



## REL 151: Religion and the Meaning of Existence

Fall 2023, online asynchronous, 8-week course

CRN 61427

Professor: Sarah Hadmack  
Office: Hale Palanakila 140

Office Hours: by appointment  
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### About This Course-

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This course is an introduction to basic issues of the question of the meaning of human existence. Emphasis is placed upon the student analyzing his/her own beliefs and exploring alternative answers. WCC: DH

### Student Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify the various understandings of experience, existence, and/or the Ultimate/Absolute Reality in the world's religious traditions.
2. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between these meanings of existence in two or more religions.
3. Identify the rituals, myths, and symbols/art that shape these worldviews.
4. Analyze your belief system(s).

### Course Format

I'm so excited you're here! This course is structured to broaden your understanding of the ways in which we derive meaning and understanding in this world. Each week you can expect to do the following:

1. Read my lecture notes.
2. Read one or two articles about that week's topic.
3. Answer review questions and/or complete an assignment, game, or quiz to demonstrate your understanding of the context.
4. Discuss the week's topics with your classmates via Lulima Forums, Padlet, and/or Jamboards.



**Most tasks will be due on Thursdays by 11:55 pm.** I look forward to working with you!

### Required Materials

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All required resources are freely available. Textbook readings, my notes, and videos are all embedded in the weekly lessons in [Lulima](#). Please ensure that you have all of the following before Week 1:

## Hardware/software

- Daily access to a desktop or laptop computer (**Using a smartphone or tablet is not sufficient.**) You may rent a laptop for the entire semester from the WCC library. To reserve one go to this [library webpage](#).
- Reliable high-speed Internet connection
- A recent version of the [Chrome](#) or [Firefox](#) browsers (free) Please use either of these browsers when using Laulima.
- A word-processing program, such as web-based [Google Docs](#) (free with UH username and most recommended), [Word](#) (free student version), or [Pages](#) (free with Apple hardware).
- Presentation program, such as [Powerpoint](#) (free student version), [Keynote](#) (free with Apple hardware), or web-based [Google Slides](#) (free with UH username).
- [Padlet](#) account (free)
- [Adobe \(Acrobat\) Reader](#) (free)

## Course Policies

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### Participating in our Course

While most of your coursework will be completed independent of your classmates, you will have ample opportunities to work collaboratively through Laulima Forums, Google Docs, Padlet, and Jamboards (Prior knowledge of these tools is NOT required.) We learn more when exposed to diverse viewpoints, we challenge ourselves when we have to articulate and sometimes defend our knowledge, and group activities develop a sense of community and responsibility for one another. Thus, this course prizes collaborative learning. Feel free to bounce ideas off of one another when working on an assignment or answering review questions, just be sure that your answers are not written identically!

## Communication

### Contacting the Instructor

You can contact me via email or through the Forums tool on Laulima. Common courtesy is greatly appreciated!- please review this syllabus to see if your question has already been answered. For other questions and communication, I will do my best to reply to you within 48 hours Monday-Friday. I do not regularly check my email on the weekends.

## Attendance & Grading

### Attendance/Participation

Participating in our Laulima course is very important. This course is an online, 8-week asynchronous course in Laulima that is offered in a compressed time frame, which requires you to dedicate minimally 9 to 12 hours per week to course work. Plan to login to Laulima at least three times per week to read the materials, complete assignments, and discuss the materials with your classmates. Please be sure to read all of my emails since it will be my main form of communication with you. You can read past emails by clicking on the "email archive" tab on the left menu bar in Laulima.

### Late Work/ Make-up Policy

Students are provided with three virtual 'No Questions Asked' (NQA) coupons that enable them to make up any assignment, quiz, or forum up to one week past the due date. Anytime that you submit an assignment late or take a quiz late, then I will automatically apply one of your NQA coupons to it. If you use all three of your NQA coupons, future late work will result in an automatic zero. Coupons may not be shared or replicated. Unused coupons will be counted toward extra credit if the student submitted all assignments, quizzes, and other tasks on time.

While I talk quite a bit about god, gods, and goddesses, I certainly don't want to play one! I am not the judge of your priorities. Thus, you do not need to provide me with a doctor's note or an explanation of

your personal emergency. YOU decide when you need to use a NQA coupon. However, use them wisely since no further late work will be accepted, regardless of reason, once you have used the three NQA coupons.

### Grading

#### Assessments and Weighting:

Quizzes (most weeks).....	25%
Discussion Questions: in Forums and Padlets (weekly).....	30%
Other Activities (such as webs, collaborative work, email replies, Jamboards, etc.)...25%	
Final Project (due Week 8)..	20%
TOTAL.....	100%

#### Letter Grades and Percentage Ranges

You will receive a letter grade based on the following scale:

A = 90-100%

B = 80-89%

C = 70-69%

D = 60-69%

F = 0-59%

N= The 'N' grade indicates that the student has worked conscientiously, attended regularly, finished all work, fulfilled course responsibilities, and has made measurable progress. However, either the student has not achieved the minimal student learning outcomes and is not prepared to succeed at the next level, or the student has made consistent progress in class but is unable to complete the class due to extenuating circumstances, such as major health, personal, or family emergencies.

## Descriptions of Course Tasks and Assessments

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### Reading and Notetaking

Each week you will read my notes and an article or two on the weekly topic. Most people's retention of the material greatly diminishes in only a day if they didn't take notes or share what they read. Note taking improves your ability to learn, understand, and remember the material. Smart note taking ensures that you are an active participant in your learning, requires you to think about what you are reading, helps you to form connections between topics, and serves as an organized, concise review for studying. There are several note taking strategies! I recommend using either the [Cornell method](#), [Mapping method](#), or the [Outlining method](#). If you Google these note-taking methods, you can find plenty of examples online. I have provided you with one guide for each.

### Quizzes

Most weeks you will take a quiz on my lecture notes and/or the weekly readings. Quizzes consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and/or true/false questions. Once started, the quiz cannot be paused so please be sure that you have a reliable internet connection before you begin. All questions will appear on one webpage; feel free to save whenever you like but do not click 'submit' until you have finished. Quizzes are timed except for the Syllabus Quiz. **You are allowed to take each quiz two times and your highest score will be recorded.**

### Discussion Questions

Each week we will discuss issues pertaining to the weekly theme. We will discuss the topics through several different programs: Lulima Forums, Padlet, Google Docs, Google Jamboards, Flipgrid, and/or AnswerGarden. Prior knowledge of these tools is NOT required. Students should both post and reply to their classmates posts, otherwise it's not a discussion.

### Weekly Emails

Please read my weekly emails, in which I will comment on your work, provide you with additional notes, and keep you abreast of any changes. Some emails will be in the form of a short video.

### Other Activities

There are other activities to demonstrate your knowledge, work with your classmates, and/or make connections between content. These activities will be introduced to you during the relevant Lulima lesson page. Examples of these activities might include: webbing, Venn diagrams, assessing sources for credibility, email replies, working collaboratively on a Google document, and reflections.

### Final Project

Students will select a topic to research for their final project. Topics include, but are not limited to, religious views on: abortion, genetic enhancements, assisted suicide, love, evolution/creationism, nature, marriage, etc.

Students are expected to:

1. research at least two faiths' views on their chosen topic
  - a. students must demonstrate the credibility of the sources they used and include an annotated bibliography
2. provide their own views on the topic

Students are encouraged to:

1. present the findings in a creative format such as a blog post, magazine article, educational video, piece of artwork, etc.

### Course Schedule

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Please review the course schedule below where you will find the dates, course topics, and assessments to be completed each week.

Specific topics to be covered each week, requirements and expectations for each assignment, and additional details for each week are available in the weekly lesson plans on Lulima. The following schedule is subject to change. Should changes occur, you will be notified by email.

### Most tasks are due on Thursdays by 11:55pm HST.

#### Week 1, Oct. 16-20: Introduction to the Course

Introduce yourself in the Na Mo'olelo slides and respond to two of your classmates' posts.

Familiarize yourself with Lulima

Read- Spiritual Personality Types

Quiz- Syllabus

#### Week 2, Oct. 23-27: Values, Virtues, and Principles

Jamboard- Values, Virtues, and Principles

Read/watch- Virtue Ethics

Poll- The Golden Mean

Read- "Toward a Definition of Religion"

Quiz- "Toward a Definition of Religion" Reading

Discussion Forum- Toward a Definition of Religion

#### Week 3, Oct. 30- Nov. 3: Myths, Symbols, and Rituals

Slide- Pivotal Values Collage

Read/Watch- Professor's Notes on Myths, Symbols, and Ritual  
Read- "The Language of the Sacred"  
Read- "Ritual"  
Discussion Forum- Rituals  
Quiz- Myth, Symbols, and Rituals

### Week 4, Nov. 6-10: Ways of Conceiving the Divine/ Understandings of the Sacred

Activity- Credible Sources  
Create a Google Slide presentation- for the faith to which you were assigned. What is the "Meaning of Life" according to that faith? Ask your classmates questions about their presentations  
Reading- "The Appearance of the Sacred"

### Week 5, Nov. 13-17: Knowledge, Belief, Authority, and Tradition

Answer- the questions you received on your Google Slide presentation last week  
Read- "Knowledge, Belief, Authority, and Tradition"  
Read- "Truth"  
Discussion Forum- what is capital T "Truth"? How do we know? What or who do we rely on for knowledge?  
Brainstorm- for your Final Project

### Week 6, Nov. 20-24: Suffering and the Problem of Evil

Read- "Evil: Its Reality and Meaning" and "The Problem of Evil"  
Discussion Forum- Suffering and Evil  
Submit- your Final Project topic and at least three credible, authoritative sources you found to support your research

### Week 7, Nov. 27- Dec. 1: Views on Death and Transcendence

Read- What Lies Beyond Death  
Read- "The Quest for Salvation"  
Discussion Forum- Death and the Afterlife

### Week 8, Dec. 4-8: Final Project

Share your Final Project  
Discussion Forum- provide praise and constructive criticism on your classmates' assignments  
Congratulations! You have completed the course.

## Additional Information

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### College Policies

#### Academic Honesty:

Students are expected to act with personal integrity, to respect other students' opinions and property, and to help create an academic environment in which discussion is encouraged. Students are expected not to engage or tolerate acts of plagiarism: cheating, copying, fabrication of citations, or other acts of

academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is treated seriously in this course. If you are quoting someone verbatim, then you must use quotation marks and cite the source immediately after the quotation in parenthetical form, (author's last name, page number). If you are unsure whether or not you are citing sources correctly, please ask me. Ignorance is no excuse. Students charged with academic dishonesty face serious consequences that range from an F grade for the assignment to an F grade for the course.

#### Statement on AI-generated work:

It is expected that you do your own work in this course. There is great value to thinking through the assignments individually. Writing is a wonderful tool to process the information you learn and to form your own opinions. Putting an assignment prompt into an AI app such as ChatGPT and presenting its answer as your own is plagiarism (cheating) and grounds for failing the course.

#### Appropriate use of AI when working on tasks in this course:



- feel free to use spell and grammar check tools such as Grammarly
- feel free to use AI recommendations for rephrasing sentences you first drafted yourself
- feel free to use AI apps to ask for clarification or additional explanation on a point you are confused by
- feel free to use AI tools to ask for source recommendations to then read and further understand a topic
- feel free to use it for brainstorming assistance and language support

#### Inappropriate use of AI when working on tasks in this course:



- do not use full sentences or paragraphs produced by an AI app as your own work. (This is plagiarism).
- do not have the AI answer the assignment (any course question) for you and then substitute different words for some of its words. This is patch-writing, a form of cheating.

#### Disabilities Accommodation:

If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to fully participate in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Specialist Counselor to discuss reasonable accommodations that will help you succeed in this class. Roy Inouye can be reached at 808-235-7453, [royinouye@hawaii.edu](mailto:royinouye@hawaii.edu), or you may stop by Hale Kako'o 106 for more information.

#### Title IX:

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Specifically, Title IX prohibits sex discrimination; sexual harassment and gender-based harassment, including harassment based on actual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; sexual assault; sexual exploitation; domestic violence;

dating violence; and stalking. Windward Community College is committed to the pursuit of equal education. If you or someone you know has experienced sex discrimination or gender-based violence, WCC has resources to support you. To speak with someone confidentially, please go to: [Title IX | Windward Community](#) to find the appropriate contact person.

#### Alternate Contact Information:

If you are unable to contact the instructor, have questions that your instructor cannot answer, or for any other issues, please contact the Academic Affairs Office in Alakai 121, 808-235-7422, [wccaa@hawaii.edu](mailto:wccaa@hawaii.edu)

#### Services:

Windward is one of the most supportive colleges! Please don't be shy! Utilize all of the wonderful services that are available to help you succeed. For information on counseling/advising, careers and student employment, tutoring (including services such as the Writing Center, Math Lab, Speech Lab, test proctoring, Trio, etc.), HINET, peer mentors, childcare, and more please see: [Services For Students | Windward Community](#)

#### Extra Credit

Extra credit will be available throughout the semester. Please contact the professor for more information. No more than two extra credit assignments can be submitted per student during the last two weeks of the semester.

#### Syllabus Change Policy:

Information contained in the course syllabus may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor. Updates to the syllabus will be communicated via email.

#### Mission Statement:

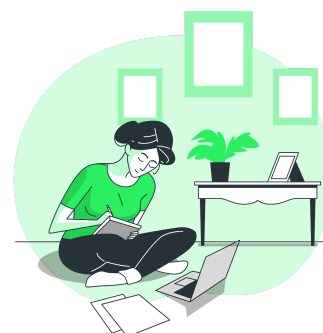
'O keia ka wā kūpono e ho'onui ai ka 'ike me ka ho'omaopopo i kō Hawai'i mau ho'oilina waiwai. Aia nō ho'i ma ke Kulanui Kaiāulu o ke Ko'olau nā papahana hou o nā 'ike 'akeakamai a me nā hana no'eau. Me ke kuleana ko'iko'i e ho'ohiki ke Kulanui e kāko'o a e ho'okumu i ala e hiki kē kōkua i ka ho'onui 'ike a nā kānaka maoli. Na mākou nō e ho'olako, kāko'o a paipai i nā Ko'olau a kō O'ahu a'e me nā hana no'eau ākea, ka ho'ona'auao 'oihana a me ka ho'onui 'ike ma ke kaiāulu — hō'a'ano a e ho'oulu i nā haumāna i ka po'okela.

Windward Community College offers innovative programs in the arts and sciences and opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of Hawai'i and its unique heritage. With a special commitment to support the access and educational needs of Native Hawaiians, we provide the Ko'olau region of O'ahu and beyond with liberal arts, career and lifelong learning in a supportive and challenging environment — inspiring students to excellence.

#### Secrets of Success

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1. Keep up with the readings and note taking. Since the course is set up to discuss the readings, if you do not read you will feel completely lost and not have an enriching educational experience. Additionally, by completing the readings and note taking, you will be well prepared for all of the required tasks of this course.
2. Only check social media and your other favorite websites at set times each day. You're working on your computer for this course. Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and more are only a click away. Classwork is hard! Reading streams and looking at photos is fun and easy! Oh, and that great feeling we get every



time someone acknowledges something we posted... I get it. Distraction is everywhere. Here are some things you can do to avoid temptation. Choose which recommendations can work for you given your family's needs and your specific distractions:

- a. do not leave any distracting websites open on your computer when you're completing class work.
  - b. leave your phone in the next room. I assume that if there's an emergency then someone will call me, not text. Thus, I do not go to my phone while I'm working unless it rings.
  - c. if you have a smartwatch that vibrates every time you get a notification, take it off during your work time.
  - d. designate specific times in which you allow yourself to go to your favorite websites. Whatever you tend to check out or click on incessantly, try scheduling in certain blocks of time for that activity and do not check them out at other times.
3. Stay organized. Use a planner! Put important deadlines for assignments from all of your courses' syllabi into the planner. Create a weekly schedule with your school and work hours. Be sure to schedule in blocks of time when you plan to read, study, and complete assignments.
  4. Contact me if you have any questions. Never think that your question is "too stupid" to ask. We are all on a life-long journey in which we learn and synthesize information everyday, act according to that knowledge, trust what has become reliable wisdom, and reassess other knowledge with newfound information. I'm not out to trick you; I want you to succeed! I am here to help you. Let me know how I can make this the best educational experience for you.

Let's get started!

