UNIVERSITY of HAWAIʻI
WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Ke Kulanui Kaiāulu o ke Koʻolau

REL 151, Religion and the Meaning of Existence

Fall 2026*

3 Credits | CRN 62234

*This syllabus and/or our Course Schedule is subject to change at any time. I will provide timely notification to you of any changes via the Lamakū Announcements tool. Mahalo in advance.

About Windward Community College

Mission Statement

ʻO keia ka wā kūpono e hoʻonui ai ka ʻike me ka hoʻomaopopo i kō Hawaiʻi mau hoʻoilina waiwai. Aia nō hoʻi ma ke Kulanui Kaiāulu o ke Koʻolau nā papahana hou o nā ʻike ʻake akamai a me nā hana noʻeau. Me ke kuleana koʻikoʻi e hoʻohiki ke Kulanui e kākoʻo a e hoʻokumu i ala e hiki kē kōkua i ka hoʻonui ʻike a nā kānaka maoli. Na mākou nō e hoʻolako, kākoʻo a paipai i nā Koʻolau a kō Oʻahu aʻe me nā hana noʻeau ākea, ka hoʻonaʻauao ʻoihana a me ka hoʻonui ʻike ma ke kaiāulu— hōʻaʻano a e hoʻoulu i nā haumāna i ka poʻokela.

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

ʻĀina

Windward Community College is located in the ahupuaʻa of Kāneʻohe and Heʻeʻia in the moku of Koʻolaupoko on the island of Oʻahu. Both ahupuaʻa are directly connected to the moʻo ʻōlelo of Pāpa and Wākea, who are seen as the ancestors of the Hawaiian nation. The campus sits beneath the puʻu of Keahiakahoe, which is also connected to many moʻo ʻōlelo of this ʻāina. Because wind names and rain names are associated with specific ʻāina, the rain name of Kāneʻohe is known as the ʻĀpuakea and the rain name of Heʻeʻia is the Ulumano.

Instructor Information

About Your Instructor

Aloha kākou! My name is Christine Walters and I am a third generation British American who was born and raised in Ojibwe lands near what is today known as the Michigan/Canada border. My proudest accomplishment is that I am the first in my family to become a college graduate: it took

me five years to earn my mathematics AA degree at community college while I worked three jobs (60+ hours a week) and attended school part time. Eventually, I earned my BA in Religious Studies from the University of South Florida and a MA in Asian Religions from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where I specialized in Buddhism. I started to pursue a PhD in South Asian religions, with a focus on South Indian Hinduism and Sri Lankan Buddhism, but I left the program in 2011 after only attending the program for a year in order to return to Oʻahu and start teaching full time at Leeward Community College. I was hired by Windward Community College in the Fall of 2025 and feel haʻahaʻa to be a part of the community here. Off campus, my hobbies include reading, hiking, and gardening. I read a lot of books about lāʻau lapaʻau in my free time. In case it isn't already obvious, I'll point out that I am quite the nerd: I am obsessed with rewatching my favorite films and recently watched the movie *Project Hail Mary* about five times! I have an Aussiedor fur baby named Pualena who loves to hike and I'm married to a local Filipino guy from Pearl City who has two adult children and an addiction to the ocean.

How to Contact Your Instructor

Christine Walters, Instructor, Humanities Department

- Virtual Office: Google Meets (link will be sent via email by request)
- Office Hours (by appointment): MTWR 9 AM to 10 AM (or by appointment outside of these times)
    - Virtual Office: Pālanakila 140 via Google Meets
    - Office phone: 808-236-9140 (feel free to leave a message; your message will be sent to my email in the event I miss your phone call)
    - Other on-campus meeting sites: The Hub or TRiO (by appointment)
- Email: cwalters@hawaii.edu

Response time: I check my email inbox between 7 AM and 6 PM Monday through Friday and will reply to your received email within a 24 hour timeframe. **I do not respond to emails during scheduled holidays or weekends**. I will *only* reply to emails on the weekend or a holiday in the event of a student emergency: hospitalization, natural disaster, and/or death in the family.

Asking Course Questions

Please use course Q&A in Lamakū Discussions for all general course questions about content, activities, due dates, how work will be graded, etc. I will check Q&A Monday through Friday twice a day (once in the morning and once in the afternoon) and provide responses there.

Email me directly with any specific grading questions and/or personal matters, per FERPA, to keep your information protected. Please use Lamakū Email instead of UH Gmail or other email.**

**While Lamakū has an Instant Message feature, I prefer email. Please respect your classmates' privacy and do not use Instant Message to communicate with your classmates. You are free, however, to email your classmates on Lamakū or use the Discussions tool to communicate with your classmates.

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:

- Location: Alakaʻi 121
- Phone: (808) 235-7422

Contingency Plan

If there is an internet outage or emergency on my end, I will do my best to communicate an update as soon as possible; mahalo in advance for your patient understanding.

Course Format & Structure

This course is offered in a 8-week time frame. Please note that this is not a self-paced course; our course schedule is provided in this syllabus.

This as an online, asynchronous 8-week course:

- Content release: All modules will be available from the start of term; I do not close content.
- Students will be interacting with the course instructor, peers, and content exclusively online; out of respect for students' schedules, there will be no live meetings.
- Course Benefits: this course is using Open Educational Resources (OER) and is Textbook Cost Zero (TXT0).

Regular Substantive Interaction (RSI)

Online courses at Windward Community College follow the college's RSI Definition for ensuring quality instruction. You can expect me to communicate with you frequently (and in a timely manner) about our coursework in the following ways during our 8-week course:

- *Announcements:* students can expect Announcements on Monday mornings.
- *Assignments:* Submissions will be graded using a Lamakū rubric. The Assignments tool and the Grades tool will be used to provide feedback within a week of the due date of the assignment.
- *Discussions:* I will monitor the Discussions tool 9 AM to 5 PM on Monday through Thursday to ask additional follow-up questions, respond to questions left by students, and/or highlight areas that might need clarification for the class to consider. Work will be graded within a week of submission and the Grades tool will be used to provide personalized feedback.
    - *Q&A:* I will check and provide answers to student posts on the course Q&A in Lamakū Discussions Monday through Thursday, 9 AM to 5 PM.

All course activity due dates are listed in Lamakū on the Calendar. Please check your UH email often and set your Lamakū Notifications (both email and D2L Brightspace Pulse App) to receive course notices, such as grading updates, announcements, and activity reminders. I will keep our Lamakū course Grades as current as possible.

Participation Verification

Campuses are required by federal regulations to verify the participation of students in their classes. In accordance with Executive Policy 7.209, all students in the University of Hawai'i system are required to establish "participation" to ensure that they are not dropped from their class(es). Effective Fall 2021, students who fail to participate by the late registration period for a class will be administratively dropped from that class. Students may also be dropped from dependent prerequisite and/or corequisite classes if both courses do not establish participation.

Course Information

Catalog Description

Introduction to the basic ideas and issues in contemporary religious thought about the meaning of existence.

Prerequisite: ENG 100 with a grade of C or better or equivalent.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By the end of the course students will have had the opportunity to:

1. Identify reasons for the academic study of religion.
2. Describe the basic beliefs and existential answers for the world's major religions.
3. Examine relevant issues and questions about the meaning of existence.
4. Analyze the myths that provide answers to the meaning of existence.

Special note about WI Courses

In this Writing Intensive course, you will do a substantial amount of writing (a minimum of 4000 words) to help you learn the course content and also improve your writing skills. Your instructor will help you with your writing by giving you instructions in class and providing you with individual feedback. While Writing Intensive courses can be demanding, many students find that the act of writing helps them to think more deeply about the subject. In addition, improved writing skills will benefit you not only in your future studies, but also in your employment and personal life.

WI Hallmarks

W1. The class uses writing to promote the learning of course materials.

W2. The class provides interaction between the instructor and students while students do assigned writing. At least one student-teacher conference on a writing assignment is required in writing intensive courses at WCC.

W3. Writing assignments must make up at least 40% of each student's course grade.

W4. The class requires students to do a substantial amount of writing—a minimum of 4,000 words, or about 16 pages.

W5. To allow for meaningful professor-student interaction on each student's writing, the class is restricted to 20 students.

Course Materials

Required

This course utilizes materials that are OER and TXT0; as such, there is no required textbook.

- Daily access to a computer with internet (desktop or laptop) is **REQUIRED.**
    - Windward offers free laptop and WiFi hotspot check-out to students (first-come, first-served), as well as software and other tech discounts; see Ka Piko Student Tech Support for information.
    - UH Online provides an online learning Readiness Activity and an Orientation to Online Learning that Windward CC students may take to see if online learning is a good fit.

Recommended

- D2L Brightspace Pulse App (free download from app stores)
- For students who want a textbook, I recommend *The Illustrated World's Religions: A Guide to Our Wisdom Traditions* by Huston Smith.

Lamakū Learning Management System (https://lamaku.hawaii.edu/d2l/home)

Learn about the Hawaiian meaning of the word "lamakū": Lamakū Pronunciation, Meaning, and Importance.

- UHCC Lamakū Student Resources (how-to videos)
    - Contact UH ITS for 24/7 Lamakū assistance.

- Keeping Accessibility and UDL in Mind
    - If you find any course content that needs remediation and/or updating, please kindly share and I will immediately work to make the content accessible.
- Lamakū courses will appear 5 days before the first day for the academic term and will become inactive (no longer be available to access) 3 weeks after the end of the term. Be sure to save any coursework you may need from Lamakū *during* the term.
- Lamakū automatically logs you out *if it does not detect activity for three hours*. A warning message will appear, notifying you of the lack of activity. Activity is defined as clicking a button in Lamakū, such as "Save Draft" or "Next" (in a test), clicking on a course tab, or taking an action that sends information to the server.

Other Technology

D2L Brightspace, the parent company of Lamakū, recommends users choose the latest versions of Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge, or Apple Safari as their internet browser.

We recommend that students update their internet browser at the start of each term, search how to allow pop-up windows, adjust their cookies, and clear device history. Also, fully restart your computer and/or device from time-to-time to optimize performance.

Review the privacy/security policies before using the technologies we will be using in this class. Contact me if you would like to discuss the use of alternate options or technologies.

- Adobe Reader is used to read course files (accessibility statement, privacy policy)
- Google Drive is UH-provided cloud storage (accessibility statement, privacy policy)
- Google Docs is used to create documents (accessibility statement, privacy policy)
- Google Slides is a presentation authoring software provided by UH (accessibility statement, privacy policy)
- Loom is used for screen recording (accessibility statement not provided, privacy policy)
- YouTube is used for delivering some of the course content (accessibility statement, privacy policy)

Grading Policy

- Attendance and participation is measured through Discussion Posts submissions; regularly missing posts WILL be detrimental to your success in this course.
- Grading of all submissions will be completed within a week of the due date.
- **The instructor ONLY accepts late work for emergency circumstances (hospitalization, natural disaster, death in the family, etc)**. Late submission requests are subject to approval by the instructor. Email the instructor AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE that a situation may impact your ability to submit graded assignments on time.

Grading Scale

Course Activity	Points/Percentage of Final Grade
Discussion Posts (400+ words per week)	60%
WI Assignments (including conference)	40%
Extra Credit: Student Evaluation Submission	10%

Assessment, Tasks, and Grading

- Discussion Posts: Discussion posts will be manually graded by the instructor and grades will be available within one week of the due date. Posts meeting and/or exceeding the minimum word count requirement (100 words per post) will be awarded full points. **Posts which contain theological content, as defined in the course materials, will sustain a deduction of 30%, since theology does not meet the SLOs of the course.**
- WI Assignments: Grading Rubrics will be provided on Lamakū; submissions on Lamakū will be graded and grades made available to students within a week from the due date. **Papers which contain theological content, as defined in the course materials, will sustain a deduction of 30%, since theology does not meet the SLOs of the course.**

Course Schedule***

***Subject to change. Students may check the Windward Student Notifications page on the website for canceled classes and/or school closures.

Week	Start Date	Module / Topic	Due Dates
1	10/19	*Module 1: What is Religion?* ● Read/Watch: ○ What is Religion? People on the street answer. ○ All (major) religions explained in 10 minutes. ○ What are your beliefs about the nature of reality? ● To Do: ○ **Participation Verification (PV): Post Introduction in Discussions tool; students who do not complete this assignment before**	**Participation Verification due Friday, October 23rd by 11:59 PM**; all other submissions are due Sunday, October 25th by 11:59 PM

Week	Start Date	Module / Topic	Due Dates
		the due date (11:59 PM on 10/23) will be automatically dropped from the class ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool; does not include Introduction (PV)	
2	10/26	***Module 2: Academic Study of Religions*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: Academic Study of Religion ○ What is the difference between Theology and Religious Studies? ○ Difference Between: Religious Studies and Theology ● To Do: ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool ○ Submit choice of film for Reflection Paper	Due Sunday, November 1st by 11:59 PM
3	11/2	***Module 3: Creation Stories, Cosmologies*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: Creation Stories ○ Narrated Slides: Cosmologies ○ The Buddha's response to supernatural questions ○ Creation from the void ○ Kumulipo: a creation story from Hoʻomana ● To Do: ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool ○ Email instructor to schedule conference	Due Sunday, November 8th by 11:59 PM
4	11/9	***Module 4: Goal of Life, Morality and Ethics, Alternative Goals*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: Goal of Life ○ Narrated Slides: Morality and Ethics ○ Narrated Slides: Alternative Goals ○ Judaism: 613 Commandments ○ Buddhism: Five Precepts ○ Determinism: explained by a physicist ○ Osho: There is No Goal ● To Do:	Due Sunday, November 15th by 11:59 PM

Week	Start Date	Module / Topic	Due Dates
		○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool	
5	11/16	***Module 5: The Problem of Suffering*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: The Problem of Suffering ○ Buddha's Response to Supernatural Questions ○ Shinto perspective on suffering ○ Daoism and Suffering ○ What is Samsara? ○ Judaism answers: If there's a God, why is there suffering? ● To Do: ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool	Due Sunday, November 22nd by 11:59 PM
6	11/23	***Module 6: Existentialism, Meaning Making, Afterlife*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: Existentialism ○ Narrated Slides: Meaning Making ○ Narrated Slides: Afterlife ○ Are you a body with a mind or a mind with a body? ○ Optimistic Nihilism ● To Do: ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool	Due Sunday, November 29th by 11:59 PM
7	11/30	***Module 7: Skeptics, Atheists, Agnostics*** ● Read/Watch: ○ Narrated Slides: Skeptics, Atheists, Agnostics ○ Neil deGrasse Tyson: Atheist or Agnostic? ○ The godless church ○ The philosophy of cynicism ● To Do: ○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool	Due Sunday, December 6th by 11:59 PM
8	12/7	***Module 8: Review, Reflection Paper*** ● Read/Watch: ○ How People Pray ○ Five ○ What are your beliefs about the nature of reality? ● To Do:	Due Sunday, December 13th by 11:59 PM

Week	Start Date	Module / Topic	Due Dates
		○ Post 4 posts in Discussions tool ○ Submit Reflection Paper on Lamakū	

Academic Integrity

Work submitted by a student must be the student's own work. The work of others should be explicitly marked, such as through the use of quotes or summarizing with reference to the original author.

In this class, students who commit academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism will have the following consequence(s):

- Students will receive a failing grade for plagiarized assignments.
- All cases of academic dishonesty are referred to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

Windward CC Student Conduct Information

UH System Student Conduct Policy EO 7.208

A note about AI use in this course: In this course, students are not permitted to use generative AI applications such as ChatGPT, Bard, or Bing, in whole or in part, to generate course materials or assignments. Grammar and spell checking tools such as those integrated into Google Doc or MS Word may be used. If you have any questions about whether a particular tool or specific use is permitted, check with the professor.

Student Kuleana

- Please review our Hawaiʻi-Style Netiquette, which blends the values of ALOHA with approaches to how we should consider treating each other online.
- Religion is an especially sensitive subject. You are all enrolled in a college course and, as a result, will be treated like adults. This means you will be afforded all of the respect and responsibilities that come with adulthood. Respectful regard for your classmates and instructor is expected and required, per the Student Conduct Code of the University of Hawaiʻi system. Any behavior that violates the Student Conduct Code may be reported to the appropriate campus authorities.
- Windward CC has Grievance Procedures in place, but I humbly ask that we cooperate to see if we can arrive at an elegant solution together. Mahalo in advance.

Academic and Technical Support

Academic Support

- Windward Community College Library
- Library eResources
- Library Research Units (LRUs)
- Ka Piko Writing Lab
- Ka Piko Speech Lab
- Ka Piko Math Lab
- Online Learning at Windward Community College
- STAR Balance

Technical Support

- UH ITS Help Desk: email help@hawaii.edu or call (808) 956-8883 (or 1-800-558-2669) for Lamakū and most technology support. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays.
- Student Tech Support: email winhelp@hawaii.edu, call (808) 235-7437, or stop by in person at Hale Laʻakea 228. Available Monday–Friday from 8:00 am–4:00 pm.
- Lamakū: Click on the Lamakū Help link in the menu bar at the top of the Lamakū homepage to fill out and submit a question and get your answer via email.
- Information Security for Students

College Policies & Support Services

Basic Needs

Basic needs include food and housing, childcare, mental health, financial resources, and transportation. Student basic needs security is critical for ensuring strong academic performance, persistence and graduation, and overall student well-being. If you or someone you know is experiencing basic needs insecurity, please see the UH System Basic Needs.

Disabilities Accommodations Statement

Windward Community College's Disability Student Services Office (WCC-DSSO) is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with disabilities.

If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to participate fully in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Specialist

Counselor, Roy Inouye, to discuss reasonable accommodations that will help you succeed in this class. The Disabilities Counselor can be reached at (808) 235-7448, wccdsso@hawaii.edu, or stop by the office (Hale Kakoʻo 106) for more information.

Financial Aid

If you are receiving financial aid and are contemplating not completing the course it is highly recommended that you contact the Financial Aid Office at (808) 934-2712 or email them at wccfao@hawaii.edu ***BEFORE*** you withdraw to discuss the impact this decision may have on your financial aid eligibility.

LGBTQ+

The University of Hawaiʻi system and Windward Community College are committed to building an inclusive community that supports and advocates for all students, staff, and faculty. We welcome all members of our campus community to our campuses: transgender, māhū, and people of all gender identities. All members of our campus community deserve a work and educational environment free from harassment or bullying based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. For more information, see the University of Hawaiʻi Commission on LGBTQ+ Equality. Windward Community College Commissioner: Lisamarie Bensman, bensman@hawaii.edu

Mental Health Counseling

Mental Health and Wellness at Windward Community College provides counseling services and activities on campus to support students' life goals as well as their academic goals. Information about services can be found at WCC Mental Health & Wellness.

Student Conduct Code

Windward Community College follows the University of Hawaiʻi Code of Student Conduct which defines expected conduct for students and specifies those acts subject to University sanctions. Students should familiarize themselves with the Code of Student Conduct since, upon enrollment at Windward Community College, they have placed themselves under the policies and regulations of the University and its duly constituted bodies. The disciplinary authority is exercised through the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Copies of the Student Conduct Code are available at the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

TRiO Program

The Federal TRiO Programs are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRiO includes six outreach and support programs targeted to serve and assist low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities in progressing through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. Information about services can be found at Windward CC TRiO.

Revised October 1 2026

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Title IX - Sex Discrimination And Gender-Based Violence Resources

Windward Community College is committed to providing a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect and is free of all forms of sex discrimination and gender-based violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these, WCC has staff and resources to support and assist you. To report an incident of sex discrimination or gender-based violence, as well as receive information and support, please contact one of the following:

Desrae Kahale, UH System Confidential Advocate
Phone: (808) 235-7393
Email: advocate@hawaii.edu
Office: Hale Kākoʻo 101

Desrae Kahale, Mental Health Counselor & Confidential Resource
Phone: (808) 235-7393
Email: dkahale3@hawaii.edu
Office: Hale Kākoʻo 101

Mykie E. Menor Ozoa-Aglugub, J.D., Title IX Coordinator
Phone: (808) 235-7468
Email: mozoa@hawaii.edu
Office: Hale Kākoʻo 109

Karen Cho, Deputy Title IX Coordinator
Phone: (808) 235-7404
Email: kcho@hawaii.edu
Office: Hale ʻAlakaʻi 120

As a member of the University faculty, I am required to immediately report any incident of sex discrimination or gender-based violence to the campus Title IX Coordinator. Although the Title IX Coordinator and I cannot guarantee confidentiality, you will still have options about how your case will be handled. My goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources and support you need.

For more information regarding sex discrimination and gender-based violence, refer to the University's Title IX resources, and the Universityʻs Policy, EP 1.204.

UH Alerts

The UH Alert emergency notification system alerts the university community in the event of a natural, health or civil emergency. The information you provide will only be used in the event of an emergency that impacts the health and safety of the UH community or the closure of whole campuses. It will not be shared with others or used for routine UH communications or announcements. To sign up, visit UH Alerts for more information.

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