**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**FALL 2011**

**COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

**REL 101.01**

Instructors: Bennett Ramsey and Ellen Haskell

Intro to Religious Studies

Time & Day: MWF; 10-10:50

**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 109.01**

Instructors: Charles Orzech and Gregory Grieve

Religion and Contemporary Culture: Film

Time & Day: Wed; 5:00 – 7:45

**Course Description:** Religion in Contemporary Culture is suitable for students who want to gain a critical understanding of recent and current cultural issues that pertain to religion, and who want to understand religion's role in popular culture. The course is designed for students with no formal background or training in Religious Studies, Religious Ethics, or Philosophy. This semester we will be exploring the role of religion in contemporary society through the use of films, digital media and other popular cultural texts.

**REL 111.01 & 02**

Instructor: Ayla Samli

Non-Western Religions

Time & Day: MWF; 11-:50 & 12-12:50

**Course Description:** This course provides a historical and thematic overview of three major religious traditions of Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Through a careful examination of various primary and secondary sources, we will consider ways in which South Asian Hindus, Indo-Tibetan Buddhists, and Chinese Daoists have attempted to understand the nature of the world, human society, and the person's place within them. In examining religious traditions that in many ways seem wholly foreign or “other” in comparison to our own, our emphasis will be on the internal logic of each, on the resources that each provides for the construction of meaning, value, and moral vision.

**REL 202.01 & 02**

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Hebrew Bible

Time & Day: MWs 2-3:15 & 3:30-4:45

**Course Description:** This course offers an introduction to the Hebrew Bible and the religion of ancient Israel. Through critical reading of primary and secondary sources, as well as through 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 be reading the Bible in its entirety! Rather, we will be exploring a selection of the Bible’s key elements 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 204.01**

Instructor: Derek Krueger

New Testament /Origins of Christianity

Time &I Day: TR -11-12:15

**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.

**REL 207.01**

Instructor: Greg Grieve

Modern Problem – Digital Religion

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

**Course Description:** This course considers some of the many combinations and connections between religion and digital media in contemporary culture. The class is divided into three sections. We begin with an introduction to media studies and then look at how scholars have studied the intersections of religion and digital media. In the second section, we analyze a selection of websites, video games, applications and other digital media. In the final section, we read studies examining people’s use of media, works that focus on how religion and digital media practices interact and influence each other in individuals’ lives. The goal of this class is more than broadening your knowledge about the subjects we cover; it is to develop your critical thinking, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The class format will consist of seminar-style discussions, weekly reading journals, student presentations, and an original, thesis-driven multi-platform research project.

**REL 209.01**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Elements of Christian Thought

Time & Day: MW 2-3:15

**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. You 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**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

Time & Day: TR 12:30-13:45

**Course Description:** This course provides an initial orientation to Judaism as a religion and a culture using PowerPoint presentations and films integrated with assigned readings. Students will be introduced to the life cycle of the Jewish year, to basic Jewish practices, beliefs and institutions and to major works of Jewish literature. The course includes a broad historical survey of Judaism from its beginnings until modern times.

**REL 221.01**

Instructor: Charles Orzech

Buddhism

Time & Day: TR, 12:30-13:45

**Course Description:** This course is designed for students who wish to acquire a foundational knowledge of Buddhist religious traditions and how they shaped and were shaped by social and historical contexts in Asia and the West. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between Buddhist thought and Buddhist ethics and practice. There will be two exams and a final examination, online quizzes, and required online participation. The course satisfies the “Philosophical, Religious, Ethical” (GPR) requirement of the General Education Curriculum. In addition, this course carries a “Global Non-Western” (GN) marker and satisfies requirements for majors and minors in Religious Studies.

**REL 225.01& 02**

Instructor: David McDuffie

Islam: **An Introduction to Islam: Concepts, Practices, and Debates**

Time & Day: TR, 2-3:15/3:30-4:45

**Course Description:**  Since September 11th, interest in Islam has grown tremendously, especially in the United States where it has been the subject of much media commentary and political debate. This course seeks to prepare students to read these public discussions with a critical eye by providing an introduction to the major concepts and practices of Islam and the meta-narratives built into particular intra-Muslim debates. We will think about Islam in terms of its diversity by focusing on a series of key debates in Islamic thought and practice from its early history to the present day. This is a “hybrid” or “blended” course, which means that half the instruction is online. The other half is the traditional face-to-face format (WE MEET FACE-TO-FACE ON TUESDAYS ONLY; between Tuesdays, we meet online in an “asynchronous” manner).

**REL 229.01**

Instructor: William Hart

African American Religion

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

**Course Description:** This course provides a historical survey of African American religions, including African beginnings, New World transformations, and the emergence of contemporary religious diversity. *To understand African American religions is to understand many religions since every religion is potentially an African American religion.* This introduction to African American religions is pursued, therefore, in tandem with an introduction to issues and methods in the study of religion.

Student Learning Objectives: Assuming successful completion of the course, students will acquire an introductory knowledge of religion studies, in particular of African American religion studies, and of the vocabulary and methods that this study entails. Thus the student will be well equipped to pursue further religion study.

**REL 231.01**

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Religion in America

Time & Day: MWF, 9-9:50

**Course Description:** Diverse religious traditions and thinkers that have played a significant role in the history of the United States from Native American beginnings to the present.

**REL 298.01**

Instructors: Bennett Ramsey

Thinking About Religion

Time & Day: TR, 11:00-12:15

**Course Description:** This course takes an imaginative and critical approach to introducing Religious Studies by focusing on case studies that illustrate how diverse religious ideas and practices may be interpreted as ways of “world construction.” Additionally, this course investigates how Religious Studies “maps” religious phenomena. Cases studies will be used to demonstrate how religious life in different times and places has been shaped by the dynamic interplay of social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic, and personal factors, and by peoples’ efforts to represent or “map” this interplay in order to bring meaning, purpose, and order to their personal and collective lives. In considering these religious mappings, the course will also attend to the ways in which students of religion are themselves map-makers and users. The course introduces the methods and materials that scholars, as students of religion, use to make sense of the religious worlds of their and other cultures. This course is, therefore, not a survey of religious traditions, but rather an extended reflection on how scholars of religion imagine “religion” as an object of study, and how we frame our studies in a self-conscious and responsible way. This course is not, in the first instance, about description, though this is an essential part of the enterprise. It is, rather, about responsible interpretation—about how to productively approach the raw data of religious phenomenon and how to locate our perspectives in the larger context of humanistic inquiry. In short, this course is designed to introduce the problem of interpretation through selected case studies that challenge our assumptions and illuminate our subjectivity. This course is designed as a seminar and writing workshop. Student participation is essential, and while the professor will lead discussion and occasionally lecture, student-led discussion will drive the course. Students will also engage in library research, as well as study the craft of writing academic research papers.

**REL 311W.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Topics in Biblical Studies: The Sacrifice of Isaac

Time & Day: R, 6-8:45

**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. Using PowerPoint presentations, classroom discussion of assigned readings and guided writing assignments, the course will exemplify how the biblical text can be explored and elaborated in text, art and music.

**REL 323W.01**

Instructor: Derek Krueger

Religious Movements and Communities: The Christian Monastic Tradition

Day & Time: TR, 2-3:15

**Course Description:** This course explores the history and literature of Christian monasticism from its origins in the fourth century Mediterranean basin through the Middle Ages. Topics will include the renunciation of family and wealth to pursue monastic life; asceticism and self-discipline concerning food and sexuality; patterns of ethical discernment and moral reflection and the knowledges of the self that such practices generated; and the formation and maintenance of communities in monasteries. Case studies will be drawn from the initial formation of monasticism in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century; the spread of monasticism in Syria and Palestine in late antiquity; the rise of monastic communities in the West in the early Middle Ages; the monastic reforms in 10th and 11th century Byzantium and among the Cistericians in 12th century Europe. We will study saints' lives, monastic rules, ethical treatises, arts and architecture.

**REL 382W.01**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Topics in Christian Thought: Blood

Time & Day: T – 6-8:45

**Course Description:** 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.

**REL 401, 402, 403, 404**

Instructor: Various Instructors

Tutorial

Time & Day: TBA

We have Foust 111 scheduled on Wednesdays from 12-2, if any of these courses need to meet face to face.