**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**FALL 2014**

**COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

**REL 101.01**

Instructor: Bennett Ramsey

Intro to Religious Studies

Time & Day: TR 9:30-1045

**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.

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**REL 101.02**

Instructor: Bill Hart

Intro to Religious Studies

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

**Course Description:** This course addresses the “A, B, Cs” of religious studies. Going beyond “common sense” ideas, the goal is to understand what religion is and how it works. This is not a “world religions” course. Rather, this course introduces students to the basic “building blocks” of religions with examples from various traditions.

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**REL 111.01**

Instructor: Heather Edgerly

Non-Western Religions

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

**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.

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**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 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.

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**REL 202.02**

Instructor: Ellen Haskell

Hebrew Bible

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

**Course Description:**  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.

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**REL 204.01**

Instructor:

New Testament/Orgns Christinity

Time and Day: MWF 1-1:50 **(WLC)**

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.

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**REL 207.01**

Instructor: Gregory Grieve

Modern Problem of Belief: Rel Video Games

Time and Day: TR 2-3:15

**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.

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**REL 209.01**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Elements of Christian Thought

Time and Day: MWF 3-3:50 **(WLC)**

**Course Description:** Why you should take this course: THE FRIDAY COURSE WILL BE ONLINE.

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.

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**REL 209.02**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Elements of Christian Thought

Time and Day: MWF 4-4:50 **(WLC)**

Course Description: Why you should take this course: THE FRIDAY CLASS WILL BE ONLINE

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.

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**REL 215.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

Time and Day: **WEB**

**Course Description**: Online -- Fully WEB Based

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.

This course will be conducted ONLINE using Blackboard.

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**REL 215.02**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Judaism

Time and Day: **WEB**

**Course Description**: Online -- Fully WEB Based

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This course will be conducted ONLINE using Blackboard.

**REL 223.01**

Instructor: Gregory Grieve

Hinduism

Time and 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.

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**REL 225.01**

Instructor: Alyssa Gabbay

Islam

Time and Day: MWF 10-10:50 **(WLC)**

**Course 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.

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**REL 225.02**

Instructor: Alyssa Gabbay

Islam

Time and Day: MWF 9-9:50 **(WLC)**

**Course 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.

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**REL 298.01**

Instructor: Greg Grieve

Thinking About Religion

Time and 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.

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**REL 311.01**

Instructor: Marc Bregman

Topics: Bible – Sacrifice of Isaac

Time and Day: **WEB**

**Course Description**: Online — Fully Web Based

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. WI [Writing Intensive] Credit.

This course will be conducted ONLINE using Blackboard.

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**REL 323.01**

Instructor: Derek Krueger

REL Movements: Christianity Monastic Traditions

Time and Day: MW 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.

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**REL 382.01**

Instructor: Eugene Rogers

Topics in Christian Thought: Blood

Time and 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.