

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR FALL 2015

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

REL 101.01 & 101.02 and 101.81D

Instructor: David **McDuffie**

Intro to Religious Studies

Days & Times: MWF 9-9:50

WEB (2)

WLC

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion. Entailed in this study will be an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the meaning attributed to the concept of religion and to assess the ways in which religious traditions, communities, and individuals function within and consequently influence human culture. Furthermore, the course will consist of an examination of the ways in which cultures influence various conceptions of religious faith and practice. During the semester, we will explore a diversity of religious traditions and expressions and a variety of beliefs, rituals, and concepts associated with them in order to evaluate the significance of religion and religious thought, both historically and in a contemporary context.

REL 111.01 & 111.02

Instructor: **Staff**

Nonwestern Religion

Day & Time: TR 11-12:15

TR 12:30-1:45

WLC

Course Description: This course will provide a historical and thematic overview of the religious traditions of Asia, including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. We will begin by exploring the South Asian religious traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, and classical Buddhism. We will then follow the spread of Buddhism across time and space throughout Asia, focusing on enduring ideas and practices and the way these have adapted to new cultural contexts. We will be looking closely at the religious traditions of Japan and Tibet and explore the ways in which Buddhism expresses itself within its interactions with the Indigenous Shinto and Bon Shamanistic traditions. Through a careful examination of various primary and secondary sources, we will consider ways in which Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists have expressed their

understanding of the nature of the world, human society, and the individual's place within them. In examining religious traditions that may seem foreign in many ways, our emphasis will be on the internal logic of each and how they construct meaning, value, and moral vision.

REL 204.01 & 204.02

Instructor: **Staff**

Intro to NT/Origins of Christianity

Days & Time: MWF 10-10:50

MWF 11-11:50

WLC

Course Description: This course examines the origins of Christianity through its earliest literature. We will read the writings collected in the New Testament, together with others that did not make it into the Bible, to reconstruct the history of the earliest Christian communities. As we chart the development of Christianity within first-century Judaism and its growth in the Greco-Roman world, we will address the beliefs, practices, and motivations of Jesus' followers in Palestine, the communities evangelized by Paul, and those communities for which the gospels were produced. Through analysis of primary sources we will attempt to situate Jesus and the New Testament in their historical context. By the end of the course, students will attain a general understanding of the types of literature produced by ancient Christian groups and a variety of issues and methods involved in the modern historical study of the New Testament.

REL207.01 and 207.02

Instructor: Bennett **Ramsey**

Modern Problem of Belief

Day and Time: TR 8-9:15

TR 2-3:15

Course Description: This course examines challenges to traditional Christian thought from within and outside it during the 19th to 21st Centuries, including changing views of God, changing views of freedom, the social study of religion, the psychology of belief, Christian views of women, feminine language for God, Christian views of Judaism and other religions, historical views of scripture, revivals of trinitarian thinking, the problem of evil, and controversies over ordination and marriage for sexual minorities. Previous students have found the reading difficult, and compared it to a philosophy course. This is not a course in ethics, and most contemporary ethical controversies

will not appear. Rather, it is a course about how Christian groups disagree and how Christian doctrine and ritual change.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able, in writing, to identify, describe, and evaluate arguments about issues dividing Christian groups in the 19th to 21st Centuries. In particular, they will demonstrate in writing the ability to evaluate the rational coherence of different views on those issues—in other words, judge the way that an author's view hold together on its own terms, meets the objections of others, or both.

REL209.01 and 209.02

Instructor: **STAFF**

Elements of Christian Thought

Days and Times: MWF 10-10:50
MWF 11-11:50

WLC

Course Description : Why you should take this course: 1. You want to know why Christians think God is three, how they think Jesus saves, why they think God permits evil, what they think God does about it, what they think God does about death, what they think God wants with sex, or what they mean by "salvation." 2. It's a good first course in Christianity, designed to be informative to those who know little. 3. It's a good advanced course in Christianity, designed to be interesting, even surprising to those who know a lot. 4. The readings are great! We read some of the greatest hits in Christian thought. 5. You want to read classic old stuff, like Augustine and Calvin. 6. You want to read the latest new stuff, published recently. 7. Frosh couldn't take courses like this in high school. 8. Seniors need training for jobs that involve thinking, writing, or supplying reasons.

Theologians think about theology much as lawyers think about law or doctors go about diagnosis. Students go on to law school, divinity school, architecture school, medical school, graduate school, consulting, business. 9. It's part of the citizens' education that Jefferson envisioned that they should know something about religion. 10. There is a good mix of lecture and discussion. 11. The course needs a variety of backgrounds to work.

REL 215.01 and 215.02

Instructor: Marc **Bregman**

Judaism

Day & Time: TR 2-3:15

TR 3:30-4:45

Course Description: This course provides a broad introduction to the religious tradition of Judaism. Central topics for the course include Jewish text, history, ritual, thought, and culture. Course readings and discussions stress the creative tension between tradition and innovation that has allowed Judaism to endure as a vital and diverse religion in an ever-changing world.

REL 221.01

Instructor: **STAFF**

Buddhism

Day and Time: TR 12:30-1:45

WLC

Course Description: This course will be an introduction to the family of religions we call Buddhism. We will begin by exploring classical Buddhism in South Asia and will then follow its spread across time and space through Asia and the West. Along the way, we will focus on enduring Buddhist ideas and practices and the way these have adapted to new cultural contexts. During the last quarter of the semester, we will examine Buddhist ethics by exploring both the philosophical concepts and practices which serve as the foundations for compassionate action. In this section, we will ask how Buddhist ethical principles can be applied to contemporary issues of war, terrorism, and ecological degradation and will look at the way Socially Engaged Buddhists have responded to these issues. As we will see, our exploration of Buddhism will inevitably involve inquiry into our own culture and its religious traditions as reflected in our understanding (or misunderstanding) of Buddhism.

REL225-01 and 225.02

Instructor: **Gabbay**

Islam

Days and Times: MWF 10-10:50

MWF 11-11:50

WLC

Course Description: The importance of Islam in the politico-religious life of the 21st century can scarcely be overestimated. Yet for many, the roots, practices and tenets of this nearly 1,400-year-old religion are shrouded in mystery. This course provides an introduction to the origins and history of Islam, including the genesis and development of its sacred scripture and monumental institutions of law, theology, and Sufism. It will cover challenges posed by sectarianism, modernity and encounters with

the West, as well as contemporary Muslim practice and the status of women in Islamic societies. Students will gain an appreciation for the rich diversity of thought and practice characterizing Islam as well as the shared rituals and history uniting its more than one billion adherents.

REL 231.01 & 02

Instructor: David **McDuffie**

Religion in America

Day and Time: TR 11-12:15

& TR 12:30—1:50

WLC

WEB

Course Description: This course involves an exploration of the dynamic nature of religion in the United States. This will involve a historical examination of the diversity of religious expressions present in an American context as well as an explication of the significance of the plurality of religious traditions present in contemporary America. Particular attention will be devoted to understanding major currents in American religious history and how various religious traditions have affected the religious topography in the United States. The following case studies will be emphasized: Religion and the American Revolution, New Religious Movements, Religion and Nature, and Religion and Science.

REL 298-01

Instructor: Bennett **Ramsey**

Thinking About Religion (WI)

Days and Times: TR 11-12:15

Course Description: This course is required of all Religious Studies majors. This course is not strictly introductory; we expect that students will have some familiarity with the academic study of religion before taking the course. Ideally REL 298 will be a third or fourth course in the major, taken within a semester of declaring the major. This course is not a survey of religious traditions, but rather an extended reflection on how scholars of religion think about “religion” as an object of study, and how we frame our studies in a self-conscious and responsible way. This course is designed as a seminar and writing workshop. Student participation is essential, and while the professors will lead discussion and occasionally lecture, student-led discussion will drive the course. Students will also engage in library research, as well as apply the craft of writing academic research papers.

REL 311.01

Instructor: Marc **Bregman**

Sacrifice of Isaac (WI)

Days & Times: R 6-8:50

Course Description: This course will survey the broad spectrum of interpretation of one biblical narrative, “The Sacrifice of Isaac” (Genesis 22:1-19), that is foundational for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Students will learn how the biblical text can be approached both objectively and subjectively through classroom discussion and guided writing assignments

REL 370.01

Instructor: Alyssa **Gabbay**

Religious Movements/Communities:

Religions of Iran

Days & Times: MW 2-3:15

Course Description:

From Zoroastrianism to Shi‘ism to the Babi and Baha’i faiths, Iran is home to a wealth of religions and a tradition of pluralism that stretches back thousands of years. Yet today most Westerners associate Iran with a particularly virulent brand of Islamic fundamentalism. In this class, we will explore the variegated threads that make up the tapestry of religions in Iran. Two overarching questions will guide our investigations: 1) Amid centuries of conquest, accommodation and acculturation, how did Iran maintain a sense of cultural and religious cohesiveness and a specifically Iranian identity? 2) When scholars speak of “Iranian religion,” what do they mean?

HSS

Instructor: Gregory **Grieve**

Rel Video Games

Day & Time: MWF 10-10:50

*Limited to Honors Students

Course Description: Shaman, paragon, God-mode: modern video games are heavily coded with religious undertones. From the Shinto-inspired Japanese video game Okami to the internationally popular The Legend of Zelda and Halo, many video games

rely on religious themes and symbols to drive the narrative and frame the storyline. *Playing with Religion in Video Games* explores the increasingly complex relationship between gaming and global religious practices. For example, how does religion help organize the communities in MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*? What role has censorship played in localizing games like *Actraiser* in the western world? How do evangelical Christians react to violence, gore, and sexuality in some of the most popular games such as *Mass Effect* or *Grand Theft Auto*? With contributions by scholars and gamers from all over the world, this collection offers a unique perspective to the intersections of religion and the virtual world.