

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

FALL 2013

REL 101.01

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Intro to Religious Studies

Day & Time: TR 9:30-10:45

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 101.02

Instructor: David McDuffie

Intro to Religious Studies

Day & Time: MWF 9-9:50

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 202.01 & 02

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Hebrew Bible (WI)

Day & Time: TR 9:30-10:45

TR: 11-12:15

This course offers an introduction to the Hebrew Bible and the religion of ancient Israel. Through lecture, critical reading of primary and secondary sources, and group discussion, we will come to understand this complex text not only as a work of literature, but also as the product of distinct cultural and historical environments. We will not read the entire Bible! Rather, we will explore a selection of readings that represent the Bible's main literary genres and themes. Central concerns of the course will be the relationship between history, theology, and ideology in this diverse text, as well as topics in Biblical spirituality such as covenant, prayer, prophecy, doubt, and love.

REL 209.01 & 02

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Elements of Christian Thought

Day & Time: MWF 10-10:50
MWF 11-11:50
WLC

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, anyway.
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 in July.
7. Freshmen couldn't take courses like this in high school.
8. Seniors need training for jobs that involve thinking, writing, or cooking up 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 liberal education that Thomas Jefferson envisioned that citizens should know something about religion, as we will see from his letters.
10. There is a good mix of lecture and discussion.
11. Some past students ranked this course the best course they had taken in college.
12. The course needs a variety of backgrounds to work.

Why you should not take this course:

1. You think of it as Sunday School.
2. You figure you know it all already because you went to church.
3. You're not interested in sex, death, or evil.
4. You don't intend to come very often.
5. You don't intend to do the reading very often.
6. You're afraid thinking is incompatible with Christianity.
7. You intend to write sermons for test essays.
8. You don't like surprises.
9. You don't like tests and quizzes.
10. Take a look at the Barth reading for week 2. It's long, difficult, and requires a quiz. If you like it, you'll like the course. If you don't, you won't.

REL 215.01 & 02.

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

Day & Time: TR 2-3:15

TR 3:30-4:45

Web

This course provides an initial orientation to Judaism as a religion and as a culture. Students will be introduced to the development of basic Jewish practices, beliefs and institutions and to the major works of Jewish literature. The broad historical survey of Judaism from its beginnings until modern times will be concretized by focusing selectively on a number of specific texts, themes and topics.

REL 221.01

Instructor: Charles Orzech

Buddhism and the Search for Happiness

Day & Time: MW 3:30-4:45

Since my house/ burned down, I now own/a better view of the/rising moon.

-Moshido

Buddhism is an introduction to the family of religions we call Buddhism, both in the past and in the present. This semester we will focus on classical Buddhism in South Asia. But unlike many introductory courses, our class will have two unusual features. During the middle of the semester we will read The Lotus Sutra and use it a lens to think about the varieties of Buddhism. The last quarter of the semester will be devoted to Buddhism in the modern West, the emergence of “Socially Engaged Buddhism” and the application of Buddhist ethical principles to contemporary issues of war, terrorism, and ecological degradation. 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. The course makes extensive use of on-line resources and images. Grading will be based on six one-page responses to the readings, occasional quizzes, a mid-semester exam and an end of semester exam.

REL 223.01

Instructor: Greg Grieve

Hinduism

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

Through readings, lectures, discussion, and writing, this course investigates Hinduism through a nonsectarian, unbiased approach that uses various methods and theories to understand the religious life of others. The course will concentrate more on practice than philosophy, with attention to some of the myths, rituals, and images that inform the lives of Hindu women and men. The student will become familiar with significant features that contribute to Hinduism as a religion, including basic terms and common concepts, major deities and their myths, and forms of devotional expression, and will consider the significance of the teachings of key Hindu classics, such as the Veda, Upanishads, Puranas, and the Bhagavad Gita. An underlying but no less important objective of this course is to become familiar with a theoretical "tool box" for the academic study of religion in general, especially as it pertains to the study of South Asia.

REL 225.01

Instructor: Alyssa Gabbay

Islam

Day & Time: MWF 10-10:50

& MWF 11-11:50

WLC

Introduction to origins of Islam and its development as a world religion focusing on doctrine, ritual practices, and community structures. Additional description: The importance of Islam in the politico-religious life of the 21st century can scarcely be overestimated. Yet for many, knowledge of 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: MWF 12-12:50
& MWF 1-1:50
WLC**

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 250.01

**Instructor: David McDuffie
Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth
Time & Day: MWF 3:00-3:50
WLC**

This course is a study of the relationship between religion and the care for the natural environment. Major topics to be covered will include the relationship between religion and ecology, the potential problems that certain religious worldviews pose for valuing non-human nature, and the emerging role of religious perspectives in addressing issues of ecological concern. The question that will serve as our orientation throughout the semester is the following: In a time of widespread ecological degradation and crises, what is the potential for religion to offer a significant contribution toward the attainment of sustainable cultures? Primary but not exclusive emphasis will be placed on the relationship between religion and ecology in Western theistic thought and practice and understanding the religious significance of environmental/ecological thought.

REL 258.01

**Instructor: Bill Hart
Darwin, Evolution, Human Nature (WI)
Day & Time: MWF 3-3:50
WLC**

In this course, we explore the impact of evolutionary theory on our understanding of religion and human nature.

REL 298.01

**Instructor: Greg Grieve
Thinking About Religion (WI)
Time & Day: TR 11-12:15**

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 310.01**Instructor: Derek Krueger****Christianity/Gender and Antiquity (WI)****Day & Time: MW: 2-3:15****REL & WGS**

This course examines ideas about gender in ancient Christianity (from the first to seventh century ce). Emphasis will be placed on the depiction of ideal females and males in narrative literatures, especially apocryphal acts, martyrdom accounts, saints' lives, and romances, as well as in theological treatises. Such writings did not so much describe the lives of men and women as prescribe them, providing models for emulation and asserting cultural norms. Our task will be to interpret and decode these models to understand how gender and embodiment were conceived as both barriers and pathways to holiness and salvation. The texts selected provide idealizations and even fantasies of gender, designed to engage an audience's desire even while encouraging Christians to abandon many of their desires. Along the way we shall consider how gender and sexuality intersected with Christian notions of authority, leadership, and hierarchy. We will encounter a range of Christian attempts to understand human embodiment, and address the impact of various Christian ideologies of gender on actual women's and men's lives.

This course is cross-listed between Religious Studies and Women's and Gender Studies and receives Writing Intensive credit. This course is designed for undergraduate Religious Studies and Women's and Gender Studies majors and others with a strong interest in the topic. Class will be run as a seminar discussion with everyone expected to contribute to our common task of interpreting the assigned texts. This course is writing intensive; it is also reading intensive. Reading assignments will average 125-150 pages per week. Students should expect to spend 5 or 6 hours a week preparing for our class meetings.

REL 313.01**Instructor: Marc Bregman****The Sacrifice of Isaac (WI)****Day & Time: R 6-8:50****WEB**

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 382W.01**Instructor: Eugene Rogers****Topics in Christian Thought: Blood (WI)****Time & Day: T 6-8:50 pm**

If you have taken this course for credit on a different topic, you may take it again since the topic has changed. Description: This course covers Christian theology of blood and its sociology. In Christianity, blood both cleanses and defiles. It marks community membership (the blood of the eucharist). A recurring theme will be how the language of blood reinforces gender roles. Other topics will include blood in sacrifice, blood and theories of sin, blood and the incarnation (if Christ had human blood, did he have primate blood, and if so what would it mean?), blood and kinship roles, blood and contagion, blood and sexuality, blood in other religions. Readings will come from theorists of religion including Emile Durkheim, Mary Douglas, Nancy Jay, and Cleo Kearns; from Christian theologians, such as Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, and others; and from historians including David Biale and Caroline Bynum. The reading will be difficult. Here is a sample of what we will talk about.

Blood is strange stuff. In Christian discourse, sometimes it cleanses, so that a red substance is said to make robes white—hence "washing in the blood of the Lamb." Such usages cause anthropologists of religion to speak of blood as a "detergent." After all, non-chlorine bleach is blue in color. Sometimes this even appears as a principle: "without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." But other blood defiles: "the city (gendered feminine) bleeds from her middle to defile herself." Christian rhetoric and images use blood in contrary ways, to cleanse and to defile. These ways are also gendered. When men (Jesus, Abraham) shed blood in sacrifice, it cleanses. When women shed blood in menstruation, it defiles. Women, as a rule, may not sacrifice (women priests are rare). Men, as a rule, may not show female characteristics. Blood has two different roles because it reinforces (and sometimes undermines) two different genders. This is not only ancient prejudice. The language and image of blood continues today to reinforce gender roles.

One reaction paper, due at the end of the first week of class. Three five-page papers, one a re-write of the one of the first two. Heavy reading in sociology of religion and Christian theology.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROFESSORS TEACHING IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS

REL 104/ RCO 223

Instructor: Derek Krueger
Religion, Ritual, and the Arts
Day & Time: MW 11-12:15
& F 11-11:50
***Limited to Residential College**

In western religious traditions, from ancient polytheism through the rise of Judaism and Christianity, ritual practices and the arts have provided ways to ask the BIG QUESTIONS, including What is the meaning of life? Why do good people suffer? How should one live ethically? What does God (or the gods) want from humans? How are divinity and holiness available to humanity?

Focusing on specific celebrations and practices from Near Eastern and Greco-Roman Antiquity through the present, we will explore how religious themes have been expressed in poetry, music, dance, theater, film, visual arts and architecture, and in ritual action. We will examine how religious systems foster both conformity and creativity by considering the meaning of repetitive religious activity, the function of the arts in communicating and searching out religious truths, the place of performance in approaching the divine, and the relationship between religion and human creativity.

HSS 116.01

Instructor: Charles Orzech
Buddhism and the Search for Happiness
Day & Time: MW 2-3:15
***Limited to Honors Students**

Since my house/ burned down, I now own/a better view of the/rising moon.

-Moshido

Buddhism and the Search for Happiness is an introduction to the family of religions we call Buddhism, both in the past and in the present. This semester we will focus on classical Buddhism in South Asia. But unlike many introductory courses, our class will have two unusual features. During the middle of the semester we will read The Lotus Sutra and use it a lens to think about the varieties of Buddhism. The last quarter of the semester will be devoted to Buddhism in the modern West, the emergence of "Socially Engaged Buddhism" and the application of Buddhist ethical principles to contemporary issues of war, terrorism, and ecological degradation. 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. The course makes extensive use of on-line resources and images. Grading will be

based on six one-page responses to the readings, occasional quizzes, a mid-semester exam and an end of semester exam.

FMS 142.01

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Freshmen Seminar: Women in Judaism (WI)

Time & Day: TR 2-3:15

***Limited to Freshmen**

This course explores the role of women in Judaism. Topics include 1) women in Jewish literature, 2) Judaism's understanding of marriage, women's sexuality, and reproductive rights, 3) women's roles in Judaism, and 4) the modern Jewish women's movement. Class will focus on close readings and group discussions, as well as on developing critical thinking, speaking, and writing skills useful in a variety of college settings. Readings will be drawn from traditional Jewish literature, modern Jewish women's writings, and current events.

REL 207-01

Instructor: Ben Ramsey

Modern Problem of Belief:

Living on a Hot Planet (WI)

Day & Time: TR 3:30—4:45

***Limited to Honors & RCO Students**

In this course we will examine the religious beliefs and ideologies behind the resistance to dealing with climate change and resource constraints and those beliefs and discourses that are emerging which promote adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and new understandings of social and economic justice.