

**COURSE OUTLINE**  
**PHIL-104**  
**Introduction to Religious Studies**  
**3 Semester Hours**  
**Humanities Core Course**

**HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**Description**

An introduction to the academic study of religion which explores the nature and variety of religious experience, the role of religion in the lives of individuals and communities, forms of ritual/rites/worship, the use of myths, symbols, and practices in guiding everyday living, religion's role in the construction of meaning, and the reciprocal relationship between religion and culture. Drawing on insights from the humanities and social sciences, this course is interdisciplinary in focus and worldwide in scope, covering religious experience in Asia, Africa, and the West. Prerequisite: Eligible to enroll in ENGL-121. (3 hours weekly)

**Statement on General Education and Liberal Learning**

A liberal education prepares students to lead ethical, productive, and creative lives and to understand how the pursuit of lifelong learning and critical thinking fosters good citizenship. General education courses form the core of a liberal education within the higher education curriculum and provide a coherent intellectual experience for all students by introducing the fundamental concepts and methods of inquiry in the areas of mathematics, the physical and natural sciences, the social sciences, the arts and the humanities, and composition. This course is part of the general education core experience at Howard Community College.

**Overall Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze the role of religion in the lives of individuals and societies.
2. Distinguish exoteric or external expressions of religion (doctrine and ritual, e.g.) from esoteric expressions of religion (secret, inner knowing possessed by a few).
3. Compare and contrast religion and spirituality.
4. Explore diverse religious practices, the role of each in a religion, and the intended effect of each on human behavior.
5. Analyze the writings of mystics, who claim direct experience of, or communion with ultimate reality.
6. Analyze cosmogonic myths that describe how the world came into being and eschatological myths that describe the end of time as well as what will happen to humans after death.
7. Analyze the role of religion in the construction of meaning and morality.
8. Explore the basic themes of religion, including the nature of the holy, the sacred vs. the profane, and the meaning of good and evil.
9. Demonstrate competence in the use of religious terms, such as ultimate reality, myth, symbol, ritual.
10. Explore both formal and popular expressions of religion in the Maryland region.

**Major Topics**

- I. Origin and Purpose of Religion
  - A. Human speculation about the "big questions" of life
  - B. The role of a community of like-minded people
  - C. The power of central, unifying myths
  - D. Awe and wonder in the face of the sacred and the mysterious
- II. The relationship between religion and culture

- A. The effect of culture on religion
- B. The effect of religion on culture
- III. Contrasts between types of religions
  - A. Institutional religions compared with “folk” religions
  - B. Scriptural religions compared with oral religions
- IV. Artistic and cultural expressions of the religious impulse
  - A. Ancient and modern expressions
  - B. Western, Asian, and African expressions
- V. Patterns of Belief and Practice
  - A. Sacramental Orientation
  - B. Prophetic Orientation
  - C. Mystical Orientation
- VI. Characteristics of Oral Religions
  - A. Human relationships with the natural world
  - B. Sacred time and sacred space
  - C. Lifecycle ceremonies
  - D. The roles of ancestors and shamanic figures
  - E. Devotional uses of music and dance
- VII. Characteristics of Institutional Religions
  - A. The relationships among sacred scriptures, beliefs, and practices
  - B. Devotional expressions within organized religions
  - C. Qualities of the personal experience of practicing a religion
  - D. Contemporary challenges facing institutional religions
  - E. The ability/inability of institutional religions to enforce behavior
- VIII. Religious responses to questions of meaning and value
  - A. The nature of ultimate reality
  - B. Human nature and its relationship with ultimate reality
  - C. The challenges of suffering, death, chance, and fate
  - D. The nature of and relationship between male and female
- IX. The intersection of academic disciplines in religious studies
  - A. Psychology
  - B. Mythology
  - C. Philosophy
  - D. Theology
  - E. Anthropology
- X. Spirituality and institutional religion
  - A. The role of spirituality within institutional religion
  - B. Spirituality as an alternative to institutional religion

### **Course Requirements**

Grading/exams: Grading procedures will be determined by the individual faculty member but will include the following:

- Final grades will be based on class participation, formal and informal writings, a practice log, and tests
- Course assignments/exams will include at least 1000 words of formal and informal writing
- Students will write personal responses to the subject matter of the course, as well as demonstrate competence in the subject matter through formal papers and tests

### **Other Course Information**

This course is a Humanities Core course. This course is a Humanities and an Arts and Sciences elective.