



CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course Name:	World Religions and the Media
Course Number:	RELI 2001 PRAG
Programs offering course:	CES/CNMJ
Language of instruction:	English
U.S. Semester Credits:	3
Contact Hours:	45
Term:	Spring 2020

Course Description

Religious belief represents a significant facet in the complexity of today's world. Communications and media experts in particular need to understand the philosophical, historical, sociological, communicative and doctrinal aspects of major religious traditions in order to provide balanced and unbiased reports. This course analyzes religions in the context of their historical development and their symbiotic relationship with local cultures, examining cross-tradition similarities and the uniqueness of each of the religions. Special emphasis will be placed on the attitudes of the various religious traditions toward politics and violence, and the role of communications in this process. As part of this course, students will also focus on the particularities of religious and non-religious worldviews in Central Europe and in a larger European context.

Learning Objectives

After completing this course, the students will be able:

1. to critically compare competing religious claims;
2. to distinguish between facts and fiction in media coverage of religion;
3. to distinguish between the doctrinal, cultural and political aspects of religion, and to produce better informed analytical media stories;
4. to acquire expertise in Central European views on religion and its practices, and to be able to represent these views to the western public in a more nuanced and contextualized way.
5. to understand sensitivities of other religious and non-religious worldviews and to learn how media professionals can interact with them in a constructive and solution-oriented manner.

Course Prerequisites

No prerequisites



Methods of Instruction

Lectures, home assignments with follow-up discussions, reaction papers. PowerPoint presentations from lectures will be available on CIEE Prague Center Canvas website. They are designed to serve as visual reminder of the main concepts of the course and as a short textbook for this course. Specific pages from three core textbooks (see bibliography) will be used as necessary. The course also will include demonstration of video materials. After watching them the students will be asked to answer quizzes or write short reaction papers (or PPT presentations). Volunteering for individual research assignments and short reports/reaction papers is encouraged and will earn extra credit points for the final grade. This may take the form of a travel report on a topic previously agreed with instructor or other form of individual research. All mandatory reaction papers may increase or decrease (in case of late submission or non-submission) credit points, whilst optional reaction papers/presentations will increase the score. Regular on-line discussions will be an integral part of the learning process.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Homework/Reaction papers 15%
2. PPT presentations 10%
3. Quizzes 5%
4. Participation/Discussion 20%
5. Midterm exam 10%
6. Final exam - presentation 20%
7. Final exam - essay 20%

Course Requirements

General

The course will finish with individual oral presentations (max. 5 minutes) with visuals and a written take-home exam in the form of an essay. To provide students with the opportunity to monitor their progress during the course, a Midterm exam will take place on the 6th week, based on classes from weeks 1-5. It will have a format of an oral presentation with visuals (max. 3 minutes). The midterm exam is an important milestone as it will test the ability of the students to apply their theoretical knowledge to praxis. A list of prompting topics will be provided by the instructor one week before the Midterm exam and two weeks before the Final exam. Students also will be required to write a research paper (or PPT presentation), and several short reaction papers or PPT presentations. Students will be expected to base their written work on the course material and on home reading, as directed by instructor, and on their individual research. In addition to the above, short quizzes will take place during the entire course.

To be graded, all written assignments and presentations have to be submitted electronically on Canvas. E-mail submissions are not accepted for grading. All communication should be



conducted through Canvas site. Students are required to regularly check the course Announcements and Discussions forums. All files submitted on Canvas should have the name of the author and the title of the topic in the file name.

1. Homework/Reaction papers

Homework refers short written notes in preparation for the class discussions and home reading assignments. Students are expected to base their written work on the course material and on home reading, as directed by instructor, and on their individual research. Home assignments are to be delivered on time/deadline. Exceptions, for justifiable reasons, must be discussed with instructor beforehand and in timely manner and/or obtain permission from the Academic Administration.

Reaction papers refer to short reaction papers after a screening of video material; and to the substance and quality of the content of on-line discussion contributions (comments). More detailed instructions for each home assignment will be published on the CIEE Canvas site in the Announcements section.

2. PPT Presentations

Individual presentations will be a PPT presentation (up 3 – 5 min.) For regular course presentations the students will have to provide instructor with approx. one page-long list of talking points (printed version before the presentation and file uploaded on Canvas after the presentation). PPT presentation file has to be uploaded on Canvas on the day of presentation the latest. Both presentation and talking points files have to have the name of the author and title of the topic in the file name. Presentation will be graded by five criteria: 1. Logic and organization of the content, 2. oral presentation/clarity, 3. Visuals, 4. Research, 5. Q/A (answering questions requires more background research than presented in the slides).

3. Quizzes

Quizzes refer to in-class quizzes. They will have two formats: electronic and hard copy. The electronic quizzes will be announced by instructor in advance to allow students to bring their laptops. The questions will be displayed on the projection screen for limited time each, and the students will write their answers in either a document (and upload it on Canvas) or fill out/mark rubrics on Canvas template for this specific quiz. They will be graded on a basis of percentage of correct answers. The hard copy paper quizzes will not be announced in advance and will have to be filled out by hand within a specific time limit for the whole quiz. They may or may not be graded. This type of quizzes is designed to help students assess their learning progress. Students will be involved in assessing and discussing each other's results.

4. Participation/Discussion



Participation grade will consist of two components. Class participation will be graded on the basis of frequency and substance (note: the quality of the content will also contribute to the Homework grade) of individual student contributions to class discussion and other activities (volunteering for leading roles in group work). This can contribute up to 50% to the total of grade in this category. Participation (timeliness and frequency of posts) in on-line discussion forum may constitute up to 50%. Participation in on-line discussions allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge and analytical skills to current social and political events. Therefore it is an important factor in grading the overall activity (note: the quality of the content will also contribute to the Homework grade). Without on-line contributions, even the most active class participation alone will not bring the total score in this category above 85 percentage points.

5. Midterm exam

Students are expected to deliver a well-organized and articulated oral presentation with visuals (max 3 min.; PPT or equivalent, short videos are acceptable as additional illustration) presentation, based on their original research. They also have to submit electronically the file with their presentation (after the exam) no later than the day of presentation. Presentation will be graded by five criteria: 1. Logic and organization of the content, 2. oral presentation/clarity, 3. Visuals, 4. Research, 5. Q/A (answering questions requires more background research than presented in the slides). The total exam grade will be the media of the grades for all criteria.

6. Final exam

Consists of two components:

- Students are expected to deliver a well-organized and articulated oral presentation with visuals (max 5 min.; PPT or equivalent, short videos are acceptable as additional illustration) presentation, based on their original research. They also have to submit electronically the file with their presentation (after the exam) no later than by the end of semester. Presentation will be graded by five criteria: 1. Logic and organization of the content, 2. oral presentation/clarity, 3. Visuals, 4. Research, 5. Q/A (answering questions requires more background research than presented in the slides).
- They will have to write their take-home answers (in a form of a short essay) to a prompting statement provided by instructor or write an essay/academic paper based on the research done for the Final presentation. In this case this will be as writing a minor thesis and presenting/defending it orally. The essay/paper must have proper academic formatting with heading, introduction, main argument, conclusion, thorough referencing and source list. The length of the essay/paper is between 1,500 and 1,600 words.



Assessment of students' participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as **meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom**, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor's or other students' line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students' active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

CIEE Prague Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and **all absences are treated equally regardless of reason** for any affected CIEE course. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursions or events, as well as Internship.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

Missing classes will lead to the following penalties:

90-minute semester classes:

<i>Number of 90-minute classes</i>	<i>Equivalent percentage of the total course hours missed</i>	<i>Minimum penalty</i>
one to two 90-minute classes	up to 10%	no penalty
three 90-minute classes	10.1–15%	reduction of the final grade by 3%



four 90-minute classes	15.1–17%	reduction of the final grade by 5%; written warning
five 90-minute classes	17.1–20%	reduction of the final grade by 7%; written warning
six and more 90-minute classes	more than 20%	automatic course failure and possible expulsion

180-minute semester classes:

<i>Number of 180-minute classes</i>	<i>Equivalent percentage of the total course hours missed</i>	<i>Minimum penalty</i>
one 180-minute class	up to 10%	no penalty
two 180-minute classes	10.1–20%	reduction of the final grade by 5%; written warning
three and more 180-minute classes	more than 20%	automatic course failure and possible expulsion

Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% of the total course hours missed, or violating the attendance policy in more than one class) will result in a written warning, a notification to the student’s home school, and possibly a dismissal from the program.

Missing more than 20% of the total class hours will lead to a **course failure**, and **potential program dismissal**. This is a CIEE rule that applies to all CIEE courses and is in line with the Participant Contract that each CIEE student signs before arriving on-site.

Late arrival to class will be considered a partial (up to 15 minutes late) or full (15 or more minutes late) absence. **Three partial absences due to late arrivals will be regarded as one full class absence.**

Students must notify their professor and Program Coordinators (PC) beforehand if they are going to miss class for any reason and are responsible for any material covered in class in their absence.

If missing a class during which a test, exam, the student’s presentation or other graded class assignments are administered, **make-up assignment will only be allowed in approved circumstances**, such as serious medical issues. In this case, the student must submit a local doctor’s note within 24 hours of his/her absence to the PC, who will decide whether the student qualifies for a make-up assignment. Doctor’s notes may be submitted via e-mail or phone (a scan or a photograph are acceptable), however **the student must ensure that the note is delivered to the PC.**

Should a truly **extraordinary situation** arise, the student must contact the PC immediately concerning permission for a make-up assignment. Make-up assignments are not granted



automatically! The PC decides the course of action for all absence cases that are not straightforward. **Always contact the PC with any inquiry about potential absence(s) and the nature thereof.**

Personal travel (including flight delays and cancelled flights), handling passport and other document replacements, interviews, volunteering and other similar situations are not considered justifiable reasons for missing class or getting permission for make-up assignments.

For class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips, make-up classes and other instances), **always contact the Academic Assistant** to decide the appropriate course of action.

Course attendance is recorded on individual Canvas Course Sites. **Students are responsible for checking their attendance regularly to ensure the correctness of the records.** In case of discrepancies, students are required to contact the Academic Assistant **within one week of the discrepancy date** to have it corrected. Later claims **will not** be considered.

CIEE staff does not directly manage absences at FAMU and ECES, but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

CIEE Academic Honesty Policy

CIEE subscribes to standard U.S. norms requiring that students exhibit the highest standards regarding academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in any course assignment or exam will not be tolerated and may result in a student failing the course or being expelled from the program. Standards of honesty and norms governing originality of work differ significantly from country to country. We expect students to adhere to both the American norms and the local norms, and in the case of conflict between the two, the more stringent of the two will preside. Three important principles are considered when defining and demanding academic honesty. These are related to the fundamental tenet that one should not present the work of another person as one's own.

The first principle is that final examinations, quizzes and other tests must be done without assistance from another person, without looking at or otherwise consulting the work of another person, and without access to notes, books, or other pertinent information (unless the professor has explicitly announced that a particular test is to be taken on an "open book" basis).

The second principle applies specifically to course work: the same written paper may not be submitted in two classes. Nor may a paper for which you have already received credit at your home institution be submitted to satisfy a paper requirement while studying overseas.

The third principle is that any use of the work of another person must be documented in any written papers, oral presentations, or other assignments carried out in connection with a



course. This usually is done when quoting directly from another's work or including information told to you by another person. The general rule is that if you have to look something up, or if you learned it recently either by reading or hearing something, you have to document it.

The penalty ranges from an F grade on the assignment, failure in the course to dismissal from the program. The Academic Director is consulted and involved in decision making in every case of a possible violation of academic honesty.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE:

The field of religious studies and its development; religion as seen from philosophical, sociological, psychological, theological, historical and political perspectives; the communicative function of religion; stereotypes in the media; variety of views on religion in Central Europe.

Readings: PPT Intro; Intro from The Religions Book (as directed by instructor).

Class 2

VARIETY OF WORLDVIEWS AND THE WAYS OF INTERPRETING THE WORLD AND RELIGION

Materialist and idealist approaches to the world: what is mind and what is matter? What is the primal source of everything. Chronos and Kairos. Do we know everything about the Universe and our place in it? What is the meaning of organic life and us living on one of the billions of planets? Anomalies and controversies in various theories. Is religion and science incompatible? Rational thinking and other life experiences.

Readings: Intro from the Religions Book (as directed by instructor);); Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Burkhardt); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 2

Class 1

PRIMAL & PREHISTORICAL BELIEFS:

The great existential questions of all times; surviving primal religious traditions today.

Readings: Intro from The Religions Book (specific pages as directed by instructor); web links from the PPT Primal Religions; handout "Hopi Message to the UN".

Class 2

ANCIENT AND CLASSICAL BELIEFS:

Polytheism and the hierarchy of gods; afterlife, rituals, virtue; ancient mythological themes in modern entertainment media; achievements of Czech Egyptology and studies of ancient cultures.

Readings: The Religions Book (specific pages as directed by instructor); web links from the PPT Ancient and Classical Beliefs.

Week 3

Class 1

HINDUISM:

The order of the Universe, the cycles of human existence, the female aspect of divine, humans relate to the divine by practice, many paths to the ultimate truth, world is an illusion, non-violence in the political realm. The problem of superficiality in media coverage; Hinduism in Europe; Czech fascination with Hindu traditions. (*Quiz*)

Readings: The Religions Book (Hinduism: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Hinduism and web links from the PPT; Anthology of Living Religions; (Creation Story and other specific pages as directed by instructor).

Class 2

HINDUISM (CONTINUED):

Varieties of Hindu traditions. Multitude of deities and their coexistence. Devotional and Metaphysical level in Hinduism. Vedas. Upanishads. Mahabharata. Bhagavat Gita.

Readings: PPT Hinduism; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Hymns of Rigveda; Lessons of Upanishads; The Religion and Philosophy of Rigveda and Upanishads; Sayings of Ramakrishna, as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 4

Class 1

BUDDHISM:

The origin of Buddhism, the path to truth and escape from the eternal cycle of suffering, kindness and compassion, enlightenment and the importance of continuous practice; scientists and media about Buddhism; Buddhism in Czech Republic and Central Europe.

Readings: The Religions Book (Buddhism: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Buddhism; Anthology of Living Religions; (specific pages on Buddhism, as directed by instructor); The Tibetan Book of Dead (specific pages as individual assignments); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.



Class 2

JUDAISM:

God's covenant and monotheism, the Law, the Messiah, all humans have a divine spark in them; Jewish tradition in Central Europe.

Readings: The Religions Book (Judaism: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Judaism and web links provided in it; Anthology of Living Religions; (specific pages as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 5

Class 1

JUDAISM (CONTINUED):

Wider cultural and philosophical influence of Judaism; political Zionism, Holocaust, modern approaches in Judaism; History of Jewish persecutions in Europe; the specter of the past: the rise of new anti-Semitism in Central and Western Europe; media coverage of this phenomenon. *(Quiz)*

Readings: The Religions Book (Judaism: specific pages as directed by instructor); web links from the PPT Judaism); Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Smith, Judaism); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Class 2

CHRISTIANITY:

Jesus as Alfa and Omega, death on the cross as message to the world, body and soul interpretations, the divine trinity, serving others by transforming the world – not conforming to it. Religious dissenting movements in the Czech history and their representation in popular culture.

Readings: The Religions Book (Christianity: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Christianity; Anthology of Living Religions; (Christianity: specific pages as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 6

Midterm Exam Period

Class 1

CHRISTIANITY (CONTINUED):

Varieties of Christian interpretation; “no salvation outside the Church,” hierarchical and non-hierarchical approaches, the function of

prayer. The relationship of religion and State in Czech history; current media attitudes toward religious issues.

Readings: The Religions Book (Christianity: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Christianity; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Smith, Christianity); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Class 2

MIDTERM EXAM

In-class PPT presentations with talking points outline.

Week 7
Midterm Exam
Period

Class 1

ISLAM:

- Review of the Midterm results.
- Intro to the story of Islam.
- Sacred texts, people, concepts, practices.
- Relationship with other religious traditions.
- Islamic revivalism.

Readings: The Religions Book (specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Islam; Anthology of Living Religions; (Islam: specific pages as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Class 2

ISLAM (CONTINUED):

Modern approaches in Islam; Islam and politics; variety of modern interpretations of Jihad; common Central European beliefs about Islam; the battle of stereotypes and facts in liberal and conservative media. *(Quiz)*

Readings: PPT Islam; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Smith, Islam); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics

Week 8

Class 1

REVIEWING THE GREAT LIVING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS:

- Commonalities and differences
- Sacred texts, people, space, time.
Contribution to the human knowledge and creativity.
Problematic areas within each tradition.

Readings: PPTs Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Smith: Judaism, Christianity, Islam; Hick: Religious Pluralism, as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Class 2

MODERN RELIGIONS:

Sikhism, Santeria, following Jesus, Baha’I, Tenrikyo, “tribulation,” The Lion of Juda, Scientology, Unification Church, Wicca, Hare Krishna, Falun Dafa, meditative and all-beliefs-accepting movements.

Limitations of media information about closed movements; charismatic bias; Central and East European neo-pagan movements seen as revival of the remnants of pre-Christian traditions.

Readings: The Religions Book (Modern Religions: specific pages as directed by instructor); PPT Modern Religions; Anthology of Living Religions; (Modern Religions: specific pages as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 9

Class 1

MODERN RELIGIONS (CONTINUED):

Discussing new religious movements; examples of NRM media coverage in the West and in Czech Republic; short student presentations. Difference between new or revivalist religious movement and totalitarian and/or violent sects.

Readings: The Religions Book (Modern Religions: specific pages assigned individually as directed by instructor); web links from the PPT 8; Anthology of Living Religions; (Modern Religions: specific pages as directed by instructor).

Class 2

FACING THE PLURALITY OF BELIEFS:

Secularism, agnosticism, atheism, variety of religious traditions and internet; science and religion. Foundations of atheistic beliefs in the Czech Republic; media discourse and ways of avoiding emotional clashes of worldviews

Readings: PPT Plurality of Beliefs; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (Dawkins, Einstein, Ueshiba, Sun Tzu, pages as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Week 10

Class 1

RELIGION AND MEDIA

Media coverage of religion: over-generalized coverage of religion by certain media outlets; the role of social media networks in the formation of negative stereotypes; Czech media coverage of religion in general as compared to coverage of religiously termed violent



political groups, overgeneralization and prejudice reflected in media; strategies and tactics for keeping the media discourse civil.

Readings: PPT Media Coverage; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (latest issues [links] as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics.

Class 2

RELIGION AND MEDIA (CONTINUED):

Religion and Violence: Modern communicative aspects of religion: religion, media, social networks, politics and violence; aspects of classical propaganda theory that apply to some religiously termed violent political movements.

GROUP DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN CONCEPTS OF THE COURSE. (FIRST STUDENT PRESENTATIONS/FINAL MAKE-UP OPPORTUNITY).

Readings: PPT Religion and Violence; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (latest issues [links] as directed by instructor); handouts and/or on-line discussion topics. Review of the main concepts of the all previous readings. .

Week 11

No meeting on Monday, April 22, due to the Easter/Spring Break (The topic of this class will be joined with the topic of the class of April 17th).

Class 2

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Readings: n/a

Week 12

Class 1

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS/FINAL DISCUSSION (GROUP EXERCISE)

Potential final discussion topics: Diversity of secular and religious worldviews, media, politics and violence. Process of cultural hybridization and various reactions to it. Breaking the vicious cycle.

Readings: all previous course material and individual research findings.

Class 2

REVISION OF THE COURSE

Revision of the course.

Readings: PPT Revision; Files from the electronic Canvas reader (latest issues [links] as directed by instructor); Review of all essential course readings as directed by instructor.



Week 13
Final Exam Week

Class 1
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Student presentations. Tutoring, as needed.
Readings: n/a

Class 2
FINAL EXAM
Take-home exam: essay/paper
Readings: n/a

Course Materials

Core textbooks:

Fisher, Mary Path and Lee W. Bailey. *An Anthology of Living Religions*. Second Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2008.

The Religions Book. Jones, Gareth and Georgina Palffy eds., London/ New York/ Munich/ Delhi: DK, 2013.

Smith, Huston. *The World's Religions*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991 (or newer edition).

Recommended:

Bulfinch, Thomas, *Mythology*, New York: Dell Publishing, 1967.

Campbell, Joseph and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York/ London/ Toronto/ Sydney/ Auckland: Doubleday, 1988.

Dalai Lama, His Holiness the XIV. *The Hearth of the Buddha's Path*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011.

Girard, René. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. London/Oxford/ New York/ New Delhi/ Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016.

James, William. *The Variety of Religious Experience*. New York/London: Collier Books/Collier MacMillan Publishers.

Jung, Carl and C. Kerényi. *The Science of Mythology*. London/New York: Routledge, 2002.

Jung, Carl. *Psychology and the Occult*. London/New York: Routledge, 2008.

Midgley, Mary. *Evolution as Religion*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.

Sacks, Jonathan. *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*. London: Hodder, 2015.



Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007.

Additional readings may be distributed and/or assigned, including excerpts from book chapters, op-ed pages, and scholarly journals. The list may be updated in regard to the specific interest areas of the students.

Films

Excerpts from numerous documentaries and motion pictures representing various aspects of religious traditions and historical events will be screened in class.

Online Resources

Links for discussion updates: current topics several times a week. Links with prompting questions will be provided by instructor as they appear in the media or as relevant to the class topics. Generic links will be in the appropriate section of Modules on Canvas. Follow the Announcements on Canvas course site.