



Spring 2015 Courses

RELIGION 101 Freshman Seminar: Good and Evil / Zoloth

Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:00-3:20 p.m.

We will spend this quarter slowly and simply reading. Our goal is to reflect on a puzzle: why do humans choose to be good or evil? Note how the shape of the question is complex and self-reflective, assuming that moral action is a choice. But is it? How do we understand the human capacity for good and for evil? What is meant by these categories?

This class will respond to the complexities of this question by reading the work of two master Jewish philosophers, Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt. They share a certain history and a fascination with the question: both were gifted students and favorites of Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher who joined the Nazi Party promptly and enthusiastically. Both narrowly escaped from the Holocaust. Both then turned their research toward the problem of human relationality, duty, judgment and moral action. Both produced a large body of dense, intricate moral theory that has come to define post-modern Jewish thought.

RELIGION 210 Intro to Buddhism / Bond

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 11:00-11:50 a.m.

This course provides an Introduction to the religion begun by the Buddha in India some 2500 years ago. The Buddhist religion has shaped the thought and culture of Asia and has also influenced Western thought and culture in significant ways. To interpret this diverse religious tradition, this course approaches it from several perspectives, including the historical, the philosophical, the religious and the cultural. The primary emphasis will be on investigating the philosophical and religious teachings of Gautama the Buddha in India as well as the thought and history of later Buddhists in other parts of Asia. The course views Buddhism as a tradition that established a system of values, an interpretation of existence and a pattern of cultural practices and rituals that the Buddhists have interpreted and applied in various ways to find meaning in life.

RELIGION 220 Intro to Hebrew Bible / Wimpfheimer

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00-12:20 p.m.

There is no understating the significance of the Hebrew Bible in Western Culture. The Bible is a text that has been repeatedly turned to for spiritual guidance, for explanations of mankind's origins and as the basis of both classical art and contemporary cinema. English idiom is peppered with phrases that originate in the Hebrew Bible and many a modern political clash can be understood as a conflict over what the Bible's messages and their implications. This course introduces students to the Hebrew Bible by reading sections of most of the Bible's books. But reading is itself a complicated enterprise. The Bible has been put to many different uses; even within the world of academic scholarship, the Bible is sometimes a source of history, sometimes a religious manual, sometimes a primitive legal code and sometimes a work of classical literature. This course will introduce students to the various challenges that present themselves within the study of the Hebrew Bible and the varied approaches scholars take when reading the Hebrew Bible. This course is a critical introduction to the Hebrew Bible. Because the Hebrew Bible is a text important to various religious practices, it is important to emphasize that the course does not expect students to have a particular religious perspective on the Hebrew Bible. Students who have such a perspective are encouraged to bring their own experiences into the classroom while respecting the opinions (and individuals) that may challenge those views.



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RELIGION 240 Intro to Christianity / Traina

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30-10:50 a.m.

This course explores the basic beliefs and key historical developments of Christianity from a religious studies perspective. We will use both recent and period writings to explore the early history of Christianity and trace its division into three main branches. After a theoretical and hands-on investigation of how these differences manifest in Christian worship and architecture, we will explore some of the points of tension for Christians in recent and contemporary culture. Central themes include Christianity's identity as communal, missional, and theological.

RELIGION 250 Intro to Islam / Ingram

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30-1:50 p.m.

This course introduces Islam, one of the major monotheistic religious traditions of world history. We will develop a framework for understanding how Muslims in varying times and places have engaged with the prophetic message of the Prophet Muhammad through diverse sources: theological, philosophical, legal, political, mystical, literary and artistic. While we aim to grasp broad currents and narratives of Islamic history, we will especially concentrate on the origins and development of the religion in its formative period (the prophetic career of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, Islamic belief and ritual, Islamic law, and popular spirituality) and debates surrounding Islam in the contemporary world (the impact of European colonialism on the Muslim world, the rise of the modern Muslim state, and discourses on gender, politics and violence).

RELIGION 333/SOC 376-23 Judaism in the Modern World: Contemporary Jewish Identities / Israel-Cohen

Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30-4:50 p.m.

This course will examine the various contours of contemporary Jewish identities in a comparative perspective between Israel and the United States. Attention will be given first to the constructs of Jewish identity in ethnic, national, and religious terms and then to the most pressing in-group schisms that divide the Jewish people today. In this capacity, we will investigate topics such as the "who is a Jew" debate; denominational tensions and questions of recognition; religious and secular divides; and political/ideological rifts. The course will include weekly reading assignments, student-led interviews on the topic of Jewish identity, and a final paper.

RELIGION 339-20 Topics in Judaism: Jewish Ethics / Zoloth

Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:30-10:50 a.m.

This will be a survey course in the broad range of Jewish ethical texts, tradition and practices. The course will cover ethical debates within Hebrew Scripture, study the method of "Halacha" or Jewish legal responses, question the traditions of philosophy that exist alongside of Halachic debates and research core Jewish arguments and figures in the field of ethics and moral philosophy. In the final weeks of the quarter, we will turn to contemporary ethical debate and analysis the arguments of Jewish thinkers within these debates. This course will include a week of field study at sites of ethical encounters in the Jewish community.



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RELIGION 339-21 Topics in Judaism: Talmud / Wimpfheimer

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00-3:20 p.m.

In this seminar, we will study a tractate of Talmud in its original form (not in English translation). Our class discussion will be conducted in English, but we will spend considerable time discussing texts written in Hebrew. The seminar is limited to students who either are enrolled in second year Hebrew or have background Hebrew reading and comprehension skills that have been certified by the instructor. This course will introduce students to Talmud Criticism by reading the Talmudic discussion of the laws of false testimony in light of prior and contemporaneous Jewish literature on this topic, the historical realities of Rabbinic Culture and questions raised within the lengthy history of Talmudic commentary. Students need not have a background in Talmud to take this class, though students with such background are also encouraged to attend.

RELIGION 339-22/Gender Studies 341-20/SOC 376-24

World Transnational Perspective on Gender & Sexuality Women in Traditional Religious Movements: Orthodox Feminist Activism in a Comparative Perspective/ Israel-Cohen

Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00-12:30 p.m.

In this course, students will be challenged to think about feminism through the lens of women committed to traditional, at times even fundamentalist, religious values. We will investigate the ways in which such women negotiate their status and examine the evolving feminist movements that have arisen within traditional religious life. More specifically, we will focus on a case study of feminist activism among Orthodox Jewish women in Israel, in a comparative perspective with Evangelical women in the USA and Muslim women in the Middle East. Some of the central questions we will engage are: how are the forms of feminist identity and activism among women in traditional religious traditions similar? In what ways can feminist activism within religious life be compared with secular feminist activism? Grades will be based on weekly writing assignments, participation, and a paper.

RELIGION 349 Paul the Apostle: Man and Myth / Dingeldein

Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30-1:50 p.m.

For nearly two thousand years, the life and thought of the apostle Paul has shaped the course of history. A founder of early Christian assemblies and an author of many New Testament letters, Paul spent much of his life attempting to transform a small, Jewish movement into a religion that encompassed an empire. After his death, Paul became a mythic figure and a tool of authorization, shaping and defining history from beyond the grave. In this course we will examine Paul's influence on various individuals and cultures, both during his life in the first-century CE and the hundreds of years following his death.

This course consists of two units. In our first unit, "Paul the Man," we will reconstruct the life and thought of the historical Paul. In our second unit, "Paul the Myth," we will examine the ways in which writers, political activists, philosophers, and religious figures from late antiquity to modernity have portrayed Paul, and we will investigate their motivations for doing so. This course is discussion-based and meets two times a week; each meeting lasts for 80 minutes.



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RELIGION 364 American Teenage Rites of Passage / Taylor

Tuesdays from 2:00-4:30 p.m.

This seminar is specially geared to American Studies and Religious Studies majors, although it engages materials of interest to both to RTVF majors and those in the social sciences. Drawing from anthropological and sociological case studies, we will examine various rites of passage experienced by teens in the U.S. In analyzing these rites, students will become conversant with theories of ritual, contemporary surveys of teen demographics and cultural trends, gender studies and cultural studies literature dealing with teen popular media and consumption, as well as historical literature on the rise and development of the American teenager as a cultural phenomenon. Students will be asked to generate original research for their seminar final project, applying the tools of the course to a case study of their own choosing. This seminar will make rigorous use of multimedia primary source materials and will require multi-source digitized media viewing and analysis as integral to course assignments. Attendance is required and recorded.

RELIGION 374 Religion and Literature / Sufrin

Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00-12:20 p.m.

This course addresses the intersection of religion and literature in Judaism and Christianity from several perspectives. We will begin with the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) and its role in the thinking of Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. We will then read the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and consider its treatment in the novel Home by Marilynne Robinson. Finally, the third part of the course examines the work of Cynthia Ozick, who uses fiction to address the question of idolatry in modern culture. These examinations will also allow us to interrogate other key terms in the study of religion such as faith, orthodoxy, heresy, martyrdom, and holiness.

RELIGION 385 The Mass & US Religious Practices/ Callaghan

Thursdays from 3:00-5:30 p.m.

This seminar will explore U.S. religious communities and contexts since WWII from the perspective of popular religious practices, especially but not exclusively the Catholic Mass. Topics will range from the emergence of a 'tri-faith' religious pluralism out of the Second World War to the importance of "sincerely held religious beliefs" for several Supreme Court decisions in the early 21st century. By organizing our discussions around religious practices we will explore how religions interacted with the physical and social environments of their practitioners. We will use U.S. Catholic history as a point of reference for a discussion of religious diversity in the United States over the past seventy-five years, expanding our model in order to address simultaneous developments within Native American, Jewish, Protestant Christian, and Muslim traditions. This course will provide students with the opportunity to learn and evaluate important historical evidence for contemporary claims about religion in America, as well as explore the category of ritual in the study of religion. Seminar readings will cover literary, historical, and sociological works, and will include a number of primary sources.



Spring 2015 Courses

GRADUATE COURSES

RELIGION 460 Late Medieval Religion--Conversations and Controversies / Kieckhefer

Mondays from 3:00-6:00 p.m.

All the controversies that came clearly into view in the sixteenth century were already anticipated in the last medieval centuries. And the conflicts among historical subjects can be seen mirrored in debates among modern scholars. Religion in the late medieval West has for some time been vigorously discussed and debated, across disciplinary and sometimes also denominational lines. The most widely respected scholars, such as Eamon Duffy and Caroline Walker Bynum, are not only emulated but also challenged. Theoretical issues sometimes lie at the heart of controversy. Views about the relationship between medieval and Reformation religion continue to generate conflict. More unexpected issues also arise: how precisely to conceive and define heresy; how far literacy and reading habits supported traditional commitment, or when and whether they fostered dissent; how to map the boundaries, if any, separating devotional practice from superstition and magic. Venerable clichés about late medieval religion—its emphasis on the humanity of Christ, or its neurotically penitential character—are now much disputed. We will plunge into all these conversations and controversies in an effort to see just why late medieval religion is so controversial. This seminar should be of interest to historians, religionists, art historians, and students of medieval and early modern literature.

RELIGION 462 Religion/Media/Culture Collaboratory / Taylor

Thursdays from 2:00-4:30 p.m.

Do you have a journal article in mind that you have been meaning to write and submit for publication before entering the job market? If so, register for the Media/Religion/Culture Collaboratory, where you will work on your publication project in a seminar of constructive colleagues, while also reading and analyzing some of the most exciting and current work being produced on the interplay of media, popular culture, modern mythologies, moral imagination, meetings and mediations of the supernatural, the secular, and the symbolic. What can the religious and implicitly religious content of media texts, their reception, remixing and remaking by active producer/consumers tell us about particular cultural moments and shifting cultural sensibilities, both contemporary and historical? What kind of window might such investigations provide into the complex workings of culture, its protean expressions, and the compelling contributions of cultural works to ongoing human conversations over space and time? Popular Sex Manuals; American Possessions; Monsters; Motherhood and Mommy Porn; Beauty Pageants; Capitalism, Cloning and Neolution; Ghost Hunters; Gaming; and Goldman Sachs: What do all of these things have to do with the entanglements of media, religion, and culture? We will explore these questions and more while following a structured format for completing and submitting your project for journal publication.



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GRADUATE COURSES

RELIGION 482 Themes of Comparative Religion--Religions and their Publics / Ingram

Tuesdays from 3:00-6:00 p.m.

The place of religion in public life has been fiercely contested in the contemporary world, as controversies ranging from the recent election of Hindu nationalists in India to public satire of the Prophet Muhammad readily attest. In recent years, scholars have approached public religion through a variety of analytical frames: the secular and postsecular, religious freedom, religion and law, and how the very notion of 'religion' has been deployed in various ways. What is often missing from these scholarly conversations, however, is a genealogy of 'the public' itself. This course has two aims: first, to introduce students to the complex genealogies of 'the public', in the West and beyond, focusing on ways that defining 'the public' has been inseparable from defining 'religion'; second, to provide a framework for how specific religious traditions have understood 'the public'. We will investigate a wide-ranging set of interconnected queries: What is a 'public'? What is the difference between a public and the public? To what extent have Western genealogies of the public excluded religion? What implicit assumptions about reason and rationality are embedded in these normative understandings of the public? If, accordingly, publics are presumed to be normatively 'rational', what forms of collectivity are its implied others, whether the crowd or the multitude? Is the public 'secular'? If so, does that make religion 'private'? What role or roles may 'religion' have in 'public' life? Do publics authorize specific forms of religion and censor others? Is the notion of a secular public sphere particular to the West? If so, to what extent have such publics become mobile, intersecting with markedly different notions of the public elsewhere? Are contemporary Hindu publics different from, say, contemporary Jewish ones? How might the stakes for religious sound in public differ from visual or ocular religiosity? Broadly, then, this course makes a case for studying religion in/and the public as among the key problematics of comparative religions. After attending to the genealogy and theory of the public, we will examine case studies drawing from Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish contexts and debates.