

Winter 2022

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

REL 170-20

Michelle Molina

Tuesday/Thursday

11:00 am-12:20 pm



Religion: we think we recognize it when we see it, and yet it is always changing. How does one study a moving target? Is religion best understood as a social practice or an individual experience? Drawing upon history, we see how the notion that “religion” could be studied objectively grew out of early modern European sectarian violence and colonial overseas expansion. We then turn to study some thinkers from the 19th and 20th centuries who argue about whether the comparison should entail the study of cultures or the study of individuals, testing their new ideas about anthropology, sociology, and psychology on case studies about religion.

Winter 2022

INTRO TO

BUDDHISM

REL 210-20

Kevin Buckelew

Monday/Wednesday

12:30-1:50 pm



This course offers an introduction to Buddhist history, culture, philosophy, and practice. We explore the major doctrinal varieties of Buddhism, from its inception through the rise of the Mahayana and Tantric or Vajrayana traditions. At the same time, we also investigate Buddhist visual, material, and ritual cultures—which offer windows onto aspects of Buddhism as a lived religion not always visible in scriptural sources. In the process we engage themes like the meaning of suffering, the cosmology of cyclical rebirth, the social role of monasticism and its intervention in traditional family structures, the place of women and gender in Buddhism, the relationship between religious ideals and everyday life, the question of self-reliance versus divine assistance, and the power of images and icons.

Winter 2022

INTRO TO

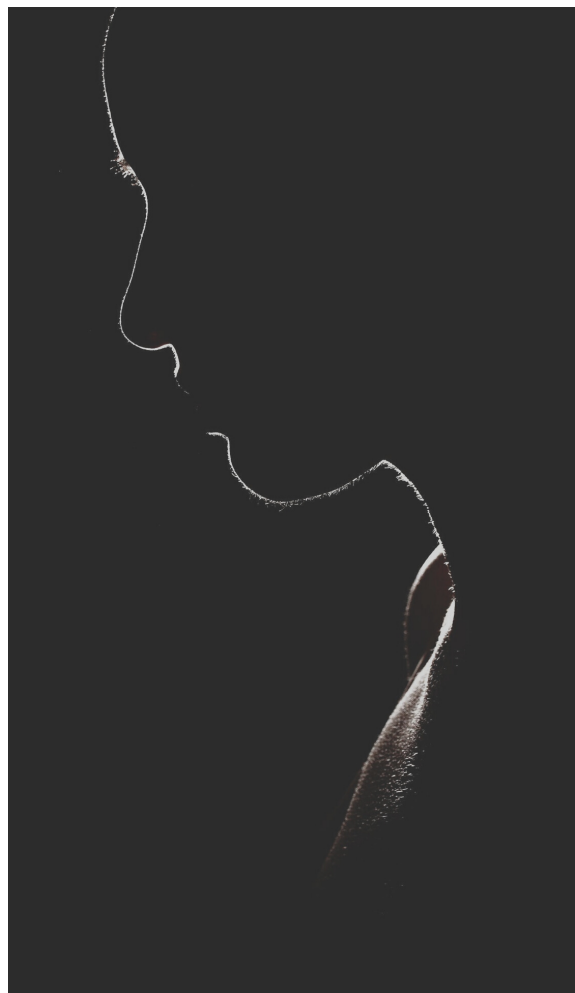
CHRISTIANITY

REL 240-20

Matthew Chalmers

Monday/Wednesday

11:00 am-12:20 pm



Whose Christianity matters? More often than not, an introduction to Christianity is in introduction to big words and great men. That's all very well, but most Christians throughout history have gone nameless; most rituals have no author, and a lot of the best loved texts and traditions are hard to fix on any individual. What does a Christianity look like when viewed not from the view of traditional history, but from the ground up? This course introduces the history, culture, and practices of Christianity from antiquity to the present by means of anonymous texts, texts without a confirmed author.

Winter 2022

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY I

REL 264-20
/ HIS 200-28
Robert Orsi

Tuesday/Thursday
9:30-10:50 am



1920-30s Classic Religious
Bowery Tattoo Flash Sheet



This course examines major developments, movements, controversies, and figures in American religious history from the end of the Civil War, as the nation struggled to make sense of the carnage of war and to apportion responsibility, to the 1930s, when economic crisis strained social bonds and intimate relations and challenged Americans to rethink the nature of public responsibility. Topics include urban religion; religion and changing technologies; African American religion; religion and politics; and the religious practices of immigrants and migrants.

Winter 2022

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

REL 318-22/

Monday/Wednesday

ASIAN_LC 300-21

3:30-4:50 pm

Antonio Terrone

This course will examine the role of religion in post-1980's China with an emphasis on the political implications of the practice of religion in the People's Republic of China. Students will read various forms of literature and policy documents to assess the extent to which Marxist theory is central to the interpretation of "religion" in Communist China. Primary sources will include Chinese constitutional articles, white papers, and editorials in English translation. Secondary sources will cover a wide range of interpretations and perspectives on the position of religious institutions and religious practices in the PRC. The first part of this course will investigate the expression of religiosity under Communism in China; the rehabilitation of Confucian values; the constitutional protection of religion and religious belief in China; the relationship between ethnicity and religious policies; the Sinicization of religion; and the administration of the five officially accepted religious traditions in the People's Republic of China (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam). The second part of the course will focus on the recent cases related to the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang and the Tibetan Buddhists of Western China. The class will explore some of the most controversial issues related to these two ethnic minorities including terrorism, religious violence, nationalism, assimilation, foreign influence, and soft power. The course format will consist of both lectures and discussions, during which students will be encouraged to exercise critical thinking and lead in-class presentations. Students will analyze various types of documents, critically evaluate content and concepts, and endeavor to synthesize the information and communicate it effectively and thoroughly. Counts towards Religion, Law, and Politics (RLP) major concentration.

Winter 2022 FATE, FORTUNE AND KARMA IN EAST ASIA

REL 318-24 /
ASIAN_LC 390-21
Kevin Buckelew

Monday/Wednesday
9:30-10:50 am



Are our actions free or fated? What larger forces shape the choices we make? To what do we owe our successes, and what is to blame for our mistakes? In East Asian religions, such questions have been answered with reference to a variety of different concepts of fate, fortune, and karma. These concepts shape not only how people have viewed the world, but also how they have made their way through life. This class focuses on religious approaches to questions of destiny in premodern East Asia. We begin by studying Indian Buddhist ideas of karma and early Chinese notions of fate and fortune preceding Buddhism's arrival in China, then turn to the ways people in China and Japan negotiated these various concepts over the many centuries following the arrival of Buddhism. In the end, we discover important throughlines amid the diversity of religious responses to the problem of destiny in East Asian history.

Winter 2022

BUDDHIST CULTURES AND THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE

REL 319-20 /

Tuesday/Thursday

ASIAN_LG 390-20

3:30-4:50 pm

Antonio Terrone

This course investigates the intersections between religion and violence in the context of Buddhist Asia while also considering why in many religious traditions there seem to be a link between the two. The course will be structured in two parts: in the first part students will be encouraged to build expertise in the basic concepts, definitions, and general academic consensus (as well as debates) about categories including “religion,” “violence,” “sacrifice,” “ritual,” “martyrdom,” and also “nationalism,” “politics,” and “terrorism” through reading both primary sources (in English translation) and secondary sources (scholarly writings). We will then move into an analysis of case studies that focus on specific circumstances where Buddhist rhetoric, scriptural authority, and religious practices have played a role in violence including suicide, terrorist-related actions, and self-immolation predominantly in pre- and modern Asia.

Some of the provocative questions that this course asks include: Why and how is religion involved in politics? Is Buddhism a pacifist religion? How does religion rationalize violence? How can some Buddhist leaders embrace terror as a political tool? Are the recent practices of self-immolation in Tibet acts of violence? Can non-violence be violent?

Winter 2022

MODERN JUDAISM, RACE, AND RACISM

REL 339-20

Eli Rosenblatt

Tuesday/Thursday

2-3:20 pm



This course will examine how racial concepts and discourses shape global Jewish cultures across the modern diaspora. By using the Atlantic Ocean as a framing device, we will consider the relationship of modern Judaism to histories of race, slavery, and colonialism. We will consider how different ways of thinking about race can help us reimagine Jewish history, Judaism as a religion, and Jewishness as a form of collective identity. In turn, we'll explore how Jewish culture can widen the lens on interactions between race and religion. How have Jews shaped and been shaped by racial concepts and ideology derived from Europe and its overseas colonies? How have Jews negotiated the shifting politics of race in the light of gendered, class-based, and interreligious conflicts? Are Jews a race? Are Jews white? These are the commonly asked and deceptively brief questions that we will only begin to address, and only through some of the specific and varied contexts in which they are asked; in Europe, the United States, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Africa. We will examine our sources with an eye towards contemporary debates about Jewish identity, thereby raising fascinating and thorny issues that link religion to race in our own time.

Winter 2022

INTRODUCING THE TALMUD

REL 339-22

Barry Wimpfheimer

Monday/Wednesday

9:30-10:50 am



The Talmud is arguably the most important book in the Jewish canon. This idiosyncratic work builds on other works in the Jewish canon and is written in a unique patois with a style that makes it as much a puzzle as a legal text. This class will introduce students to the Talmud itself while also talking about its cultural import.

Winter 2022 *AMERICAN TEENAGE RITES OF PASSAGE*

REL 364-20 /
AMER_ST 310-20
Sarah Taylor

Thursday
2-4:50 pm



Amish Rumspringa, the Apache 'Isanaklesh Gotal, Jewish bar and bat mitzvah, the quinceañera, and high school senior prom. What do all of these have in common? They are all teenage rites of passage. 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, media and cultural studies. We will examine teen popular media and consumption related to rites of passage 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 from the course to a case study of their own choosing. This seminar will make use of multimedia materials and will feature multi-source digitized media viewing, analysis, and some mediamaking as part of course assignments. All course materials will be on Canvas. Counts towards Religion, Sexuality and Gender (RSG) religious studies major concentration.

Winter 2022

RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

REL 369-20 /
HUM 325-5-30
Eda Uca

Monday/Wednesday
2:00-3:20 pm

What happens when religion goes digital? In this course we examine how religions are adapting to an increasingly digital world and how digital environments are shaping old and new religious practices. Through a series of case studies, we will consider how religious practitioners and the "spiritual but not religious"



are using digital media to challenge established religious authority, create community, innovate devotional practices, and theorize their experiences. We will examine, for example, collage and hip hop, virtual pujas, mindfulness apps, user-generated gods, emoji spells, tulpamancy, transhumanism, and Slender Man. Through these case studies we will explore how digital natives and adopters are reimagining religious presence, mediation, community, ethics, and ontology. This class centers BIPOC, queer, and feminist voices, digital arts, memetics, lived religion, and social justice. Students will practice skills for digital humanities research, engage in ethical reflection, and apply course learning to creating their own digital artifacts. Counts towards Religion, Sexuality, and Gender (RSG) religious studies major concentration.

Winter 2022

GOD AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

REL 374-20

Claire Sufrin

Monday/Wednesday

11 am-12:20 pm



Times of crisis and collective suffering give rise to theological innovation and creative shifts in religious expression as people seek to understand their traditions in light of their experiences. In the wake of the Holocaust, Jews and Christians faced such a need for religious rethinking. In theological terms, they asked: where was God and should we expect God to act in human history? What does this event indicate about God's existence? In human terms, they asked: how do we live as Jews today? As Christians? As human beings? Focusing on theological and literary texts, in this course we will explore how Jews and Christians reshaped their thinking about God and religion in response to the Holocaust and the experience of suffering in the modern world.

Winter 2022

POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

REL 379-21 /
POLI_SCI 382-20
Elizabeth Hurd

Tuesday/Thursday
9:30-10:50 am

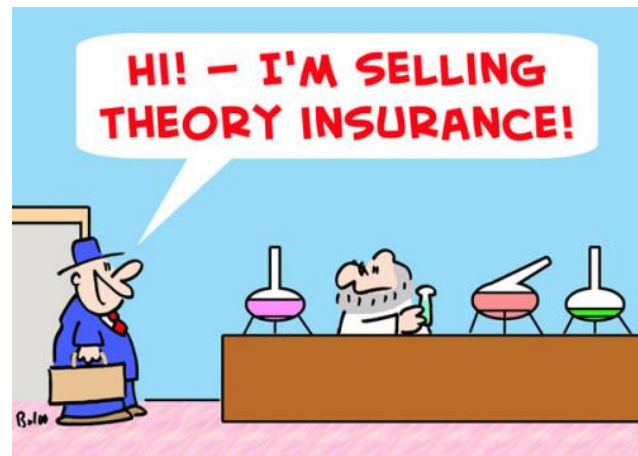


This course teaches how think critically, comparatively, and globally about the intersections of religion, law, and politics. It is organized around a set of legal cases and supporting materials curated by Professor Hurd and Professor Winnifred Sullivan which are available through the open access Teaching Law and Religion Case Study Archive. Rather than taking the US as the paragon of religious freedom and considering whether the rest of the world lives up to US standards, the course approaches the United States as one among many societies living amidst religious diversity. We study these dynamics comparatively, examining the ways in which religious, legal, and political traditions intersect, interact and co-constitute. A second objective is to connect these cases to local (Northwestern, Evanston, Chicago, Illinois, and US) communities and concerns, focusing on religion, race, and indigeneity. This contributes to an effort to strengthen Northwestern's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research and realize the objectives of the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion by including substantial course content on African American, Native American, and Jewish American political/religious history and experience. The course traverses disciplinary, geographic, and secular-religious boundaries, drawing on readings from politics, socio-legal studies, religious studies, indigenous studies, anthropology, history, and popular culture. Students will consider their own experiences of living with religious diversity as we explore strategies to think religion anew in the contemporary world. The teaching modules used in this course were developed under the auspices of two research projects supported by the Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion and International Affairs and the course itself with the support of a Provost's Faculty Grant for Innovation in Diversity and Equity. Counts towards Religion, Law, and Politics (RLP) major concentration.

Winter 2022 THEORIES OF RELIGION

REL 395-20
Sarah Taylor

Tuesday
2-4:50 pm



What is "theory"? What does it mean to have a theory about something? How are theories helpful? What do theories do? What is "religion"? How do things get excluded or included in this category? What counts as "religious" and why? Who gets to decide? This course is an introduction to foundational theories of religion and to the history of the construction of the category of "religion" over time. Throughout the term, you will be working on formulating your own theory of religion, which you will articulate and defend in your final seminar paper. In this course, you will gain (as ritual theorist Catherine Bell says) "the skills and tools to make sure that very complicated situations and ideas can be put into words, thereby making it possible to have discussions about issues that can only be discussed if there is language for reflexivity, nuance, counter-evidence, and doubt." In the process, you will be asked to make theory translatable to your peers by actively engaging theoretical concepts in creative ways.