

Religion

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The goal of the study of religion at a secular college is religious literacy. Religious literacy, an important dimension of cultural literacy, entails both a cognitive component (knowledge of religions and of the religious dimension of culture) and proficiencies (the acquiring of skills relevant to the analysis of religion). Courses in religion have the objective of conveying knowledge about the world's religion, and of developing skills of analysis, interpretation, and communication.

An individually designed combined major which integrates the study of religion with work in another department can be arranged.

Distribution: Courses completed in religion apply to the humanities and cultural pluralism (selected courses) distribution areas.

Learning Goals:

• **Field-Specific Areas of Knowledge**

- Upon graduation, students will be able to analyze and understand religious phenomena based upon substantive knowledge of a broad range of religious ideas and practices as well as in-depth study in a single area of concentration.
- More generally, students will be familiar with different dimensions of religion as a phenomenon and different academic methods by means of which religion is studied and understood.

• **Communication**

- Students will be able to present answers to a research question in writing that meets the highest standards of conceptual clarity and correct and readable prose. They will be able to discuss orally the subject matter and method of their research, and locate both within the wider horizon of the phenomenon of religion and the academic study of religion in a substantive, articulate, conceptually clear, and precise manner.

• **Critical Thinking**

- Students will be able to distinguish confessional from academic approaches to religion, and to bracket the former in interpretations of religious phenomena. They will have cultivated skills of critically analyzing and interpreting different genres of texts: sacred scriptures, philosophical and theological arguments, historical studies, and social-scientific and gender studies analyses of religious phenomena.

• **Research Experience**

- Students who graduate will be able to carry out independent research on a religious phenomenon by formulating a sophisticated religious studies research question, conducting appropriate research, and defining their own methodological perspective. Students will be able to articulate the contributions and limitations of their chosen method.

The Religion major: A minimum of 36 credits in religion, including the following: Religion 203; Religion 448; Religion 490 or 498; six elective courses, at least two of which are at the 300-level. At least three of the elective courses, including one at the 300-level, must form a concentration to be defined in consultation with the advisor during the Spring of the Junior year, prior to Fall registration; the senior thesis must be written in the concentration area. Additionally, at least one of the elective courses must be a course in comparative religion, to be selected from the following list. Only one 100-level course may be counted toward the major requirements. The study of an appropriate language, as determined in consultation with the student's major adviser, is also highly recommended although not required. The senior assessment: All religion majors are required to write a senior thesis of 25-30 pages, and to pass an oral examination on the thesis, which may include questions of a more comprehensive nature. Departmental policy does not allow a P-D-F grade option for courses within the major.

Honors in the major: All students majoring in Religion are required to write a thesis and to register for Religion 490 *Thesis in Religion*. Students do not apply for admission to candidacy for honors. Students who write a thesis graded A or A- by the Religion Department faculty, and who pass the Senior Comprehensive Examination with distinction, will be granted Honors in Major Study if they attain the minimum Cumulative and Major GPAs specified in the faculty code (3.300 and 3.500, respectively). The Chair of the Religion Department will notify the Registrar of those students attaining Honors in Major Study no later than the beginning of the third week of April. Two copies of the Honors Theses must be submitted to Penrose Library no later than Reading Day.

The Religion minor: A minimum of 20 credits in religion, including Religion 203, at least one 300-level course, and at least one course in comparative religion, to be selected from the following list. Only one 100-level course may be counted toward the minor requirements. Departmental policy does not allow a P-D-F grade option for courses within the minor.

Courses designated Comparative:

Religion 100 *Introduction to Religion*

Religion 103 *Death and Afterlife*

Religion 109 *Conceptions of Ultimate Reality*

Religion 110 *Religion and the Senses*

Religion 116, 117 *Comparative Studies in Religion*

Religion 150 *Evil and Suffering*

Religion 152 *Saintly Lives*
Religion 153 *Religion and Native America*
Religion 160 *Asian Religions and the Environment*
Religion 204 *African American Religious Traditions*
Religion 221 *Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains*
Religion 222 *Hindu India*
Religion 236 *Comparative Scriptures*
Religion 301 *Reason and Madness: Religion and
Ethics from Kant to Nietzsche*
Religion/Film Media Studies 307 *Mediating
Religions*
Religion 314 *Approaches to Religion, Violence and
War*
Religion 330 *Multireligious South Asia*
Religion 358 *Feminist and Liberation Theologies*

100 Introduction to Religion

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

An introduction both to religion as a reality of human history, culture, and experience, and to the study of religion as a field in the humanities and social sciences. Topics include the nature of religion, theological, and social scientific theories of religion; sacred scriptures, East and West; religious thought about the nature of ultimate reality, the human condition, and the path to salvation in several traditions. Not a survey of world religions, but an introduction to religion using cross-cultural materials and a variety of approaches. Three class meetings per week. Open only to first- and second-year students.

103 Death and Afterlife

Spring

Walters

4 credits

Death and the afterlife have been central concerns of all religious people, whose answers to the questions “why do we die?” and “what happens next?” have shaped their ways of life in general and their funerary practices in particular. However universal the reality of death, conceptualizations of and responses to it have varied widely among and even within various religions and civilizations. This seminar, based on reading and discussion of primary (scriptural) and secondary (scholarly) texts, explores a range of ideas and practices surrounding death and the afterlife in two of the world’s great civilizations: The Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) and the Indic (Hindu, Buddhist and Jain). In addition to identifying the specific understandings and practices unique to each religion, we will raise and address comparative questions about similarities and differences found among them. Open only to first- and second-year students.

109 Conceptions of Ultimate Reality

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

What is ultimately real? Matter and energy? Fate? God or gods? Nirvana? The Impersonal One? This introductory course in the academic study of religion explores differing conceptions of ultimate reality in a variety of traditions. It considers the question of ultimate reality both phenomenologically (analyzing sacred texts) and philosophically (considering several treatments of the problem of the pluralism of conceptions). Open only to first- and second-year students.

110 Religion and the Senses

Fall

Osborne

4 credits

Looking across a range of religious traditions, this course examines the modes of the human senses in relation to religious experience, drawing on both primary and secondary literature. We will ask such questions as: are the senses acting as a means allowing for perception of the divine, or some kind of experience or contact? Are they a medium for self-discipline, in either a positive sense through the cultivation of a pious self, or negatively, through denial? Are the senses serving as a metaphor, and, if so, to what end? We will also interrogate the boundaries and relationships between senses. Open only to first- and second-year students.

116, 117 Comparative Studies in Religion

4 credits

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion. Topics for the sections vary from semester to semester and year to year, depending on the particular interests of the instructors, but every course will consider some aspect of the phenomenon of religion and study it in a comparative perspective. Open only to first- and second-year students. Any current offerings follow.

116 ST: Religion as Popular Culture

Spring

Mershon

4 credits

What do you do “religiously?” Are you part of a “cult following” of a TV show? Is your gym your “church”? This introductory-level course invites you to answer these questions by exploring how and why religious beliefs and

practices appear in unexpected places—from trendy exercise clubs to binge- watching TV shows. We will read a combination of theoretical texts that introduce you to the study of religion and popular culture in America, as well as engage with primary sources from television, literature, and social media. This discussion-based course is divided into six units about key areas where popular culture and religion intersect: 1) celebrity, 2) eating and exercise, 3) television, 4) music, 5) sports; and 6) shopping. In this class, we will examine how religion informs popular culture in America in order to better understand and question our presuppositions about the category of religion itself. Distribution area: humanities.

150 Evil and Suffering

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

One of the most difficult questions in religious thought is the question of evil and suffering. If there is a good God, why does evil exist? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't God put an end to human suffering? Does God cause the terrible events we see nightly on the news? Do these events prove there is no God? What is evil and where does it come from? In this course we will study responses to these questions in a variety of forms, including philosophical, theological, and literary texts as well as film. Open to first and second year students only.

152 Sainthood Lives

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course explores and compares saints' life-stories, and traditions of saint worship, from a variety of religious traditions. What makes particular saints saintly? To what extent are saintly qualities and forms of saint worship universal, and to what extent do they depend upon particular cultural and religious matrices? How and why have religious people celebrated their saints, in literature and in ritual? Open only to first and second year students.

153 Religion and Native America

Spring

Thayne

4 credits

When Europeans first arrived in the Americas, they did not typically recognize Indigenous rituals, beliefs, and practices as “religion.” Over time, however, European Enlightenment categories such as “natural religion” were applied to Indigenous practices, with significant implications. This course will be both an excavation of the category of religion and a history of religion in Native America, including its contemporary setting. We will consider how religious, anthropological, and other Euroamerican categories have influenced and been involved in the production of “Indigenous religion” and Indigeneity in North America, as well as ways these categories have been co-constituted with/as/against race. The course will also focus on Native American engagement with Christianity, missionary work to Indigenous peoples, Native “conversion,” and U.S. reform efforts, such as federal boarding schools. We will consider how religion has functioned within the U.S. legal system, particularly in cases where Indigenous peoples have sought to protect their lands and practices under the rubric of religion. Particular attention will be given to religion in this region, with sections on Washat, or the Seven Drums religion of the Plateau peoples, First Salmon ceremonies of Pacific NW peoples, the missionary work of Myron Eells (son of Whitman Seminary founder Cushing Eells), and the missionary efforts of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman—namesakes of Whitman College—among the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla people, and the complicated issue of memorializing and remembering the so-called “Whitman Massacre” and legacy. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major or minor or toward the Anthropology major or minor. Open only to first and second year students.

154 Yoga, Meditation and Mindfulness

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

Over the past few decades, practices of yoga and mindfulness have become increasingly commonplace in medical treatment, stress management, and sports performance. Practices that had once been passed down from teacher to student as techniques leading to liberation from suffering and illusion are now available on one's smart phone. This course will introduce students to the history of yoga and meditation through texts and ethnography. We will study a variety of approaches to contemplative practice, including the Stoics, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus in addition

to contemporary formulations of yoga and meditation in relation to medicine and psychology. Open only to first and second year students.

160 Asian Religions and the Environment

Fall

Walters

4 credits

A comparative exploration of historical and contemporary ideas and practices related to the natural environment in select Asian religious traditions. May be taken for credit toward the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major. Open only to first and second year students.

201 Reading Biblical Narratives

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

The stories of the Hebrew Bible include some of the most memorable characters and stories in literature. However, what makes a biblical narrative a “story”? In this course, students will examine biblical narratives using contemporary methods of literary criticism. The course focuses on the themes of gender, power, covenant, and history as they are constructed through devices such as plot, style, and characterization. Beginning with the second half of Genesis, this course uses Robert Alter’s translations of the Hebrew Bible. *Prerequisite:* General Studies 145.

202 The New Testament and Early Christianity

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

An introduction to the beginnings of Christianity by a study of the New Testament and other early Christian writings. Attention will be given to both historical questions and religious ideas. The focal points of the course will be the Gospels, the problem of the historical Jesus (including the contemporary work on this problem by the “Jesus Seminar”), and the theology of Paul.

203 What is Religion?

Fall

Osborne

4 credits

What is religion, and why is its study important in the twenty-first century? This course engages students with classic and contemporary theories about religion, and considers a variety of methods in the transdisciplinary field of religious studies.

204 African American Religious Traditions

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course studies religion among African American people and African-inspired religions of the Black Atlantic. In addition to African American Christianities and black participation in Christian denominations (most prominently Protestant but also Pentecostal, Catholic, Mormon, and Evangelical), we will also read about and discuss Rastafari, Santeria, Vodoun, the Nation of Islam and Black Islam(s), the religiosity of black nationalism, Hebrew Israelites and messianic return-to-Africa movements, and more. We will discuss themes such as the Black Atlantic, slavery, emancipation, civil rights, colonization and de-colonization, migration, urbanization, incarceration, freedom struggles, politics, race and critical race theory, mega churches, televangelism, etc. The course will include readings by authors such as James Baldwin, Malcolm X, W. E. B. DuBois, Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes, Aime Cesaire, Albert Raboteau, Cornel West, Paul Gilroy, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and others. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major.

205 Introduction to Christianity

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

Utilizing readings from the Christian Bible, Creeds and Catechisms, and theologies, this course introduces students to the major stories and doctrines of the Christian tradition. The focus of the course is on varieties of beliefs—Protestant and Catholic, liberal and conservative. Recommended but not required prior to taking more advanced work in Christian thought. Open only to first and second year students.

207 Islamic Traditions**Fall****Osborne****4 credits**

This course provides an overview of the religious tradition of Islam in a global context. We will encounter a lived tradition: one that is constantly defined, redefined, and contested through the beliefs and practices of Muslims in interpretation of scripture, ritual life, literature, art, and other modes of expression. Themes that may receive attention include foundational sources and literatures such as the Qur'an, hadith, and shari'a, as well as the role of the Prophet Muhammad, Sunni and Shi'i traditions, political Islam, and Islam in America. The sources for the course include both readings and films. May be taken for credit toward the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major.

208 Buddhist Ethics**Not offered 2018-19****4 credits**

What does it mean to be a Buddhist? How should a Buddhist act in a world that Buddhist doctrine defines as "*dukkha*," or "suffering?" What can Buddhist thought contribute to discussions of contemporary ethical issues, such as environmentalism, gender, poverty and violence? This course will introduce students to the study of Buddhist Ethics from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Our sources will include Buddhist philosophical and narrative literature alongside ethnographic and historical studies of Buddhist attempts to map out and embody ethical ideals and practices in a changing world. Following these sources, we will engage with fundamental Buddhist concepts of action, selfhood, and cosmology while considering the effects of globalization and the formation of "Buddhist Modernism" as Buddhists respond to the challenges of colonialism and adapt to the concerns and presuppositions of Western Buddhists. May be taken for credit toward the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major. May be elected as Philosophy 211.

209 Jewish Texts and Traditions**Not offered 2018-19****4 credits**

This course studies Jewish texts and traditions from antiquity to the present-day. The course emphasizes the diversity in Judaism, focusing on moments of innovation and change in the lived tradition. Using a combination of primary texts, secondary literature, and film, students will explore the major areas in the study of Judaism, including biblical literature, the rabbinic period, mysticism, folklore, philosophy, and Holocaust literature. Recommended but not required for further courses in Judaism.

213 Buddhist Monasticisms**Not offered 2018-19****4 credits**

What does it mean to renounce the world and become a Buddhist monk or Buddhist nun? This course will explore the complexity and diversity of Buddhist monasticism as it is constituted in different countries and different times. The course begins with textual and archeological evidence detailing the emergence of Buddhist monasticism over two thousand years ago in India and concludes with contemporary ethnographic accounts of male and female monastics in a number of countries struggling to adapt to a swiftly changing world while simultaneously protecting the continuity and distinctiveness of their particular lineages. Through a sustained study of different forms of Buddhist monasticism, this course will engage in a broader discussion of Buddhist constructions of gender, identity, family, asceticism, law and modernity. May be taken for credit toward the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major.

214 American Jewish Thought**Not offered 2018-19****4 credits**

When the first Jews arrived in America in 1654, they sought, like many others, religious freedom. Today America is home to one of the largest Jewish populations in the world, and has produced its own unique forms of Judaism. Students will explore this complex tradition and the construction of American Jewish identity through Jewish philosophy, literature, and films from the mid-20th century to present day.

217 The Qur'an
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course offers an exploration of the Qur'an, the scripture of Islam. In introducing the text, we will examine the historical and literary context in which it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in seventh century Arabia. Through close reading we will survey the many messages, themes, and literary and poetic styles found in the text itself. Special attention will also be given to the range of methods and approaches that Muslims have used in interpreting the Qur'an, and to the role played by the text in ritual life.

219 Modern Jewish Thought
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

The onset of modernity brought about dramatic upheaval and change for Jewish communities, from the optimism of the Enlightenment to the horrors of the Holocaust. This course covers the history and thought of Modern Judaism from the 17th century to the 20th century in Europe. Students will read philosophical texts to gain an overview of the major themes, events, and thinkers of this important period in religious thought and Judaism.

221 Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course introduces three South Asian religions -- Brahmanism (proto-Hinduism), Buddhism and Jainism -- through comparative study of the philosophies and practices each advocated in ancient India. Students will read foundational scriptures of each religion in translation, with discussion and lecture guided to understanding them as in dialogue with each other. Two class meetings per week. Open to all students. Offered in alternate years.

222 Hindu India
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course explores Hindu theology, literature, mythology, art, religious practice and politics in premodern India, and their legacies for religious pluralism in modern India. Students will read classical Hindu texts in translation, with lecture and discussion focused on understanding both concord and conflict within them, followed by select Muslim, Christian and secular reflections on Hinduism composed in premodern and modern India. Two class meetings per week. Open to all students. Offered in alternate years.

227 Christian Ethics
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course is an introduction to Christian Ethics, both theoretical and applied. Unlike traditional courses in ethics, which follow a historical trajectory, this course simultaneously engages classical texts in Christian ethics alongside contemporary critiques and reinterpretations of these texts. These critiques challenge the formulation dominant Christian ethical concepts by raising questions of gender, race, privilege, and globalization. Students will also engage in applied ethics by analyzing contemporary ethical issues through the lens of classic thinkers.

228 Modern Western Religious Thought I: Crisis and Renewal
Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

November 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. What were the religious ideas of the Protestant Reformers that lead to the break with Roman Catholicism? We will read Luther and other Reformers as well as Catholic responses, and consider the joint Lutheran-Catholic declaration from 1999 that doctrine need no longer divide them. The second half of the course will explore the questions, How did the Scientific Revolution of the 17th Century and the Enlightenment of the 18th lead to a further crisis for Western Religion? How did early 19th century thinkers creatively respond? Not open to first-year students. May be elected as German 228. Ordinarily offered in alternate years.

229 Modern Western Religious Thought II: New Challenges and Responses
Not offered 2018-19 **4 credits**

The 20th and 21st Centuries are marked by new challenges to Western religious thought and new creative responses. This course considers how Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish thinkers engage with modernity. Issues to be considered may include Protestant Neo-orthodoxy's repudiation of Liberalism, Nazism and German theologians' responses, the Holocaust and Jewish religious thought, the second Vatican Council and Catholic thought, feminist and liberation theologies, the New Atheism, the diversity of religions and the problem of religious truth. Not open to first year students. May be elected as German 229. Ordinarily offered in alternate years.

236 Comparative Scriptures

Spring

Osborne

4 credits

This course takes a comparative thematic approach to reading across the three scriptures of the Abrahamic traditions—the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Although they originate at different moments in history, in the context of different religious traditions, a common vocabulary of themes, narratives, genres, and poetics appears across all three. We will take a thematic approach by reading the scriptures as literature, in conversation with one another, and in so doing, raising the issue of the possibilities and limitations of a comparative perspective.

245 Jewish Ethics

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

What is Jewish Ethics? This course confronts this question through an overview of the history of Jewish ethics and close reading of representative Jewish thinkers of the 20th century. The course is structured so that students can engage one of the most important works of contemporary Jewish ethics – Judith Butler's challenging and controversial work *Parting Ways*. In this book, Butler draws upon the thinkers we will read in this course – Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin and Primo Levi – to construct a new Jewish ethical theory, one that raises questions about Jewish identity, the role of ethics in religion, and the place of religion in the public sphere.

250 Theravāda Buddhism

Fall

Walters

4 credits

This course explores Theravāda or "Earlier Vehicle" Buddhism, which flourishes today in South and Southeast Asia. Students will read selections of the foundational "early Buddhist" canon from India and later literature that tracks the religion's spread in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, with discussion and lecture focused on understanding the religion's rich cultural and historical diversity across this region. Two class meetings per week. Open to all students. Offered in alternate years.

251 Mahāyāna Buddhism

Spring

Walters

4 credits

This course explores Mahāyāna or "Great Vehicle" Buddhism, which flourishes today in East Asia. Students will read selections of the foundational "Great Vehicle" *sūtras* and later literature that tracks the religion's spread in China and Japan, and the rise of Tantrayāna or "Esoteric Vehicle" Buddhism there and in the Himalayas, with discussion and lecture focused on understanding the religion's rich cultural and historical diversity across this region. Two class meetings per week. Open to all students. Offered in alternate years.

290-292 Special Topics in the Academic Study of Religion

2-4 credits

One-time offerings of studies of selected authors, themes, or religious traditions at the intermediate level. Any current offerings follow.

290 ST: The American Diaspora: Jewish Identity in 20th-Century Literature

Fall

Mershon

4 credits

What does it mean to be Jewish American or an American Jew? How have Jewish writers negotiated the relationship between Jewish and American culture over time? Judaism has been defined in a variety of ways—through religion,

culture, nationality, ethnicity, and language. This course invites you to approach the study of Jewish American life through literature, with a particular focus on twentieth-century novels. By honing our close reading skills and the tools of literary analysis, we will travel with our protagonists from the Jewish shtetls of Poland to the bustling streets of Chicago. Through class discussion and short papers, you will practice making written and oral arguments that explore many of the central themes defining the experiences of American Jews, including assimilation, anti-Semitism, democracy, intermarriage, migration, and translation. Distribution area: humanities.

291 ST: Animals, Ethics, and Religion

Spring

Mershon

4 credits

Why are some animals considered food and others objects of religious devotion? Why do we treat dogs like family and kill flies without a second thought? Why do animals appear so frequently as metaphors in our everyday speech? In this course, students will explore these questions by reading texts featuring animals in literature, scripture, film, and theory, ranging from the Hebrew Bible, Franz Kafka, and Rainer Maria Rilke, to Robert Bresson, J.M. Coetzee, and Donna Haraway. We will bring these diverse texts together in order to investigate how animals illuminate religious questions about the relationship among humans, animals, and the divine. This discussion-based course is divided into five key themes: 1) naming, 2) eating, 3) companionship, 4) symbolism, and 5) sacrifice. Each unit brings together biblical, literary, and theoretical texts and examines how representations of animals reflect central religious concerns. In the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss, animals are “good to think with,” and in this class, animals will not only help us explore literary and religious questions, but also to examine our own presuppositions about human and animals. Distribution area: humanities.

301 Reason and Madness: Religion and Ethics from Kant to Nietzsche

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

The modern period is often heralded as a time of the triumph of reason over religion. However, many of the most prominent philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries promoted Christianity as a “rational religion” and embodying a “universal ethic.” These thinkers, by contrast, disparaged Judaism as “irrational” and “unethical.” This course is an intensive study of philosophical texts grappling with the interconnections between religion, ethics, and rationality, specifically focusing on representations of Judaism. The course concludes with Nietzsche’s critique of this trend in modern religious thought. Students will read significant portions of philosophical texts, including Kant, Hegel, Cohen, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. May be taken for credit toward the German Studies major or minor.

Prerequisite: at least one course in Religion, Philosophy, or German Studies or consent of instructor.

304 Muslim Bodies

Spring

Osborne

4 credits

This course considers the roles of bodies and embodiment as related to the religious tradition of Islam. What is the role of the body in Islamic thought and practice? How are different bodies understood and treated in Islamic contexts? In what ways might the category of Islam as a religion intersect with race? Themes that may receive attention include ritual performance via the body, fashion and clothing, gender, sexuality, disability, race, and theoretical discourse of embodiment. The basics of Islam will not be covered in the course; while there are no prerequisites, it is highly recommended that students have prior course experience relating to Islam, or in Religion, Gender Studies, or Race and Ethnic Studies. May be taken for credit toward the Middle East/Islamic World area for the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major.

305 Gender and Identity in Judaism

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

The question of Jewish identity has been central to Jewish thought since the modern period. This course studies how Modern Orthodox Judaism defines Jewish identity in the secular world, and how questions of gender identity complicate this task of definition. The course focuses on a close reading of texts from American and Israeli scholars that represent a number of religious studies methodologies. Through this course, students will learn about these

various methods and how gender analysis is incorporated into and perhaps changes these methods. Not open to first year students.

307 Mediating Religions

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course will engage with philosophy, religious studies, phenomenological theory, post-colonial and cultural studies scholarship in order to critically analyze mediated religion and other parts of social life on a global scale. We will consider the many meanings of mediation, from the larger social level of mass communication to the individual level of the body, in which larger beliefs are individually mediated through ritual and performance. Themes that may receive attention include: the use of electronic fatwas in modern Muslim societies; the rise of American televangelism; the global and local markets for religious cultural products; the representation of religious identities—particularly the rise of Islamophobia—in media; and the prominence of fundamentalist and nationalist religious politics across the globe. Lectures, discussions, and tests. May be elected as Film and Media Studies 307. When Film and Media Studies 307 is not offered, Religion 307 may be taken for credit toward the Film and Media Studies major. May be taken for credit toward the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major.

310 Hearing Islam

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course explores the ways in which Islam has been conceived, represented, and contested through sound. How does hearing or saying affect the practice of religion? What makes a particular sound religious, with regard to either its production or its experience? Topics will include the call to prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, the “problem” of music in Islam, and genres of Islamic music from a wide range of historical and cultural contexts (such as ghazals--love poems set as songs --and Islamic rap, for example), sermons, and other audio artifacts. The course will draw on both reading and listening assignments.

314 Approaches to Religion, Violence and War

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

What is the relationship between religion, violence and war? Is there something about a religious worldview that leads to violence against outsiders or is it simply that humans have an inherent potential for violence that religions cannot fully control? How have different religious traditions sought to legitimate or condemn violence and war? As contemporary media continues to make explicit links between religion (or particular religions) and violence, it is important for citizens of the world to have a clear awareness of the reductionism inherent in such claims. By critically examining primary religious texts, ethnographic case studies and key thinkers that have informed our understanding of religion and violence this course is geared towards a conceptual clarification that moves beyond rigid definitions. This course will culminate in a significant research project on a topic of your choice. As this is an advanced course, it is strongly recommended that students have taken classes in religion.

321 Islamic Mysticism

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course examines the concepts, literatures, and practices associated with mysticism in Islam (Sufism), and the lives of related figures. We will draw on both close reading of mystical literatures, as well as studying the integration of the practices and individuals into Sufi orders into society in a variety of geographical and historical contexts.

330 Multireligious South Asia

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

South Asia is home to well-established and highly diverse Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Zoroastrian, Christian and tribal religious communities, whose members have been interacting with each other in both constructive and contentious ways for three millennia. This course examines historical and contemporary examples of South Asian multireligious encounter in order to raise and address more general questions relevant to the study of “multireligion” in any context: just how have religious people engaged their religious “others” through the ages? What strategies

exist within the different religious traditions for making sense of and responding to the universal fact of religious diversity? How do these strategies relate to social, political, economic and other cultural concerns of the people who employ them? What factors cause them to fluctuate over time or in different circumstances? How does the academic study of religions—itsself an attempt at making sense of religious diversity—relate to the multireligious strategies of the lived traditions it analyses? Open to all students, but at least one prior course in religion is strongly recommended.

347 The Buddha

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

The life of the Buddha has captivated religious imaginations for 2,500 years, but the biography of the Buddha is not singular: in its traverse of millennia and continents, Buddhism has generated many Buddhas, each appropriate to the time and place in which he was imagined. This course examines select biographies of the Buddha from Asia and Europe, modern as well as ancient, in order to investigate the impact of historical and intellectual circumstances upon the composition of each. It serves both as a case study in religious biography and as a broad overview of the origin and development of Buddhism. *Prerequisite:* Religion 221, 250, 251, or 257, or consent of instructor.

350 The Problem of God

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This course focuses on the existence and nature of God as an intellectual problem. The course will explore conceptions of God in the Western religious traditions and how God came to be a problem with the emergence of skepticism and atheism in the modern world. Historical and literary approaches, as well as philosophical and theological perspectives, will be included. Contemporary attempts to rethink the nature of God and to argue for the reality of God will be considered. Two class meetings per week. Not open to first-year students.

353 The Historical Jesus

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

This seminar is an exploration of recent scholarship on the problem of the historical Jesus — the attempt to distinguish the historical figure of Jesus from the theological portraits of him in early Christian literature. Attention will be given to the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar regarding the authenticity of the reported sayings and deeds of Jesus, as well as to recent books on Jesus of Nazareth by scholars representing a variety of methodological perspectives. Each student will report to the class on a recent work on Jesus. *Recommended prerequisite:* Religion 202.

358 Feminist and Liberation Theologies

Not offered 2018-19

4 credits

Since the 1960s, Western religious thinkers have been giving explicit attention to the relevance of gender, race, and class for religious thought. This course is a comparative exploration of Latin American liberation theologies, African American theologies, and feminist theologies (Jewish, Christian, and Post-Christian). Format: readings in primary sources, class discussions, oral reports, and papers. Not open to first-year students.

387-390 Special Topics in Religious History, Literature, and Thought

2-4 credits

Intensive studies of particular authors, literatures, issues, or eras. The topics will vary year to year. Any current offerings follow.

387 ST: Mormonism: Race, Gender and Sexuality, and Marriage in America

Fall

Thayne

4 credits

How did Mormons go from being depicted as libidinous reprobates in need of militant reform during the nineteenth century to being imagined as quintessential model American families by the end of the twentieth? What does this transition tell us about the disciplinary formations of race, gender, sexuality, and family in America? How have racial *others* been imagined and constructed through Mormon scripture and then “converted” through missionary work, and what can this tell us about indigeneity and race? This class will use Mormonism as a case study to

examine the histories and structures of indigeneity and race, gender and sexuality, and marriage and family in American history. As such, our survey begins before the organization of the church in 1830 and extends far beyond the body of official church membership. While the larger goal of the class will be to use Mormonism to understand these broader issues, we will examine in particular the lives and testimonies of Indigenous, African American, feminist, and queer Mormons, in addition to the “mainstream” movement, considering the multiplicity of voices that constitute the Mormon people and the shifting and changing America they belong to. We will also discuss the global spread of Mormonism—a significant development for a church that now boasts that over half of its membership are non-English speakers, while the upper echelons of church leadership are still dominated by white males from the intermountain American West. May be taken for credit toward the Gender Studies major or minor or Race and Ethnic Studies major or minor. Distribution area: humanities.

388 ST: “Sorry-not-Sorry:” The Ethics of Apologies

Fall

Mershon

4 credits

In the contemporary moment, it seems that every day someone is issuing an apology. But what does it really mean to say you’re sorry? How can you take action to address historical and present-day wrongs? In this course, you will examine the ethics of apologies across history—including biblical writings on forgiveness, Germany’s response to the Holocaust, and American political scandals. We will look together at images, film, literature, and theory to examine the rhetoric, politics, and structures of apologies and “non-apologies.” This discussion-based course will cover the themes of acknowledgement, memorialization, dialogue, restitution, and forgiveness. Our ongoing aim will be to consider the extent to which nations and individuals have come to terms with individual and collective wrongs. Through class discussions, presentations, and a final research paper, you will consider how our shared understanding of apologies shape our ethical attitudes and actions. Distribution area: humanities.

389 ST: Hyphenated Identities: Race and Ethnicity in Jewish-American Culture

Spring

Mershon

4 credits

What does it mean to be Jewish in America and who has the authority to decide? Is Jewish identity determined by one’s DNA, religious observance, and/or family structure? This advanced-level course invites you to consider these questions by exploring the wide spectrum of ways American Jews have thought of themselves in relation to the categories of race and ethnicity, and how the answers to these questions have changed over time. We will consider topics such as the Jewish participation in slavery, Jewish immigration, the experiences of Jews of color, and the relationships between white Jews and African Americans. By studying representations of Jewish identity in historical, literary, and visual texts across American history, we will examine how the categories of race and ethnicity contribute to various understandings of what it means to be Jewish-American. In the process, we will better understand and question our presuppositions about Jewish identity, as well as American religious identities themselves. Distribution area: humanities.

401, 402 Independent Study

Fall, Spring

Staff

1-4 credits

An opportunity for advanced students to pursue a specific interest after consultation with the instructor.

Prerequisite: consent of instructor.

448 Seminar in the Academic Study of Religion

Fall

Walters

4 credits

A senior capstone experiences that prepares majors for senior thesis writing through an exploration of contemporary issues in the field. Required of, and open only to senior religion majors.

490 Thesis in Religion

Spring

Staff

4 credits

Research and writing of the senior thesis. Open only to and required of senior religion majors. *Prerequisite:* Religion 448.

498 Honors Thesis in Religion

Spring

Staff

4 credits

Research and writing of the senior honors thesis. Students register for Religion 490, not for Religion 498. The registration will be changed from Religion 490 to 498 for those students who attain honors in Religion. Open only to senior religion majors.