

Ancient World Religions and Philosophies

Instructors:
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The ancient world has had an enduring influence on global culture and politics, for most of the major world religions crystallize before the 6th century CE. This course will examine the origins of major systems of belief around the world, with special attention to the major questions and contexts in which they grew. In addition, the course will explore the origins of philosophical thinking in the Middle East and China, and consider the relationship between religious and philosophical ideas. The course will further explore in what ways religion and ideas are indigenous to a region and in what ways they are global.

Selections from Readings

Bhagavad Gita

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Lao Tzu Taoism

Buddhist Scriptures

Most readings appear in PDF on Moodle

Essential Content:

Analyze the complex effects of geography and environment on the development of human cultures and political systems.

Students will explore the possible links between environment and ideology in the ancient world

Examine the nature of power, its sources and justification, and its relationship to dominant ideologies.

Students will study the various religious and philosophical bases for legitimizing power and constraining its bounds in the ancient world

Examine different human approaches to truth and certainty: mythology, religion, philosophy, science.

Students in the course will analyze different ancient approaches to knowledge, nature, power, ethics, and the afterlife. These approaches will include a wide variety of religious and philosophical traditions.

Study the history of different intellectual disciplines with particular emphasis on their areas of confluence and conflict

The course is essentially a survey of ancient ideas, with special emphasis on the historical relationships between ideologies and a stress on comparative topical analysis.

Consider gender roles and their influence on human events and public policy

While considering issues of mind, body, and nature, students in the course will examine the treatment of gender in the major world religions and philosophies of antiquity.

Develop such analytical skills as critical reading, the interpretation of maps, art, and visual evidence, and the interpretation of statistical and tabular data.

Students will confront various types of evidence in the course, particularly visual material. They will use these resources in conjunction with written sources in the formulation of their arguments

Construct clear, elegant written and oral arguments, supported with appropriate evidence

Course assessments will all involve written and oral arguments that combine student reflection with textual analysis.

Core conceptual content standards:

1. Analyze and compare Western and non-Western idea systems.
2. Analyze the complex relationships between material conditions and cultural constructs, including the understanding of nature.
3. Analyze the origins, application and justification of power in different cultural settings.
4. Analyze and compare economic structures and their influence on the societies of the past.

Skills common to all courses on an iterative basis:

1. Reading for Meaning
2. Expository Writing
3. Oral Communication
4. Research
5. Appropriate Technology Use
6. Responsible Citizenship

Habits of Mind:

These are derived from our core competencies and common to all courses, and of the eight listed at least five can only be acquired and practiced in community with others (* below).

1. *Approach questions from an interdisciplinary perspective
2. Study problems, not eras
3. *Recognize the existence of multiple perspectives
4. Construct graceful generalizations
5. *Engage in public discourse in an atmosphere of ethical pluralism and mutual respect
6. Evaluate the quality of evidence drawn from varied media

7. *Respect the integrity of the academic endeavor
8. *Define ethical behavior in theory and in context

SSLs and Outcomes

I.

- A. Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought.
- B. Construct questions which further understanding, forge connections, and deepen meaning.
- C. Precisely observe phenomena and accurately record findings.
- D. Evaluate the soundness and relevance of information and reasoning.

II.

- A. Identify unexamined cultural, historical, and personal assumptions and misconceptions that impede and skew inquiry.
- B. Find and analyze ambiguities inherent within any set of textual, social, physical, or theoretical circumstances.

III.

- A. Use appropriate technologies as extensions of the mind.
- B. Recognize, pursue, and explain substantive connections within and among areas of knowledge.
- C. Create the “beautiful conceptions” that give coherence to structures of thought.

IV.

- A. Construct and support judgments based on evidence.
- B. Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance.
- C. Identify and characterize the composing elements of dynamic and organic wholes, structures and systems.
- D. Develop an aesthetic awareness and capability.

V.

- A. Identify, understand, and accept the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a diverse community.
- B. Make reasoned decisions which reflect ethical standards, and act in accordance with those decisions.

By the end of the course each student will have demonstrated understanding of the long history of inter-regional exchange of ideas and goods and formulated a conception of how despite this interplay different eastern and western traditions emerged. Student papers and discussions will provide the primary tool for assessing these outcomes in which the expected development of communication skills will also be on display.

Instructional Design and Approach

This course combines the history of ideas and the intellectual history sub-discipline with social and political history to offer an integrative approach to the ancient world. While the main themes of the course (Truth as based on the authority of the Divine, Truth as transparent to human reason, Truth as composite) will inform much of the course discussion, none of these themes rests comfortably apart from other historical influences. For this reason, the course takes a chronological and geographical (rather than thematic) approach to ancient history. We begin our discussion with the earliest traces of human history and questions of religion and philosophy then we proceed chronologically through the various regions of importance. We then proceed through the advent and preponderance of monotheism.

Students will examine the details of systems of thought, encounter these broader categories as strategies in for the establishment of knowledge and the legitimization of authority in human history, and reflect upon the ways that the constant interactions of people of different regions throughout history may have shaped these developments and systems. In addition, the course has a distinct comparative character: students will explore the parallels between Mediterranean and Asian ideas in each of the three wider categories.

As a survey, the course is Competency based, it seeks to establish competency in the subject matter and in analytical reading and writing. However, the course also has an Inquiry component: students will be required to formulate comparative questions and explore the sources to answer those questions. The major papers in the course will all have some research component. Finally, the course will treat varied subject matter: religion, philosophy, political thought, geography, and art. It will also require students to confront different ways of knowing, different ways of establishing truth (both historically and philosophically). In this sense it is genuinely integrative.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

1) Use of the tablet in class for anything other than assigned class work will result in an unexcused absence for the day (and therefore run the risk of a student being dropped from the course). Doing other work means partaking in any of the following during class time: viewing Facebook or other social networking sites, checking PowerSchool (e.g. obsessive-compulsive checking of updated grades for other classes), checking e-mail, IM-ing, taking phone calls, *consulting Wikipedia unless told to do so*, or ***viewing any other material not pertinent to current classroom discussion***.

2) Be on time and turn in assignments on time. Back up your files! Use a USB drive. There are no extensions except in the most unusual of circumstances (and with the explicit instruction of Student Life). See LATE WORK section below.

3) Courtesy and respect to each other and to the instructor should be maintained at all times in both e-mail correspondence and in class. The right to dissent shall not be stifled, but the need to reflect and articulate intelligently is also demanded. Questions should be directed toward the instructor. Class debates should address the issue at hand and its supporting evidence, not differences in student personalities.

GRADING

Papers	45%
Group projects, presentations, and participation	35%
Quizzes	10%
Creation/Apocalypse Poster	10%

LATE WORK AND COLLABORATION

As a simple matter of fairness to all students enduring the same time constraints as their peers and a matter of organization for the instructor, each assignment is expected to be turned in at the time specified. Except in the most unusual of circumstances and with instructor permission, late work will be penalized a half grade per day for up to four days (96 hours from the exact time of the cut off to be exact). After four days late work will not be accepted under any circumstances. Keep track of your due dates!

This also applies to group projects. Every member of a group is responsible for collaborative assignments. This means that not only is each member responsible for knowing what the other members have found in their research but the resulting final assignment is expected to be turned in on time and with all necessary parts. Each individual grade is affected by the collective effort.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Especially if you complete written work at the last moment, the temptation to pass off other people's work as your own is a great one. In a culture where the value of ideas is rarely in their value for their own sake, it is crucial to appreciate them at an institution that thrives on developing new ones. All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) explain:

“You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else's words or ideas but fail to credit that person. . . . You plagiarize even when you do credit the source but use its exact words without using quotation marks or block indentation. . . . You [also] plagiarize when you paraphrase a source so closely that anyone putting your work next to it would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.”

Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole *or in part*, will result in an immediate F for the assignment and referral to Keith McInstosh for disciplinary action.

See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details and be sure to refer to the IMSA [Chicago Style](#) website for written assignments.