

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

**REL 101.01**

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Intro to Religious Studies

Time & Day: MWF: 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**

Instructors: David McDuffie

Religion and Contemporary Culture: Grogan Learning Community **ONLY**

Time & Day: TR: 9:30-1045

**Course Description:** This course is a study of the relationship between religion and science. Primary but not exclusive emphasis will be placed on religion-science debates as they have developed in relation to modern science and understandings of Western theism. Attention will be devoted to the ways in which the fields of religion and science are variously understood from those within these traditions of human inquiry as well as from those who are commenting from a stated outside perspective. Entailed in this will be an analysis of the types of questions offered by scientific and religious individuals and communities. During the semester, we will explore a variety of viewpoints on this relationship in an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the complexity of the interaction between religion and science in human culture.

## **REL 111.01**

Instructor: Ayla Samli

Non-Western Religions

Time & Day: MWF: 1-1:50

**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 207.01**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Modern Problem

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

**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.

Readings from major, classic, and contemporary works of controversy will provide a variety of models for understanding the issues of the course. The same readings also provide critical evaluations of rival views. Expository readings and postings by the instructor will prepare students to identify topics, recognize compatible views, and differentiate rival views; they will inculcate understanding and offer further strategies for evaluation. Three in-class tests, no exam during exam period.

Why you should take this course:

1. You want to know what Christians are arguing about these days.
2. You like in-class discussion and tests.
3. It's a good first course in Christianity, designed to be informative to those who know little.
4. It's a good advanced course in Christianity, designed to be interesting, even surprising to those who know a lot.
5. The readings are great! We read some of the greatest hits in Christian thought.
6. First-years and sophomores couldn't take courses like this in high school.
7. Juniors and seniors need training for jobs that involve thinking, writing, or cooking up reasons. Theologians think about theology much as lawyers think about law. Students go on to law school, divinity school, architecture school, graduate school, consulting, and business.
8. It's part of a liberal education that the citizens of North Carolina should know something about religion.
9. The Religious Studies Department at UNCG is one the best public-university religious studies departments without a graduate program.
10. The course needs students from a variety of backgrounds to work well.

Why you should not take this course:

1. You think of it as Sunday School.
2. You don't like to read.
3. You think spirituality is a matter of individual experience apart from texts and communities.
4. You think that Catholics, Anglicans, or Eastern Orthodox people aren't really Christians.
5. You don't like philosophy.
6. You are afraid of Freud or Marx.
7. You prefer historical influence and effect to conceptual analysis.
8. You don't intend to come very often.
9. You're shy about speaking up in class.
10. You want to sit back and be entertained by a lecture.
11. You don't intend to do the reading very often.
12. You're afraid thinking is incompatible with Christianity.
13. You want to prove your faith by butting heads with 19th C. critics of religion.
14. You want to be in a homogeneous group where everyone thinks alike and is pious.
15. You intend to write sermons for postings and papers.
16. You don't like surprises.

16. You're a senior and you've planned to have a good case of senioritis: you've worked for it, you deserve it, and nobody's going to deprive you of it!

17. You're any year and you're pretty sure you need a semester off, but you haven't planned or maybe even admitted it to yourself yet, so you need to flunk out in order to get a break. If any of these is the case, then don't do it to us!

## **REL 209.01**

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Elements of Christian Thought

Time & Day: MWF: 11-11:50

**Course Decryption:** Religious Studies 209 is a midlevel course in Christian theology. In this course we will read in depth three influential books in recent theology: Gustavo Gutierrez' "Theology of Liberation;" Elizabeth Johnson's "She Who Is;" and Andrew Sung Park's "The Wounded Heart of God."

Students are not required to have any formal background in the history of Christianity or in theology. In addition to reading the two primary texts, students will read secondary source material on the history of the Roman Catholic tradition since Vatican II.

## **REL 210.01 & Honors**

Instructor: Derek Krueger

Christianity to Reformation

Time & Day: TR: 11-12:15

**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: Ellen Haskell

Judaism

Time & Day: MW: 2-3:15

**Course Description:** This course will provide 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 will 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 217.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

The Synagogue

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

**Course Description:** Course Description: From its inception, the synagogue has served as the social and religious center of Jewish life. In this course we will attempt to enter the world of the ancient, medieval and modern synagogue through the portals of its architecture, art, and literature. Texts for preparation and study in class will include passages from rabbinic literature viewed as artifacts of synagogue sermons, piyyutim (liturgical poems) and selections from traditional and contemporary liturgy in English translation.

### **REL 218.01**

Instructor: Charles Orzech

## Chinese Religions

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

**Course Description:** Acupuncture, Gongfu (Kung-fu), yin/yang, Chan (Zen)—our culture is awash in movements and ideas drawn from Chinese religious traditions. This course is an introduction to Chinese religious traditions both in the past and in the present, and how they were shaped by social and historical contexts. The focus this semester will be on Daoism, Confucianism, folk traditions. We will be paying particular attention to thought, ritual, and society. Chinese Religions satisfies the “Philosophical, Religious, Ethical” (GPR) requirement of the General Education Curriculum. In addition, the course carries a “Global Non-Western” (GN) marker and satisfies requirements for majors and minors in Religious Studies.

## REL 248.01

Instructor: Ayla Samli

Comparative Religious Ethics: Gender and Islam

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

**Course Description:** This course will consider how Islam relates to gender in varying cultural contexts. Special attention will be paid to how gender roles are enacted or resisted in Islamic societies. We will investigate Islam in the lived, everyday cultural contexts of women along with some of the current debates about feminism and Islam, timely perspectives on a growing religion.

## REL 250.01

Instructor: David McDuffie

Religion and Care of the Earth

Time & Day: MWF: 10-10:50

**Course Description:** 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 258W.01**

Instructor: William Hart

Darwin, Evolution, and Human Nature

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

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

### **REL 311W.01**

Instructor: Ellen Haskell & Derek Krueger

Topics in Biblical Studies: Jews and Christians

Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Conflict

Time & Day: M: 6-8:50

**Course Description:** This course offers a close look at Jewish and Christian Biblical interpretation that addresses conflict between the two traditions. Texts will be drawn from the second Temple period, the New Testament, rabbinic literature, the early church fathers, and various medieval sources, including Jewish mystical works. Particular attention will be given to polemical literature in which Jews and Christians use the Bible in disagreements with each other. The course will incorporate perspectives from anthropology and historical-critical studies, and will be team-taught by Professors Krueger and Haskell.

### **REL 313W.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Topics in Ancient Judaism: Jewish Law

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

**Course Description:** This course will provide an introduction to Jewish Law. Students will learn the fundamentals of Jewish law through guided readings in primary sources and

secondary literature. Writing assignments will require each student to summarize and to compare or contrast approaches to legal issues within the Jewish tradition.

### **REL 333W.01**

Instructor: Ben Ramsey

Religion and Psychology

Time & Day: T – 6-8:45

**Course Description:** Religious Studies 333 is designed as an upper level seminar on the psychoanalytic tradition and its importance to theories of religion. Readings in the course will include works by Foucault, Lacan, Hillman, Kristeva, Benjamin, Keller.

### **REL 365W.01**

Instructor: Charles Orzech

Myth and Religion

Time & Day: W: 6-8:50

**Course Description:** Why do people listen to and tell stories? Why are some stories regarded as religious, or true and others as false? How do stories shape religious cultures and how are they enacted in ritual? For much of the last century the study of myth has revolved around such questions and has been at the center of the fields of Classical Studies, the History of Religions, Psychology, and Anthropology.

Myth and Theory is designed to introduce you to the study of mythology and to a range of theoretical approaches to the study of religion. Unlike many courses on myth, Religious Studies 365 does not seek to acquaint you with a "classical" mythic corpus. Rather, Myth and Theory is an exploration of the problem of myth, and of the methods of analysis and tools of interpretation available for the study of myth. We will examine theories of myth that argue for its centrality in all societies (evident in religion, ideology, politics, ethics, popular culture, and media), and others that see it as an artifact of our own inquiries. Our explorations will focus on analytical techniques developed from the nineteenth century through the present; techniques that include historical criticism, structuralism, hermeneutics, psychological theory, and postmodern critical theories. The readings and assignments are designed to engage you in analyzing myths and in considering the implications of your analysis. Emphasis will be on classroom and on-line discussion, group work, evaluation and analysis, and on the application of these skills to other areas of life. Thus, for instance, you may research mythic themes in a series of presidential speeches, in advertising campaigns, in movies, on-line games, and so on. On completion of this course students will be able to articulate the major theories of myth and to discuss their contexts and implications.

**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.

**REL 410.01**

Instructor: Greg Grieve

Senior Seminar

TR: 2-3:15

*Pr. REL 298*

*Required of all seniors.*

Colloquium on a unifying theme or major recent work in Religious Studies. Topic will vary with instructor.