

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**FALL 2012**  
**COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

**REL 101.01**

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Intro to Religious Studies

Time & Day: TR: 9-9:50

**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**

Instructor: Gregory Grieve

Religion and Contemporary Culture: Film in Religion

Time & Day: R: 6:00-8:45

**Course Description:** From its beginning film has been a vehicle for the exploration of religion and spirituality. In this course we use films to explore contemporary religious issues, beliefs, and practices and their relationship to society. Although some films are obviously religious (The Passion of the Christ, for instance), the religious dimensions of many films become apparent only upon closer, more critical examination. Our culture has become more visual, and understanding the religious dimensions of cinematic texts can help us better to understand religious belief and practice in late modern society. This semester we will be viewing and discussing films such as The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, The Matrix, The Mission, Blade Runner, The Handmaid's Tale, and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.

## **REL 111.01**

Instructor: Ayla Samli

Non-Western Religions

Time & Day: MWF: 11-11:50

**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 111.02**

Instructor: Ayla Samli

Non-Western Religions

Time & Day: MWF: 12-1

**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**

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Hebrew Bible

Time & Day: TR 2-3:15

**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 entire Bible! Rather, we will be exploring a selection of the Bible's main 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 202.02W**

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Hebrew Bible

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

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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 entire Bible! Rather, we will be exploring a selection of the Bible's main 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: Diane Lipsett

New Testament and Origins of Christianity

Time & Day: MW 2-3:15

**Course Description:** Study of the New Testament texts in their historical, sociological, and literary contexts

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### **REL 207.01W**

Instructor: Ben Ramsey  
Modern Problem  
Time & Day: M: 6-8:45

**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.

### **REL 210.01W**

Instructor: Ben Ramsey  
Christianity to Reformation  
Time & Day: TR: 12:30-1:45

**Course Description:** This course is a historical survey of Christian thought and practice from the second century to the dawn of the Protestant Reformation (around 1500). Through reading texts representative of Christian traditions, we will consider the variety

and development of Christian theological teaching (on such topics as the incarnation and the Trinity), rituals and liturgy (including baptism, eucharist, and the Christian calendar), ethics, and modes of life (such as monasticism). Particular attention will be given to expressions of Christianity in the ancient world, before the rise of Islam. We will then consider Christianity both in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantium) and in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. Students will learn to read and understand classic Christian literary and theological texts.

This is a course in the history of Christianity in pre-modern times--this is not a course in contemporary Christian beliefs and practices. Most of you will encounter religious forms vastly different from anything in your own experience, although many modern types of Christianity, such as Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and highly liturgical forms of Protestantism continue to bear strong resemblance to the Christianities of the ancient and medieval eras. This course is best understood as a course about past and foreign cultures. At every point we will be concerned to understand the material we encounter from the standpoint of the analytical study of religion, which interprets religious systems in terms of their beliefs and practices within the framework of the humanities.

## **REL 215.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

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

**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.

The first half of this course will be taught on-line. Be sure to see Dr. Bregman's syllabus. The first classes until OCTOBER 4 would be taught online, the remaining classes as face-to-face meetings.

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Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

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

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## **REL 221.01**

Instructor: Charles Orzech

Chinese Religions

Time & Day: MW: 15:30-16:45

### **Course Description:**

*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 as 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.

## **REL 223.01**

Instructor: Greg Grieve

Hinduism

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

**Course Description:** 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 251.01**

Instructor: Bill Hart

Topics in Social Ethics: Slaves, Fetuses, and Animals

Time & Day: MWF: 9-9:50

**Course Description:** In this course, we explore the ethics and politics of anti-slavery, anti-abortion, and anti-animal abuse abolitionists. "Abolitionists" would rather kill or die than live in a society that enslaves, aborts, or abuses. "Abolitionists" refers to the radical opponents of slavery, abortion, and animal abuse. Animal rights, antiabortion, and anti-slavery movements (old and new) seek to radically transform society by redefining life, personhood, and freedom.

## **REL 298.01**

Instructors: Greg Grieve and Ellen Haskell

Thinking About Religion

Time & Day: 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 311W.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Topics in Biblical Studies: The Sacrifice of Isaac

Time & Day: 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. 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.

The first half of this course will be taught on-line. Be sure to see Dr. Bregman’s syllabus. The first classes until OCTOBER 4 would be taught online, the remaining classes as face-to-face meetings.

## **REL 324W.01**

Instructor: Charles Orzech

Philosophical Issues in Religion

Time & Day: T: 6-8:50

**Course Description:** Philosophical Issues in Religion: Semiotics, Visual Culture, and Religious Images brings together three important areas of study: semiotics, or the “study of signs,” visual culture, or the study of the “visual components of everyday life,” and the study of images in religion. Because of its particular genealogy, the study of religion has been and continues to be text centered. Semiotics provides a wide range of tools for the study of texts, yet it opens new possibilities by subsuming texts under the larger category of ‘signs.’ We will begin with discussion of how we see images and how images ‘mean’ in Part I of the course. We then move into a crash course in semiotics and visual culture as they apply to the study of religious images (paintings, icons, films, etc.) in Parts II and III of the course. Part IV of the course is reserved for student presentations. I consider this course a joint exploration and it is very likely the syllabus will undergo refinement in accordance with the direction of class interests and discussion. By the end of this course a student will be familiar with semiotic and visual culture approaches to the study of religious images, will use a selection of these methods to analyze an image or film, and will have substantial practice in both informal and formal writing.

Required Texts: The following are required and are available at the Campus Bookstore.  
Purchase them at the beginning of the semester:

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1972)

Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, (2002), which is available free online at  
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>

George Lakoff and M. Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*  
(1989)

David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (2005)

## **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.