

Comparative Study of Religions (A005548)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)	Dutch	Gent	lecture independent work
B (semester 1)	English	Gent	independent work lecture

Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

De Roover, Jakob LW51 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

	crdts	offering
Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject Arabic and Islamic Studies)	5	A, B
Bachelor of Science in Sociology	5	A
Exchange Programme Critical Perspectives on Culture	5	B
Exchange Programme History	5	A, B
Exchange Programme Oriental Languages and Cultures	5	A, B
Linking Course Master of Arts in Gender and Diversity	5	A, B
Elective Set Critical Perspectives on Culture	5	B
Elective Set Religion Studies	5	A, B

Teaching languages

English, Dutch

Keywords

Comparative study of religion, the concept of religion, orientalism, Christianity, Western culture, Asian traditions

Position of the course

This course introduces the student to a range of basic issues in the comparative study of religion and cultures, and provides the student with the necessary concepts and skills to learn to reason about these issues.

Contents

The course introduces the student to a range of current issues in the comparative study of religion. Its aim is *not* to teach and memorize a series of facts about the different 'religions' of humanity or to compare religion X with religion Y and Z. The aim is to learn how to reason about central problems and questions in the study of cultures, religions and traditions.

Some of the issues that will be addressed in this course:

(a) The inconsistency in the use of the term 'religion': in the study of religion, there is a confusion concerning the use of the term religion. How does one recognise a phenomenon as a religion? Which contradiction emerges in discussions of religion and how can this problem be addressed?

(b) The cultural universality of religion: one of the basic intuitions in the comparative study of religion (and in Western culture in general) is that all cultures have some form of religion. To understand a culture one needs to study its religion. To get to know a people, one needs to find out their religious beliefs. But how do we know this is the case? What are the foundations of this idea: which evidence

has been given for the fact that all cultures have religion?

(c) The Western creation of religion in India (and Asia, more generally): India is seen as the country of many religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. Today, however, several scholars in the study of religion problematise this claim and suggest that these so-called religions are creations, constructions or inventions of the West. What is meant by this? Does this type of hypothesis make sense?

(d) The theological roots and framework of the comparative study of religion: while the comparative study of religion and culture of today claims to be secular and scientific, its conceptual framework is pervaded by concepts like 'religion', 'worship', 'god', 'salvation', 'liturgy', etc. These concepts have their origin in a Christian-theological framework. Has the study of religion indeed freed itself from the constraints of Christian theology? Does its conceptual vocabulary allow us to gain insight into the traditions of Asian, African, and Native American cultures?

(e) Which kinds of questions have the traditions of India, and of Asia more generally, been concerned about? The human search for happiness or 'enlightenment' has been central to many these traditions. But what does this mean and how relevant are these traditions today to people from other cultures? The students will read relevant texts to gain insight into each of these problems. The problem and questions will be introduced in the form of lectures and online videos, after which the students will have the opportunity to discuss the texts, problems and questions with the teacher in work sessions/online discussion groups.

Initial competences

No specific competences are required except the common-sense ideas about religion that exist in the contemporary Western world and a good command of English (which is required for reading the texts that will be discussed during the course).

Final competences

- 1 To have acquired insight into central issues in the comparative study of religion.
- 2 To independently and critically read and analyse scientific texts in the comparative study of religion.
- 3 To formulate a systematically argued standpoint concerning important problems in the study of religion and culture.
- 4 To be able to reflect upon one's own experience and common-sense beliefs concerning Western culture and non-Western cultures.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

- The central themes and issues will be introduced and discussed in lectures and online videos.
- The guided self-study (reading of texts and online videos) functions as a preparation for the lectures.

Study material

Type: Reader

Name: Comparative Study of Religions: English-language texts will be made available on Ufora

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

References

Balagangadhara, S.N. 2005. *"The Heathen in His Blindness...": Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*. Second revised edition. New Delhi: Manohar (available on the Ufora page of the course). Other texts (both primary and secondary sources) and additional background literature will be made available on Ufora.

Course content-related study coaching

- Opportunity to pose questions to the teacher during the lectures and online seminars or during the consultation hour.
- Opportunity for feedback in the course of writing the exam paper.
- Opportunity for feedback on exam performance.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment, Participation, Assignment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment, Participation, Assignment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment**Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment**

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

Evaluation on the basis of (a) an exam paper, (b) participation in the classes and feedback-sessions, and (c) an oral exam where the exam paper is discussed. The paper addresses a question or assignment chosen from a list which will be given to the students at the beginning of the semester. The students can get feedback on a version of their exam paper during the semester.

Calculation of the examination mark

60% exam paper; 10% participation in classes and feedback-sessions; 30% oral exam.

Facilities for Working Students

The course material will be made available on Ufora as much as possible. There will be a possibility to join online feedback-sessions, where the students can discuss the texts and questions and drafts of their exam paper with the teacher.