

Draft as of January 5th, 2020. Syllabus is subject to revision on Avenue to Learn (A2L)

Great Books in Asian Religions
Religious Studies 1J03 (RELIGST 1J03)
McMaster University
Winter 2020

Instructor: Marcus Evans

Office: University Hall B119

Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:00pm – 4:30pm

Email: evansm4@mcmaster.ca

Lectures: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 – 2:20pm, Chester New Hall (CNH B107)

Tutorials: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 12:30 – 1:20pm, T13 (Room 107)

Teaching Assistant: Anne Crosby

Office: TBA

Office Hours: TBA.

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Course Description

This course surveys books from the Asian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. We will peruse some of Asia's religious literature for their stances on living. We discuss themes ranging from the meaning of ritual, moral responsibility, reality, selfhood, suffering, meditation, what it means to be enlightened or awakened, and simply the notions of path, truth, or a way of life. Also, given that texts from the foregoing traditions have impacted cultures outside Asia, we sometimes discuss how they influence African American cultural productions and producers. In doing so, students will not only think and learn about what Asia's great books tell us about life, but also how artists of a certain culture appropriate those texts (or themes therein) into their own cultural work or worldviews. Simply put, students will

1. Learn about the basic teaching of classical religious texts of South and East Asia.
2. Learn about how these texts are used in other cultural spaces.
3. Develop their craft of writing on (and interpreting) religion in cultural production.

No background knowledge of Asian religions and languages is necessary as a course prerequisite.

Required Text

The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic. New York: Penguin Books. 1977.

Students can purchase this book used/new on Amazon and at the McMaster's campus store. Other sources, throughout the course, will be available online via Avenue to Learn (A2L) or through McMaster library's electronic services.

Assessments

Tutorial (10%)

Excellent performance in this course requires that students attend both lectures and tutorials. Tutorials will begin in the second week of the term. Your TA may use these sessions to review material from the previous week, to engage a select portion of the weekly readings, to watch, read, and discuss supplementary media, or to perform some sort of writing exercise. Students should always come to tutorial with paper and writing utensils in preparation for the event of writing. Your TA will devise a method of record-keeping tutorial attendance. Except for in seriously extenuating circumstances (e.g. a snow day or a medically necessitated relief supported by verifiable documentation), there are **no excused absences for tutorial**. Please accept responsibility if you miss a day (no emails requesting alternative assignments).

Two 650-word media responses (15% per response): Due on A2L Feb. 14th & Mar. 20th @ 11:59pm

Students will write two media responses on how Hinduism and Buddhism factor in select hip-hop productions of KRS-ONE and Dead Prez. The instructor will mark these papers according to how well students follow the instructions, for how well their responses apply certain themes, and for their clarity and coherence. The instructor will circulate prompts, supplementary material, and details about these assignments in lecture and on Avenue to Learn in advance of the assignments' due dates.

In-class quiz (25%): February 26th

Students will write a mid-term quiz in class following reading week. The quiz will cover basic concepts, themes, and people discussed thus far in readings and lectures. These evaluations will likely consist of short-answer responses, fill-in-the-blanks, and/or passage identification and explanation. More information on the quizzes will be circulated in class by the instructor.

Take-Home Exam (35%): Due April 9th

Students will be given over a week (from the last day of class) to write a take-home exam. The exam will be comprehensive, allowing students to draw from their lecture notes and readings to write responses to questions on select themes that we have discussed throughout the course. More information about the final will be circulated in class by the instructor.

Course Schedule:

The instructor may alter contents of this schedule at his discretion.

Week 1 (No Tutorials this week)

January 8th. Orientation.

January 9th. Hinduism.

Week 2

January 15th. The Vedic world.

January 16th. Ritual Sacrifice & Dharma.

Read: *The Rig Veda* (Selections on A2L)

Week 3

January 22nd. A Different World.

January 23rd. Death (the Guru) and Yoga.

Read: *The Upanishads* (Selections on A2L)

- 1. Chandogya (excerpt) & Manduka (whole); 2. Mundaka (excerpt); 3. Katha (whole).

Week 4

January 29th. The Song of God.

January 30th. From Krishna to KRS-ONE.

Read: *The Bhagavad Gita* (Selections on A2L).

Week 5

February 5th. Rama's Heroic Journey.

February 6th. Hanuman and Black Panther?

Read: *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (used/new copies in McMaster's campus store).

Week 6

February 12th. Buddhism & The Buddha (a screening)

February 13th. The Buddha (a screening)

February 14th. First assignment due by 11:59pm on A2L

Read: *Life of the Buddha* (Selections on A2L)

Week 7

Break.

Week 8

February 26th. In Class Quiz.

February 27th. The Four Noble Truths.

Read: "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth" and "Getting Rid of All Cares" from Walpola Sri Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught* (Selection on A2L).

Week 9

March 4th. The Path of Selflessness?

March 5th. The Eightfold Path and Dead Prez.

Read: *Dhammapada* (Selections A2L).

Week 10

March 11th. It's Bigger than Siddhartha.

March 12th. Chanting *The Lotus Sutra* and Tina Turner

- **Read:** *The Lotus Sutra* (Selections on A2L).
- **Read:** "Tina Turner: What's love Got to Do with it." Interview of Tina Turner by Andrea Miller for Lion's Roar (online magazine). March 7, 2016. <https://www.lionsroar.com/tina-turner-whats-love-got-to-do-with-it/>

Week 11

March 18th. Emptiness & The RZA

March 19th. China and Three Dao's.

March 20th. Second Assignment Due by 11:59pm (on A2L).

- **Read:** *The Heart Sutra* (Excerpt on A2L).
- **Read:** RZA "The Heart: A Street Parable of Courage" in *Tao of the Wu* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2012)
- **Read:** RZA. "'The Wu-Tang Manual: 'A Look to the East' & 'The Three Ways: Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism'" in James Robson's *The Norton Anthology of World Religions: Daoism*.

Week 12

March 25th. Dao of Confucius

March 26th. Dao of Heaven, Humanity, and Earth

- **Read:** *Basic Writings of Xunzi* (Selections on A2L).

Week 13 (No Tutorials)

April 1st. Dao of Laozi

April 2nd Dao of Water

- **Read:** *Daode Jing* (Selections on A2L).

Take Home Exam Due: April 9th @ 11:59pm on Avenue to Learn (A2L)

POLICIES

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity), located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Avenue to Learn (A2L)

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn (A2L). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be

deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. [Student Accessibility Services](#) can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

McMaster Student Absence Form

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.