the material in order to assess whether you completed the reading or other assigned materials.

To perform well on these quizzes, you must do more than just read the assigned text or watch the assigned video or listen to the assigned podcast.

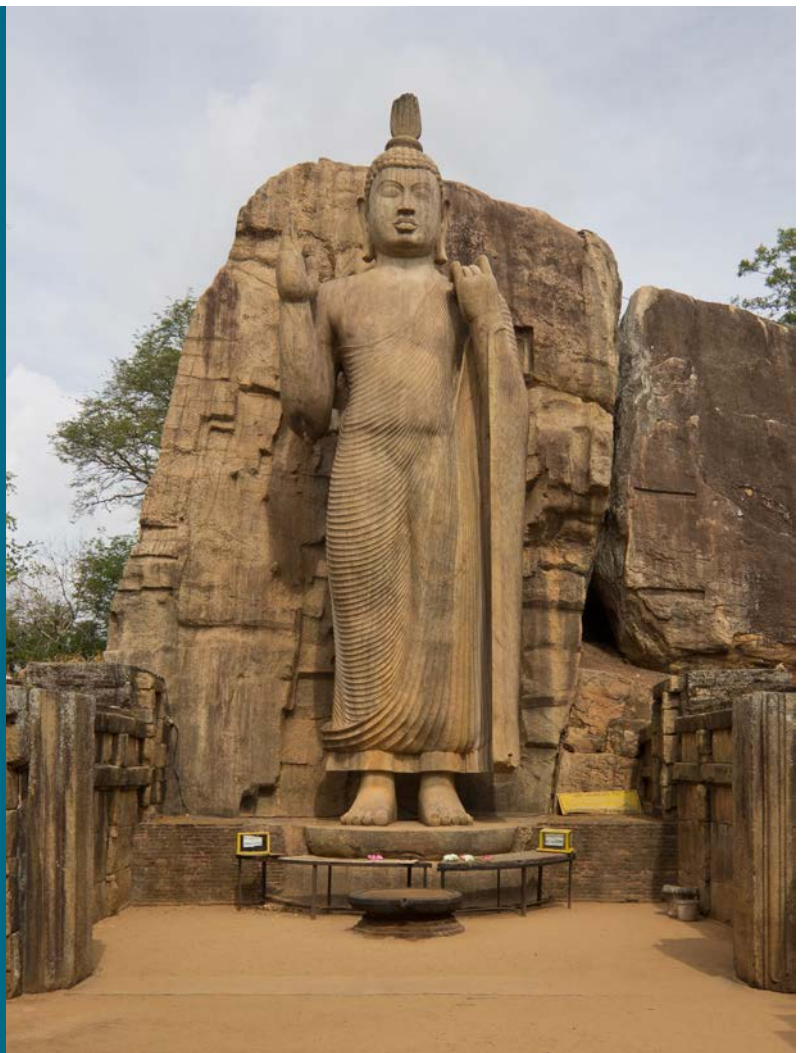
You must read, watch, or listen **actively and deeply**. As applicable, you should

- underline important points
- take notes about
 - key terms, definitions
 - important questions raised by the assigned material
 - basic argument of the assigned material
 - central takeaways (so what? why? what changes?)

The Avukana statue is a standing statue of the Buddha near Kekirawa in North Central Sri Lanka. The statue, which has a height of more than 14 m (46 ft), depicts the Buddha with a hand raised in reassurance, a variation of the Abhaya mudra.

A mudra is a symbolic or ritual gesture or pose in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers.

The Abhaya mudra, or "gesture of fearlessness," represents protection, peace, benevolence and the dispelling of fear.



Creative Art Assignment: Thematic Reflection (15%)

Comparison, especially comparative religion and comparative theology, exercises the **imagination**. Indeed, most disciplines in the **humanities** require and exercise the faculty of the imagination and most religious traditions value the imagination as a faculty that **connects us to God/Ultimate Reality/Consciousness, to the Self, and to the Other**.

This assignment requires you to select a **theme, reading, or other assigned material** (religious narrative, story, ritual, practice, or other text) and creatively engage it through your own imagination.

I urge you to **connect your creative engagement** to your own **personal story, identity, or experiences around religion, culture, family, spirituality**, or something else. You may use any media. **You will display this creative piece on a webpage you create with Adobe Express.**

Any media?

Yes, any media: photography, drawing, AI-generated images, poem, comic strip, abstract art, Instagram Reel/TikTok video, short story, collage, and so forth.

Assessment (“but, I’m not artistic”)

You will not be graded on your artistic ability (aside from an assessment as to whether you actually spent some time *trying*—that is, don’t submit a circle, or a square, or a scribble). **IT MUST BE YOUR OWN WORK.**

You will be **graded on the 250-to-500-word reflection/analysis of your creative work of art**. You must include what reading/podcast/video/theme you are responding to, and then draw from it to explain your work of art. You must **cite, with quotation marks, twice from two different materials**.

Submit URL via Canvas



Ascent of Muhammad to Heaven (c. 1539–1543), from the Khamseh of Nizami

Module Short Essays (15%)

This course is divided up into modules. After each module there will be a written thesis-driven question.

There are **five modules** and therefore **five module short essays**; however, you are **required to submit only three of them**.

These essays will be submitted via Canvas.

General Requirements:

- At least 500 words, no more than 1000 words.
- **Cite at least four times** from at least **three different assigned materials** from **three different days**.
- The questions will be thesis-driven, and so your response must **argue a thesis** (I will demonstrate and explain in class)
- You must begin with an **introductory paragraph** that has a **thesis statement**.
- You must provide at least **three supporting arguments** drawn from the course material and, yes, your own experience.
- I will submit all essays to a generative AI detector. If your essay comes back with a positive result, you will be required to meet with me in-person so that you may explain your essay without notes and in your own spoken words.
- I will provide feedback for each essay. If you earn a better grade on the second and then third submission, I will take that into account and **weight your better grades more**.

"The Finding of Moses" from the Golden Haggadah, an illuminated Hebrew manuscript originating around c. 1320-1330 in Catalonia



Two In-Class Written Tests (20%)

You will have two in-class written tests covering previous material. You will have the topics and short answer questions ahead of time to prepare.

You may bring in one sheet of hand-written notes, double sided, to reference during the test.



The Last Judgment: a fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo covering the whole altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City.

In-Class, Written Final Exam (20%)

We will meet during the course's regularly scheduled final exam period for an in-class written exam.

Like the two tests, you will have the topics and short answer questions ahead of time to prepare and you may bring in one sheet of hand-written notes, double sided, to reference during the exam.



Bhavachakra describing the cycle of saṃsāra: illustrated in the wheel are eight realms of existence in which a sentient being can reincarnate, according to the rebirth doctrine of Buddhism. Yama, the god of death, is at the top of the outer rim. The outer rim shows the Twelve Nidānas doctrine.



Kali (Hindu goddess associated with time, change, creation, power, destruction and death in Shaktism), draped with a necklace of skulls, stands on Shiva. The surrounding landscape is littered with body parts. The figures of Brahma, Vishnu and another are seen observing the scene from within the clouds.

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Monday 8/26 Review of Syllabus, Course Guidelines, and Assessments.	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Syllabus • Listen and discuss, “This is Water,” David Foster Wallace’s 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College.
Wednesday 8/28 Module I.1 What is comparison and what are we comparing?	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Introduction,” pp. 3-7, of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch, “What is Religion,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) • Watch, “What does it mean to be religious,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube). In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we know “the Other”? : Open Books, Hidden Codes, Closed/Projected Self • Categorizing and Comparing • How are we defining religion for this class? (explicit and implicit religions)

Monday 9/2 NO CLASS, Labor Day

Wednesday 9/4 Module I.2 Do all religions begin with a religious experience? Jewish Mysticism The Early Jewish Jesus Movement, I mean, Christianity?	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 9-27, of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch, “What is Kabbalah,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altered States of Consciousness and Religion • Mysticism/Experience as one aspect or <i>the central aspect</i> of religion? • Polytheism, henotheism, pantheism, panentheism, monotheism, cosmotheism, atheism—what do we mean when we say “God/god”? • Transcendence and Immanence • Watch, “When Did Christianity and Judaism Part Ways?,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) • Jewish Comparison and Christian Comparison
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Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Info

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Monday 9/9 Module I.3 Religious Communities and Religious Beliefs	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 28-43 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch, "'Qi' Explained: Ancient, Mystic Superpower?," ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Islamic (comparative) Terms: <i>dīn</i>, <i>kitāb</i>, <i>mu'min</i>, <i>muslim</i>, <i>muḥsin</i> • Is Hinduism a religion? Polytheism and Brahmanic Traditions (Advaita Vedanta) • Jain's Blind Men and the Elephant • Sikh and No Religion • Ibn 'Arabi, Kabir, & Guru Nanak on religious diversity
Wednesday 9/11 Module I.4 Religion as an analytical category Reflexivity and the Humanities	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch, "The Modern History of the Study of Religion and 'Historical Consciousness'," by Takacs (on Canvas) • Read pp. 87-101 (up to and including the section entitled, "The Problem and Promise of 'World Religions'") of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Sources: Christianity and Religion of Empire • The skill of reflexivity and the Humanities • The category "religion"—useful, harmful, or neutral?
Monday 9/16 Module I.5 Magic, Ritual, and the Comparative Faculty	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 101-118 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch, "Was Jesus a Magician?," ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it magic or a religious ritual?—questioning the categories • Insiders vs. Outsiders—questioning the distinction • Liminal Spaces (Anzalúa's <i>nepantla</i> and the Islamic <i>barzakh</i>) • Religious Questions of Ultimate Concerns (or, "comprehensive qualitative orientation" [John Thatamanil])

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Module I Short Essay	Module I Short Essay Question covering the content of the previous five classes (Module I.1-5). Three out of five Short Essay Responses are required. Essay prompt on Canvas. Due On Canvas: Thursday 9/26
<p>Wednesday 9/18</p> <p>Module II.1</p> <p>Religions are enacted and expressed (1)</p>	<p>Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read pp. 125-140 (up to and including section title “Trickster Myths”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) Creation Myths: Read Genesis Chapters 1-3; Read “Skywoman Falling”; Read a version of the creation myth from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a text sacred to some Hindu traditions; Read a version of the creation myth from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a text sacred to some Hindu traditions <p>In Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Story Time: “We, the Curious Ones,” by Marion Dane Bauer, illustrated by Harry & Deepti Clarifying Terms: myth, truth, meaning, purpose, materialism/physicalism/scientism “A, B, C: Six Guidelines for Comparing Religions” (<i>Comparing Religions</i> companion website)
<p>Monday 9/23</p> <p>Module II.2</p> <p>Religions are enacted and expressed (2)</p>	<p>Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read pp. 140-156 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) Watch “What is Ritual,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) Watch “Americans Are Religious About America,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) <p>In Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing Eucharist (Christianity) and Deer Dance of some Native American Tribes Ibn Arabi on the Secrets of <i>ṣalāt</i> (daily prayer in Islam) When competing myths polarize: “American history textbooks can differ across the country, in ways that are shaded by partisan politics” (NY Times) What are your rituals?

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 9/25 Module II.3 Religions are Emplaced (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 161-177 (up to and including section title “A New Heaven”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Listen to “(Episode 503) SO GLAD YOU ASKED about Religion & Food,” <i>Keeping It 101</i> In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science and Religion: What is and is not in conflict, and why/when. • Comparing the Buddhist doctrine of Two Truths with a monotheistic (mostly Christian, little Jewish, also Islamic) take on reality (<i>imago Dei</i>, occasionalism, and more) vis-à-vis science
Thursday 9/26	Reminder: Module I Short Essay Due
Monday 9/30 Module II.4 Religions are Emplaced (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 177-193 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Listen to or read, “THE SERVICEBERRY: An Economy of Abundance,” by Robin Wall Kimmerer In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-theologies in interreligious perspective: Capitalist Ecology, Christian Deep Incarnation, Hindu Eco-Theologies, Jain Environmentalism, and more
Module II Short Essay	Module II Short Essay Question covering the content of the previous four classes (Module II.1-4). Three out of five Short Essay Responses are required. Essay prompt on Canvas. Due On Canvas: Thursday 10/10

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 10/2 Module III.1 Religions are Embodied (1): Sex & Gender	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 199-219 (up to and including “The Sexual Ignorance of the Religions”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Listen to “Episode 205: Gender, Sexuality, & Religion in what’s now the U.S.,” <i>Keeping it 101</i> In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining Key Terms for Comparative Religion: Feminism, Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Theories/Theologies • Native American Two Spirits, South Asian Hijras, and Queer Christian Theology — Queer Religiosities in Comparison • Thesis: Intense Desires Yields Strict Sexual Codes?
Monday 10/7 In-Class Test 1	In-Class Test 1 will cover Modules I and II. I will provide test questions/study guide in advance.
Wednesday 10/9 Module III.2 Religions are Embodied (2): Race	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 219-233 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Listen to “Episode 203: Race & Religion in what’s now the US,” <i>Keeping it 101</i> In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading together, “Racism and Anatta: Black Buddhists, Embodiment, and Interpretations of Non-Self,” by Rima Vesely-Flad
Thursday 10/10	Reminder: Module II Short Essay Due
Monday 10/14 NO CLASS	
Fall Break: M 10/14 and T 10/15	

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 10/16 Module III.3 Social Dimensions of Religion (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 239-250 (up to and including the section titled “Sacred Art, Architecture, and Music”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Read “Liturgical Letters: Jewish and Christian Calligraphic Art and Comparative Theology,” by Joanna Homrighausen in <i>Journal of Interreligious Studies</i> In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative Hagiographies
Monday 10/21 Module III.4 Social Dimensions of Religion (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 251-271 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch “Is There Any Difference Between a Cult and a Religion?,” ReligionForBreakfast (YouTube) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are miracles...real? The category of the super natural and the paranormal • Reading together, “Byung-Chul Han: ‘The smartphone is a tool of domination. It acts like a rosary,’” in <i>El País</i>
Module III Short Essay	Module III Short Essay Question covering the content of the previous four classes (Module III.1-4). Three out of five Short Essay Responses are required. Essay prompt on Canvas. Due On Canvas: Thursday 10/31

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 10/23 Module IV.1 The Religious Imagination (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 275-288 (up to and including subsection title “Monster Studies”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Watch video presentation, “Imagination in Islamic Art and Poetry,” (Takacs) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story time, “When God Made You,” by Matthew Paul Turner, illustrated by David Catrow • Story time, “I am God’s Dream,” by Matthew Paul Turner, illustrated by Estrella Bascuñan • Excerpts from primary sources on imaginal/illusory world (TBD)
Monday 10/28 Module IV.2 The Religious Imagination (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 288-307 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Read, “Visions, Enlightenment, and Other Revelatory Events: Spirit Work in the Study of Religion,” by Kristin Bloomer In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Lady of Guadalupe Case Study: Imagination as Fusion, Hybridity, Syncretism, and Third Space • Excerpt from the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> on the revelation of Vishnu’s Cosmic Form + exploring Hindu images of this event • Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian Comparative Iconography

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 10/30 Module IV.3 The human beyond the body (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 313-327 (up to and including subsection title “Comparative Corpses”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Read (or listen to) the essay, “The empty brain: Your brain does not process information, retrieve knowledge or store memories. In short: your brain is not a computer,” by Robert Epstein (in Aeon) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading sections of “Introduction,” in <i>Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India</i>, by Kristin C. Bloomer
Thursday 10/31	Reminder: Module III Short Essay Due
Monday 11/4 Module IV.4 The human beyond the body (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 327-343 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Read pp. 1-14 of “Chapter 1: Rosalind,” in <i>Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India</i>, by Kristin C. Bloomer In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading together Primary Sources on human and beyond the human (TBD)
Module IV Short Essay	Module IV Short Essay Question covering the content of the previous four classes (Module IV.1-4). Three out of five Short Essay Responses are required. Essay prompt on Canvas. Due On Canvas: Thursday 11/14

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Wednesday 11/6 Module V.1 Faithful Rereadings: Contemporary Theological Approaches (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read pp. 353-360 (up to and including section titled “Comparative Theology”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) Start reading “Chapter 6 The Hospitality of Receiving: Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Interreligious Learning,” pp. 193-200 of <i>Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity</i>, by John Thatamanil In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch, “What is the Difference Between Theology and Religious Studies?,” ReligionForBreakfast Ibn Arabi on “the gods of beliefs”
Monday 11/11 Module V.2 Faithful Rereadings: Contemporary Theological Approaches (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read pp. 363-384 (from “Three Faithful Ways to Compare” to the end) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) Finish reading “Chapter 6 The Hospitality of Receiving: Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Interreligious Learning,” pp. 200-212 of <i>Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity</i>, by John Thatamanil In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative Reading In Class: Christian, Taoist, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist conceptions of “ultimate as mystery”
Wednesday 11/13 Module V.3 Reducing Religions: Rational Rereadings (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read pp. 389-405 (until the •••) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Categorizing/Classifying; Language and the Construction of Reality (Social Constructionism); Realism and Critical Realism “It is my professional, not personal, opinion that ‘God’ exists” — Proofs of God’s Existence vs. What and Who God is

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Thursday 11/14	Reminder: Module IV Short Essay Due
Monday 11/18 Module V.4 Reducing Religions: Rational Rereadings (2)	<p>Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 405-422 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) • Read, “We Are Not Our Brain: How Poets and Philosophers Saw the Immaterial Life of the Self,” by Muhammad U. Faruque <p>In Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring In-Depth: Neuroscience and Cognitive Evolutionary Models • Exploring In-Depth: Is Religion Violent?
Wednesday 11/20 In-Class Test 2	In-Class Test 2 will cover Modules III, IV, and V.1-2. I will provide test questions/study guide in advance.
<p>Monday 11/25 NO CLASS (prof takacs at conference)</p> <p>Thanksgiving Break: W 11/27 - Sunday 12/1</p> <p>Wednesday 11/27 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)</p>	
Module V Short Essay	<p>Module V Short Essay Question covering the content of the previous four classes (Module V.1-4). Three out of five Short Essay Responses are required. Essay prompt on Canvas.</p> <p>Due On Canvas: Thursday 12/5</p>

Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings

Schedule of Classes

In-Class Test

Assignment Due Date

No Class

Day	Required Readings &/or Assignment
Monday 12/2	Creative Art Assignment: Thematic Reflection DUE on Canvas
Monday 12/2 Module VI.1 Reflexive Rereadings of Religion/Religious Experience (1)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 427-441 (up to and including section titled “A Toolkit for the Fourth Dimension”) of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (required textbook) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Class Discussion 1: Is reflexive rereading just another name for [critical] faithful rereading? • Can there be a “place from no faith”?
Wednesday 12/4 Module VI.2 Reflexive Rereadings of Religion/Religious Experience (2)	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp. 441-459 of <i>Comparing Religions</i> (require textbook) In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Class Discussion 2: Is reflexive rereading just another name for [critical] faithful rereading? • How have your positions changed?
Thursday 12/5	Reminder: Module V Short Essay Due
Monday 12/9 Module VI.3 Lingering Questions, Final Exam Questions	Before Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come prepared with questions about final exam In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lingering Questions and Comments about final and anything else from course
TBD	In-Class Written Final Exam