

Comparative Study of Religions (K000796)

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 2024-2025

A (semester 1)

Dutch

Gent

lecture

seminar

independent work

Lecturers in academic year 2024-2025

De Roover, Jakob

LW18

lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2024-2025

crdts

offering

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Comparative study of religion, the concept of religion, orientalism, Christianity, Western culture, Indian 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 offers the student the necessary skills and concepts to learn to reason about these issues. This educational component is part of the Minor Cultural Sciences in the third year Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. The course can also support study or degree programmes in the social sciences and humanities that involve the study of different cultures and religions. It contributes to the following educational competences of the degree programme in the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology: B.1.6, B.2.2, B.3.1, B.3.2, B.5.1.

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 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) Orientalism: what are the cognitive constraints under which Western culture has understood and described Asian cultures and their traditions?

(e) 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?

(f) How do certain problems in the study of religion recur in the study of culture and society in general? Here, several societal problems of today will be discussed.

To gain insight into each of these problems the students will read relevant texts. The problem and questions will be introduced in the form of online videos and lectures, after which the students will have the opportunity to discuss the texts, problems and questions with the course 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

Seminar, 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 and online seminars.
- On the basis of their guided self-study (reading of texts) and the lectures, the students will be invited to ask questions and participate in discussions during the online seminars, under the guidance of the teacher.

Study material

None

References

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

Course content-related study coaching

- Opportunity to pose question 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

continuous assessment

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

Participation, Assignment

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

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

(Approved)

Extra information on the examination methods

Evaluation on the basis of (a) an exam paper and (b) participation in the classes and feedback-sessions. The paper addresses a question or task 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 twice during the semester.

Calculation of the examination mark

90% exam paper; 10% participation in classes and feedback-sessions.

Facilities for Working Students

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