The information presented here is as of 10/21/2009. For up-to-date course offerings, please return to the previous page and select “Courses Offered.”

RELIGION (Div. II)
Chair, Professor DENISE K. BUELL

Professors: BUELL, DARROW**, DREYFUS**, Assistant Professors: HAMMERSCHLAG, JOSEPHSON, SHUCK, Harry C. Payne Distinguished Visiting Professor in Liberal Arts: AL-AZM. Visiting Assistant Professor: GUTSCHOW**. Croghan Visiting Professor: MCGINN. Bolin Fellow: HIDALGO.

MAJOR

The major in Religion is designed to perform two related functions: to expose the student to the methods and issues involved in the study of religion as a universal phenomenon of psychological, sociological, and cultural/historical dimensions; and to confront students with the beliefs, practices, and values of specific religions through a study of particular religious traditions. It is a program that affords each student an opportunity to fashion his/her own sequence of study within the prescribed baccalaureate pattern constructed to ensure both coherence and variety. It consists of at least nine semester courses as follows:

Required sequence courses
- RELigion 101 Introduction to Religion
  Two seminars, one that explores a central topic of contemporary critical inquiry in the study of religion (courses numbered 270-299) and one that explores a body of theory in the study of religion (courses numbered 301-309). Note: WGST 402 will count as a 300-level seminar for the Religion major in 2009-2010.
- Religion 401 Issues in the Study of Religion

Elective courses

Five additional courses in Religion are to be selected in such a way that at least one course is taken in both the Western and non-Western traditions. Students will construct their sequence in consultation with departmental advisors and subject to their approval. In order to achieve a deep coverage of a particular religious tradition or set of related problems in the study of religion, students are urged to select three electives that together have some kind of coherence, be it cultural, historical, or topical. Related courses from other departments or programs may be included among the three courses, and the point of coherence can be the subject of research papers in the senior seminar.

Students are advised to elect additional courses in related fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, art, history, philosophy) in order to gain a clearer understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which religions appear.

For those who wish to go beyond the formally-listed courses into a more intensive study of a particular religious tradition, methodological trend, or religious phenomenon (e.g., ritual, symbol-formation, mysticism, theology, etc.), there is the opportunity to undertake independent study or, with the approval of the department, to pursue a thesis project.

The value of the major in Religion derives from its fostering of a critical appreciation of the complex role religion plays in society, even those that consider themselves non-religious. The major makes one sensitive to the role religion plays in shaping the terms of cultural discourse, of social attitudes and behavior, and of moral reflection. But it also discloses the ways in which religion and its social effects represent the experience of individual persons and communities. In doing these things, the major further provides one with interdisciplinary analytical tools and cross-cultural experience and opens up new avenues for dealing with both the history of a society and culture and the relationships between different societies and cultures. What one learns as a Religion major is therefore remarkably applicable to a wide range of other fields of study or professions.

THE DEGREE WITH HONORS IN RELIGION

The degree with honors in Religion requires the above-mentioned nine courses and the preparation of a thesis of 75+ pages with a grade of B+ or better. A thesis may combine revised work done in other courses with new material prepared while enrolled either in Religion 493-W31 or Religion W31-494. Up to two-thirds of the work in the thesis may be such revised work, but at least one-third must represent new work. The thesis must constitute a coherent whole either by its own internal logic or by a focus on a particular religious tradition. Candidates will also be expected to present the results of their thesis orally in a public presentation. Students who wish to be candidates for honors in Religion will submit proposals and at least one paper that may be included in the thesis to the department in the spring of their junior year. Students must normally have at least a 3.5 GPA in Religion to be considered for the honors program.

The chair will serve as advisor to non-majors.

STUDY ABROAD

The Williams College Religion Department encourages potential majors to study abroad in order to enhance their education and gain international perspectives on religious studies. There are many excellent study abroad opportunities offering students a variety of possible experiences: among them cultural immersion in the traditional-institutional systems of another country, study in an independent school, participation in an interfaith study program, or independent study. Many of our majors study in the Williams College Oxford Program, but our majors also regularly pursue a semester or year-long study in other programs.

REL 101(F) Introduction to Religion

As an examination of the structure and dynamics of certain aspects of religious thought, action, and sensibility—employing psychological, sociological, anthropological, and philosophical modes of inquiry—the course offers a general exposure to basic methodological issues in the study of religion, and includes consideration of several cross-cultural types of religious expression in non-literate and literate societies.


Enrollment limit: 25 (expected: 15-25).

First Semester: JOSEPHSON
Second Semester: SHUCK

2:35-3:50 MR

THE JEWISH TRADITION

REL 201(F) The Hebrew Bible (Same as Comparative Literature 201 and Jewish Studies 201)

The Hebrew Bible is perhaps the single most influential work in the history of Western philosophy, literature, and art. But the overwhelming presence of the text in nearly every aspect of modern culture often obscures the sheer brilliance of its narrative technique as well as the complex interplay between law, history, prophecy, and poetry. This course offers a comprehensive introduction to the literary, historical, and theological aspects of the Hebrew Bible with an eye towards developing a sophisticated understanding of the text in its ancient context. Through the close reading of substantial portions of the Hebrew Scripture in translation and the application of various modern critical approaches to culture and literature, students will explore fundamental questions about the social, ritual, and philosophical history of ancient Israel, as well as the fundamental power of storytelling that has resonated across two millennia.

Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation, short written assignments, and two to three longer papers.

Enrollment limit: 40 (expected: 40). Preference given to Jewish Studies concentrations.

Second Semester: HAMMERSCHLAG

2:35-3:50 MR

DEKEL

REL 203 Judaism: Innovation and Tradition (Same as Jewish Studies 101) *(Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (D)*

What is the relationship between modern notions of Jewish identity, thought and practice and the Hebrew Bible? How does the modern Reform movement link itself to the laws of the rabbinc sages? Are there consistent values and ideals that mark Jewish moral thought throughout its history? What elements of the Jewish tradition have enabled its elasticity and historic persistence? By providing an introduction to the traditions of Jewish thought and practice through the ages, this course opens up the question of the course’s method of progression will be primarily chronological, commencing with myths of Israel’s beginnings and culminating with contemporary debates over Jewish identity, we will additionally emphasize the strong ties between methods of Jewish thought and practices and the surrounding cultural environments in which we develop. We will approach the tradition not only with historical concerns, but with literary and philosophical aims as well. We will analyze the interpretive strategies, theological presuppositions, and political aims that accompany the tradition both in its continuity and its discontinuity. We will consider the extent to which we can speak of Judaism as a monothetic entity and questions such as how Judaism has been expressed in Judaism, Jews and Jewishness, such as nation, people, race and ethnicity, and the motivations behind such designations. Texts will include the Hebrew Bible, Holz (ed), Back to the Sources; Halbertal, People of the Book; Mendelssohn, Jerusalem; Hertzberg (ed), The Zionist Idea; Levi, Surviving in Auschwitz; as well as excerpts and articles available in a course packet.

Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 15). Preference given to Religion majors and Jewish Studies concentrations.

HAMMERSCHLAG

REL 204 Endtimes: Messianism in Modernity (Same as Jewish Studies 204 and Philosophy 204) *(Not offered 2009-2010)*

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has described modernity as the period of the world’s disenchantment, when God absconded and religion was either rationalized or reduced to the category of superstition. Ironically, this very disenchantment might help to explain the persistence of the concept of the messiah in even the most secular branches of modern European thought. One of Judaism’s most powerful and elastic concepts, the notion of the messiah saw a variety of radically
different interpretations between the 17th and 20th centuries. This course will consider the range of modern interpretations of the messiah, taking as its concrete starting point the Sabbatian Heresy of the 17th century and concluding with Derrida’s philosophical development of the concept of the messianic as pure interruption. The course’s aim is to use messianism as a focal point around which to consider the dynamic relationship between philosophy and Judaism in modernity. This course will expose the mutual influences of these two forces, illustrating both how Enlightenment conceptions of progress helped to create the notion of “messianism” understood as an abstract idea, and how the modern/post-modern philosophical conception of the “messianic” as a force that interrupts time is dependent upon historical studies of the messianic dimension of traditional Judaism. The readings for each class will not generally exceed 40 pages but will require close attention. Authors to be read include GWF Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Gerhard Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida.

Format: seminar. Requirements will include regular participation, weekly writing assignments of 2-3 pages, and a final 12- to 15-page paper an approved topic of the student’s choice.


Hammerschlag

REL 205 Ancient Wisdom Literature (Same as Classics 205, Comparative Literature 217 and Jewish Studies 205) (Not offered 2009-2010)

The Biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are often grouped together under the Hebrew category of hokmah, ‘wisdom.’ Although these books are very different in content, they can all be interpreted as meditations on ethical and practical philosophy. In this way, they represent the Hebrew Bible’s canonical embrace of a widespread Near Eastern literary phenomenon. From the instructional literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia to Greek didactic poetry and fables, and from Mediterranean cultures to a wide range of texts that engage the issues of personal behavior, leadership, and justice. Starting with the central wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible and moving through relevant material from the Apocrypha, New Testament, and the Egyptian and Babylonian traditions, this course will examine the literature of wisdom throughout the ancient world with an eye toward understanding its various social, political, and philosophical contexts. We will then consider the Greek wisdom tradition in such texts as Hesiod’s Works and Days, Aesop’s fables, and fragments from the pre-Socratic philosophers. Finally, the course will explore the influence of these ancient sources on later expressions of wisdom in medieval European literature, as well as more recent examples such as Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanack. All readings are in translation.

Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation, short written assignments, and two longer papers.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).

DEKEL

REL 206(S) The Book of Job and Joban Literature (Same as Comparative Literature 206 and Jewish Studies 206) (W)

The Book of Job has often been described as the most philosophical book of the Hebrew Bible. The story of one man’s struggle to understand the cause of his suffering and his relationship to God represents the finest flowering of the Near Eastern wisdom literature tradition. Through its exploration of fundamental issues concerning human suffering, fate and dignity, and the nature of philosophical self-examination, Job has served as a touchstone for the entire history of existential psychological dimensions. We will then proceed to investigate key modern works in several genres that involve Joban motifs, themes, and text both explicitly and implicitly. These texts will include Franz Kafka’s The Trial, Archibald MacLeish’s J.B., Robert Frost’s “Masque of Reason,” Carl Jung’s Answer to Job, and William Blake’s Illustrations to the Book of Job. All readings are in translation.

Format: discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation, weekly short written assignments, and two longer papers.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).

Hour: 9:55-11:10 TR

DEKEL

REL 207 From Adam to Noah: Literary Imagination and the Primeval History in Genesis (Same as Comparative Literature 250 and Jewish Studies 207) (Not offered 2009-2010)

How long did Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden? What was the mark of Cain? Why did Enoch not die? Who was Noah’s wife? How did Giants survive the Flood? These are only a few of the fascinating questions that ancient readers and interpreters of the Book of Genesis asked and attempted to answer. The first ten chapters of Genesis present a tantalizingly brief narrative account of the earliest history of humankind. The text moves swiftly from the Creation to the Flood and immediate aftermath, but this masterful economy of style leaves many details unexplained. This course will explore the rich and varied literary traditions associated with the primeval history in Genesis. Through a close reading of ancient noncanonical sources such as the Book of Enoch, Jubilees, and the Life of Adam and Eve, as well as Jewish traditions represented in Josephus, Philo, and Rabbinic literature and other accounts presented in early Christian and Gnostic texts, we will investigate the ways in which the elliptical style of Genesis generated a massive body of ancient folklore, creative exegesis, and explicit literary re-imagining of the early history of humankind. We will then move to several continuations of these variant traditions in medieval and early modern literature, with particular attention to the extensive material on the figures of Cain and Noah. All readings are in translation.

Format: discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation and several writing assignments.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19). Preference will be given to students who have already taken a course in Biblical literature.

DEKEL

REL 209 The Legend of the Wandering Jew (Same as Comparative Literature 209 and Jewish Studies 209) (Not offered 2009-2010)

The Wandering Jew was a man who died in Jerusalem in 306 and was doomed to roam the earth until the Advent of one of the most enduring and productive tales of the Middle Ages. Alternately a shoemaker, carpenter, or even doorkeeper to Pontius Pilate, the Wandering Jew appears in the folklore, literature, and visual arts of every region and era in European history. This course will explore the rich and varied traditions associated with this legend from its pre-history in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels up through its early modern and Romantic heyday. In readings ranging from medieval chronicles and Reformations to modern fiction and Romanticism, we will work by Chaucer, Schiller, and Hans Christian Andersen, we will trace the evolution of this mysterious wanderer from reviled figure of anti-Jewish polemic, to righteous convert and missionary, to learned sage. Along the way we will also examine the intersection of the tale with such legendary figures as Cain, Prester John, and the Wild Huntsman. We will then turn to several modern literary reflections and contemporary artistic renderings of the story. All readings are in translation.

Format: discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation and several writing assignments.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19). Preference will be given to students who have already taken a course in Biblical literature.

DEKEL

THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

REL 210(S) Reading Jesus, Writing Gospels: Christian Origins in Context (Same as Classics 210 and Comparative Literature 213) (W)

What were the religious and cultural landscapes in which Christianity emerged? How did inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean world speak about the concept and significance of religion? How have scholars of early Christianity answered these questions? What are the implications of their various readings of early Christian movement and consider it within a comparative framework developed in the first half of the course.

Format: lecture/discussions. Requirements: one class presentation; three 3-page papers, one 5- to 7-page paper, and a final paper (15 pages).

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 10). Preference given to sophomores but is open to all classes.

Hour: 1:10-2:25 MR

Buell

REL 211 The New Testament (Not offered 2009-2010)

This course examines the twenty-seven writings that constitute the distinctively Christian portion of Christian scriptures, known as the New or Christian Testament (see Religion 201 for a course on the Hebrew Bible, the portion of the Christian Bible whose writings are scripture for both Jews and Christians). This course introduces students to a range of methods of biblical interpretation, to cultivate an understanding of the texts in the ancient historical and literary contexts of the Roman Empire, Judaism, and emerging Christian communities in which individual New Testament writings were composed and interpreted. The course also explores the process by which these collections of writings became authoritative for Christians.

Format: lecture and discussion. Evaluation will be based on class participation, brief weekly writing exercises, 5- to 7-page historical exegesis paper, and a final exam.

No prerequisites, open to all classes. No enrollment limit (expected: 25).

Buell

REL 212 The Development of Christianity: 300-600 C.E. (Same as History 324) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W)

This class is designed to introduce you to the history, writings, practices, and structures of early Christians between 300-600 CE. Who were “Christians” and how did they understand and define themselves in this time period? What historical and cultural factors influenced the ways in which Christians were perceived, could imagine themselves, and lived? While this class addresses the basic flow of events and major figures in early Christian history, it will also require you to develop a critical framework for the study of history in general. In addition, you will gain significant experience in the critical analysis of primary source materials. Special
REL 214 The Christianization of Europe (Same as History 329) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W)
(See under HIST 329 for full description.)
GOLDBERG

REL 215 The First Crusade (Same as History 425) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W) (D)
(See under HIST 425 for full description.)
GOLDBERG

REL 216 The Middle Ages (Same as History 225) (Not offered 2009-2010)
(See under HIST 225 for full description.)
GOLDBERG

REL 217 Apocalypse Now and Then: A Comparative History of Millenarian Movements (Same as History 476) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (D)
(See under HIST 476 for full description.)
BERNHARDSSON

REL 218(F) An Introduction to Christian Mysticism
Over the past generation mysticism has become a topic of growing interest in religious studies. But what is mysticism and how important is it? In order to try to answer these questions different methodological approaches to mysticism (e.g., philosophical, theologological, sociological, psychological, literary, comparativist) need to engage in conversation with historical investigations of the development of the mystical element found in particular religious traditions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This course will provide an overview of the history of Christian mysticism as a resource for enriching theoretical approaches to the phenomenon.
Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation: each student will be expected to: (1) engage in class discussions based on the readings for each session; (2) initiate at least one of these discussions with a brief (5-7 minute) oral presentation of the main issues in the text under discussion; (3) provide a brief weekly paper (1-page) analyzing one of the texts discussed; and (4) take a final exam writing one essay among several presented for consideration.
No prerequisites; open to all. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19). Preference given to sophomores considering a major in religion or history.
BUELL

REL 219 The World of Charlemagne (Same as History 325) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W)
(See under HIST 325 for full description.)
MCGINN

REL 220(S) The Reformations in Early Modern Europe (Same as History 330)
This course tracks the major developments in Christian thought from the Reformations to the nineteenth century. We will begin by examining the background to the Reformations across Europe and across denominations of Christianity, showing how the Reformations along with their precursors indirectly helped to usher in a world that placed greater emphasis on the value of selfhood and moral autonomy, encouraged the emergence of the Enlightenment and scientific rationality, and helped to lead to the cultural and political re-alignment of nation-states.
Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation will consist of several short papers (1500 words, a final paper (3000-3500 words), and thoughtful interaction.
No prerequisites; open to all. Enrollment limit: 20 (expected: 20).
Hour: 9:55-11:10 TR
McGINN

REL 221 Post-Enlightenment Christian Thought (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)
Christianity in the Western world has undergone numerous challenges since the early eighteenth century. Many thinkers have turned inward, developing pietsitic theologies compatible with the modern world, while others have searched for an adequate expression of Christianity after the "Death of God." Another, remarkably resilient strand has actively turned against the Enlightenment in ironic ways, appropriating modern technologies, for example, while repudiating scientific discoveries that undermine their belief. This course will examine these issues, along with a careful consideration of the way gender, identity, and community have come to play a powerful role in contemporary expressions of Christian belief.
Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation will consist of several short response papers, thoughtful interaction, a midterm, and a 10-page final paper.
No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 25 (expected: 15).
SHUCK

NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIONS

REL 225 Religions of North America (Same as American Studies 225) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)
Scholars have written much about the history of religion in North America, but the effort has been fraught with many oversights. Recent scholarship has begun to take account of the fact that most religions in North America either did not emerge from European sources, or have existed long before the arrival of Europeans. Indeed, many religions have grown out of the American soil during the past several centuries-what some would call the product of religious "cross-fertilization," and what others would deem as religious and cultural thievery, i.e. colonialism. This course follows a modified historical trajectory, one that strives to allow the voices of forgotten "others" to speak, bringing questions of colonialism, identity, and the importance of religious community to the forefront.
Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation will consist of several short response papers, thoughtful interaction, a midterm, and a 10-page final paper.
No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 25 (expected: 15). Open to all.
SHUCK

REL 226 New Religions in North America (Same as American Studies 226) (Not offered 2009-2010)
This course considers contemporary North American religion from a historical, sociological, and philosophical perspective. We will examine the historical and contemporary experiences of America's ever-expanding religious diversity, prominently featuring the voices of those traditionally excluded from older, Protestant-informed accounts of American religion. The focus of the course will be the exploration of the ever-expanding variety of new religions in North America, challenging students to engage the numerous cultural, philosophical, and methodological issues involved with the study of marginal religions. New religions often highlight cultural anxieties, e.g. loss of identity in contemporary secular societies, responses to new technologies, changing gender roles, globalization, etc. The study of new religions becomes, then, a closer, reflexive examination of contemporary American culture and its underlying tensions. For example, the Raëlian Movement claims to have cloned the first human, Wicca, on the other hand, offers critiques of environmental depredation and traditional gender roles. In such cases, the historical roots of the current boom in new religions, detail contemporary issues, and outline the possible forms new and emerging religions may assume in the coming years. This course will also have a website dedicated to the exploration of new religions, providing links to interesting sites, basic resources, and student essays/projects.
Format: lecture/discussion. Students will be evaluated on the basis of their writing and presentation projects, three 5- to 7-page essays, along with their thoughtful discussion of the key issues raised in the course. Open to all classes without prerequisite. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 15).
SHUCK

REL 227 Utopias and Americans (Same as American Studies 227 and Latin/american Studies 227) (Not offered 2009-2010)
This course considers the relationship between the imagination of utopias and the imagination of the lands and peoples in the Western hemisphere, through our main focus will be on the United States of America. We shall examine some significant utopian perspectives on the Americas, starting with Christopher Columbus' 1503 description of the "new world" and concluding with late twentieth-century utopias like Aztlan as employed by the Chicano/a student movement in 1969.
Format: seminar. Evaluation will be based on class participation, short weekly writing assignments, a 5-page midterm paper, and a 10- to 15-page final research paper examining an American utopia. No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 12).
HIDALGO

REL 228(T) North American Apocalyptic Thought (Same as American Studies 228T) (W)
Apocalyptic thought pervades much of contemporary American culture, whether among Protestant evangelicals, new religions, novelists and filmmakers, or even scientists and environmentalists who warn of ecological catastrophe and the deadly consequences of nuclear proliferation. This course will introduce, using historical, sociological, and philosophical accounts, how North Americans have thought about and continue to think about questions of the End, both in a cultural and in a personal sense.
THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

REL 230 Reading Reading: An Introduction to the Qur’an and Islam (Same as Comparative Literature 260) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W)

One of the two most consequential texts in human history, the Qur’an is more conscious of itself as text and the work of interpretation that is part of the life of a text. Because it is God’s most important sign (and also because it is relatively short) millions have memorized it and the art of Qur’anic recitation is one of the staples of Islamic culture and performance arts. Nevertheless it is primarily as a text that the Qur’an exists in itself and in the minds of Muslims. The text of the Qur’an will thus be the focus of this course, reading it extensively, intensively and repeatedly throughout the semester. We will attend to the structure and variety of styles and topics in the text and to the Qur’an’s understanding of itself in relation to other forms of literary expression. We will place the form and content in the context of seventh century C.E. Arab society and attend to the life of the Prophet (PBUH) that provides one crucial framework to the text. Through the lenses of ta’fiss, Qur’anic commentary, and ta’wil, we will also use the text to give an initial survey of some of the main theological, philosophical, mystical and legal developments in the Islamic tradition. Finally we will explore some of the aspects of the place of the text in the life of Muslims, including the development of calligraphy and recitation.

Format: lecture/discussion. Requirements: three essays (6-8 pages) based on class materials (at least one will have a revision process). Students able to read the Arabic text may substitute work in a collateral reading group of the Qur’an in Arabic for one of the essays.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 10). Open to all.

DARROW

REL 231 The Origins of Islam: God, Empire and Apocalypse (Same as History 209) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)

The rise of Islam in the seventh-century C.E. is usually seen, by both Muslim and non-Muslim historians, as a total break with the past. This course will challenge that assumption by placing the rise of Islam in the context of the history of late antiquity (c. 300-700 C.E.). The first half of the course will examine the impact of Judeo-Christian monotheism in the ancient world, the rise of confessional articulations, new ideas about holiness and its relation to sexuality and the transformations undergone by Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. We shall examine the conversation of these traditions with philosophical and religious, the internal struggle within traditions to define rules of interpretation, the impact of ascetic, iconoclastic and apocalyptic ideas and, finally, polemics among the traditions. Special attention will be given to borderlands (Armenia, Syria, and Arabia), where the problems of regionalism and religious diversity were prominent. We will then examine the career of Muhammad (PBUH) in the context of Arabia, the spread of the Islamic empire into Christian and Iranian worlds, the impact of apocalyptic expectations, the fixation of religious decision-making within the tradition and the question of conversion and religious diversity within the commonwealth of Islam. The course will end with the flourishing of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century. This course will make use of the Iranian worlds, the impact of apocalyptic expectations, the fixation of religious decision-making within the tradition and the question of conversion and religious diversity within the commonwealth of Islam. The course will end with the flourishing of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century. This course will make use of the Iranian worlds, the impact of apocalyptic expectations, the fixation of religious decision-making within the tradition and the question of conversion and religious diversity within the commonwealth of Islam. The course will end with the flourishing of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century. This course will make use of the Iranian worlds, the impact of apocalyptic expectations, the fixation of religious decision-making within the tradition and the question of conversion and religious diversity within the commonwealth of Islam. The course will end with the flourishing of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century. This course will make use of the Iranian worlds, the impact of apocalyptic expectations, the fixation of religious decision-making within the tradition and the question of conversion and religious diversity within the commonwealth of Islam.

Format: lecture/discussion. Requirements: four 5- to 7-page papers based on the readings and revised in editing workshops.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 20). Open to all.

DARROW

REL 233(F) Islamic Mysticism: The Sufis (W)

Studying Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam, is an excellent introduction to the complex world of the Sufis. The Sufis represent a colorful and multifaceted spiritual tradition that both enriches and critiques orthodox Islamic interpretations. This course will explore the origins of Sufism in the ascetic and revolutionary piety of the early Islamic communities, the institutionalization of the Sufi brotherhoods (tariqas) to God; Sufi beliefs and practices; the development of the Sufi orders and techniques of ecstasy; both high and low-levels; we will read in the classics of Sufi poetry and thought, including Rumi, Attar, Suhrawardi, and Ghazali; we will also explore the Sufi theology of Ibn Arabi. We will conclude with an examination of a contemporary Sufi life in Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey.

Format: tutorial. Requirements: four 5- to 7-page papers based on the readings and revised in editing workshops.

No prerequisites. Open to all. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).

Hour: 2:35-3:50 MR

DARROW

REL 234 Shi’ism Ascendant? (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)

One consequence, intended or not, of recent U.S. actions in the Middle East has been to inflame the Sunni/Shi’ite division and raise fears of Shi’ite ascendency. Sectarian conflict is, in fact, the exception rather than the rule in Islamic history because Sunnis and Shi’a have in most places been separate and lived relatively peacefully together where they intermixed. This is the fourth time in Islamic history when the specter of an ascendant Shi’ism has occupied the Muslim community. Shi’ism has always been an alliance of the dispossessed and the intellectuals (assuming the latter are not among the former) and functioning in Islam to provide a vocabulary of revolution, a highly developed philosophy of religion, and a messianic fervor in contrast to which Sunnis emerged. This course will compare the three earlier putative episodes of Shi’ite ascendency in the eight, tenth and sixteenth centuries C.E. and set these in conversation with contemporary debates focusing on the role of early Shi’ism in its vocabulary of an alternative vision of the legitimacy of the Islamic state, the ideas of the imamate and martyrdom, the emergence of Isma’ili and Twelver versions of Shi’ism, the conversion of Safavid Iran to Shi’ism, the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the scene in the post-Saddam Islamic world.

Format: lecture/discussion. Evaluation based upon class participation and two short (4-6 page) essays and a final research paper (12-15 pages).

No prerequisites, open to all classes. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 15).

DARROW

REL 236 The Greater Game? Central Asia and its Neighbors Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (Same as History 216 and International Studies 101) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the recognition of untapped mineral wealth, and Islamic resurgence have all led to an increased focus on Central Asia and its neighbors, Russia, China, the Middle East. This course will be an introduction to the Caucasus, the Central Asian Republics, Xinjiang and Mongolia and the interests of their neighbors, including now the United States in those areas. This will be a lecture course that will introduce the salient themes and issues that are necessary for understanding these areas. The course will inevitably be more deeply comparative focusing on themes of “the clash of civilizations,” the construction of national identities, notions of ethnicity and the treatment of ethnic minorities, resurgent religious movements, and the relation of state and civil society. This course will also function as an introduction to doing social scientific research on these areas and special attention will be devoted to the preparation of a research paper.

Format: lecture/discussion. Requirements: two short essays (4-6 pages), three research papers (12-15 pages).

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 15). Preference given to first-year students and sophomores.

DARROW

REL 238(G) Gender Remade: Muslim Women and Narratives of Subjection (Same as Anthropology 257 and Women's and Gender Studies 257)

(See under ANTH 257 for full description.)

LOAN

REL 239(F) Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought (Same as Philosophy 239)

This seminar examines some of the most important issues, debates, and polemics that occupied Muslim thought since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978 (with special emphasis on the Arab world—the heartland of Islam). The basic theoretical, philosophical and theological principles underlying those controversies will be carefully explored, discussed and critically brought forward. The influence, use and abuse of traditional Western critiques of modernity and of current post-modern European attacks on the Enlightenment will be elaborated in the context of their appropriation and exploitation by Islamist theocrats. These will include, for example, Foucault’s discourse theory, Bachelard’s “Epistemological Break”, Heidegger’s “authenticity”, Feyrerand’s “Farewell to Reason” and his “economism”, Kierkegaard’s “theickness and poverty”, the so-called “postmodernism”, the wholesale assault on the idea of progress. Some of the debates to be examined are: (a) the real nature of the Islamic Revolution in Iran; (b) the legitimacy and adequacy of such concepts as “Fundamentalism”, “Revivalism” and “Islamization” when applied to Islam; (c) The Sunni doctrine of “Hakimniah” (God’s Sovereignty) as against the Shi’i doctrine of “Velayet-e-Faqih” (the rule of the Islamic state) as triggered by ‘Omar ‘Abedi Said; (d) the Salafist-Shi’a affair and his novel the Satanic Verses: (f) the concepts of jihad and jihadiism; (g) the future of political Islam after its evolution from fundamentalism to jihadiism to spectacular terrorism. The approach will be historical, comparative and explanatory. The instructor will draw on his experiences as a long-time participant in the discussions, controversies and polemics produced by and around these issues.


No prerequisites; open to all. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).

Hour: 1:10-2:25 MR

AL-AZM
This course by course, examines Buddhism from a double perspective. On the one hand, it studies the tradition descriptively, examining some of its religious, philosophical, historical and sociological aspects. On the other hand, this course also seeks to bring out the personal relevance of Buddhist ideas, ensuring that they are not just considered as objects but also as partners in an ongoing conversation. We start by examining the Theravada tradition of South and South-East Asia through which we seek to understand some of the basic Buddhist ideas such as no-self, suffering and its origin, and the possibilities for freedom. We then move on to the Vajrayana and Tibetan Mahayana traditions, which are characterized by an increase in importance of compassion on the basis of the bodhisattva ideal. In dealing with Buddhism in Tibet, we focus more particularly on the tantric aspects of its tradition. Throughout this course, we are careful to consider Buddhism not just as a set of thought provoking ideas that can be studied in abstraction from their implementation, but as being based on socially inscribed practices. We examine a broad range of practices, ranging from so-called popular rituals to the practices of virtuosos. In particular, we examine meditation in the Theravada and Tibetan Tantric traditions. In this way, we gain a realistic appreciation of the nature, role and difficulties of such a practice, and dispel some of its misunderstandings.

Format: lecture/discussion. Requirements: full attendance and participation and two 4-to 6-page essays.
No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 30).

DREYFUS

REL 245(S) Tibetan Civilization
Often depicted as Shangrila, a mythical and ideal country, Tibet has had the dubious privilege of being a focus of Western fantasies. One cannot but wonder about the motives and sources of this mythology. Although this course examines these representations, its main focus is an immersion in the cultural and historical aspects of Tibetan civilization, which give students the tools with which to understand Tibetan culture from the inside. As such this course is part of the Exploring Diversity Initiative. We first consider the early history of Tibet, the introduction of Buddhism, the relations between Buddhism and the indigenous religion, and some of the aspects of the culture that these institutions helped creating (such as gender roles, family structure and social stratification). Finally, we consider the more recent tragic events and examine the profound transformations that they have brought. Throughout the course, we consider the central role of the complex interaction between Buddhism and politics in Tibetan history, both in the pre-modern period and in more recent times, when the Tibetan people have faced the challenge of how to use their institutions and culture to resist oppression. In this way, we get a footing in the Tibetan world, and the indispensable assessment of Western representations of Tibet becomes not just an exercise in self-reflection but also a gate to a better understanding of a remarkable but tragically threatened civilization.

Format: seminar. Requirements: participation in bi-weekly class blog, class discussion, oral presentation, final paper.
No prerequisites. Open to all. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 30).
Hour: 8:30-9:45 MWF

DREYFUS

REL 246 India’s Identities: Religion, Caste, and Gender (Same as Anthropology 246 and Women’s and Gender Studies 246) (Not offered 2009-2010) (D)
India is a nation based on difference whose multiple and fragmenting identities are often framed as unified oppositions: Hindu/Muslim, Rich/Poor, Secular/ Religious. This course will develop the media’s popular representations of these and other identities in order to complicate the notion of a diverse Indian nation. It will highlight the range of identities and social practices among India’s booming population that have produced critical axes of differentiation such as gender, caste, ethnicity, and religious sect. It begins by considering how the colonial principle of “divide and rule” provides an object lesson in the ways that difference can be used to sustain both social hierarchy and political rule. It describes how this logic of difference produced the tragedy of Partition and its legacy for the operation of gender and religion on the subcontinent. We critically examine the class and religious divisions that led to the birth of three nations—India, Pakistan, and subsequently Bangladesh—and the particular logic of communalism and religious violence in modern India. Throughout, the course attends to the subjective experience of being Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh, untouchable or upper caste, as well as male or female as a way of understanding the way that difference shapes individual agency and lives across India. It seeks to empathize or at least understand the perspective of both victims and perpetrators of communal and gender based forms of violence in India today. This course fulfills the Exploring Diversity Initiative by theorizing the ways in which difference has been used to effect profound historical, social, and individual changes in the Indian subcontinent.

Format: seminar. Requirements: participation in bi-weekly class blog, class discussion, oral presentation, final paper.
No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 20 (expected: 20). Preference given to seniors, as well as majors in Religion, Anthropology, and Women’s and Gender Studies.

GUTSCHEW

REL 249(S) Spiritual Crossroads: Religious Life in Southeast Asia (Same as Anthropology 233 and Asian Studies 233) (D)
(See under ANTH 233 for full description.)

JUST

EAST ASIAN TRADITIONS

REL 250 Scholars, Saints and Immortals: The Religious Life in East Asia (Same as Asian Studies 250) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (D)
In East Asian cultures, as in the United States, popular conceptions of morality typically take their shape, not from explicit rules, but from moral paragons—stylized figures that are said to embody a distinctive cluster of virtues. For example, American Christians invoke not just Jesus, but also a pantheon of “sacred saints,” including Martin Luther King Jr. and General Patton. George Washington and Cesar Chavez. This course will explore the cultural functions of moral paragons (and heroes more generally) by introducing students to examples from Chinese and Japanese history, ranging from Confucian articulations of the ideal scholar-bureaucrat to Buddhist conceptions of the Bodhisattva to Taoist immortals. We will also interpret the top-down creation of new moral paragons by East Asian states, including the popularization of the samurai in interwar Japan and Mao Zedong’s self-presentation as the embodiment of China. National communitarian echoes of founding myths and collective narratives. Readings will include primary texts in translation by Chuang-ten, Confucius, Shan'tideva and others. This course fulfills the Exploring Diversity Initiative by providing students with tools for cross-cultural analysis of moral paragons, as part of how societies manage difference and articulate hierarchies of privilege and power.


JOSEPHSON

REL 251(S) Zen Buddhism: History and Historiography
Because mystifying references to Zen are strewn throughout American popular culture—from episodes of the Simpsons to names of perfumes and snack foods—most Americans have an image of Zen Buddhism that is disconnected from anything actually practiced in East Asia. This course offers a corrective to this image by considering the formative period of Zen in China, its transmission to Japan, and its development in both cultural contexts. It will conclude with an examination of Zen’s unique role in American popular culture. The course will enrich the conventional image of Zen by addressing its involvement with power and governance, gods and demons, mummies and sacred sites, sex and violence, nationalism and scholarship. Texts will include selections from primary works in translation (The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, The Gateless Barrier, The Anected Seated Meditation) as well as selections from secondary literature (including Suzuki, Zen and Japanese Culture, Victoria, Zen at War, and Faure, The Rhetoric of Immediacy).

Format: lecture/discussion. Assignments will include participation in class discussion, short response papers (2-3 pages), a mid-term exam, and a take-home final exam.
Hour: 11:00-12:15 MW

JOSEPHSON

REL 256 Engendering Buddhism: How Women and Men Shape and Are Shaped by Buddhism (Same as Anthropology 256 and Women’s and Gender Studies 256) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W)
This course examines how gender has shaped Buddhism as well as how Buddhism has shaped gender. Most generally, it considers the myriad ways that Buddhist soteriology and practice produce the very gender differences they purport to overcome. How have the Buddha and his far-flung disciples institutionalized gender differences in spite of their putative goal of transcending duality? We examine the varying experiences of women and men in Buddhist societies and literatures as a lens by which to analyze the pervasive operation of social and gender hierarchy. Our analysis revolves around several interdependent themes. Finally we discuss how gender and American misrepresentations of Buddhism have transformed gender and other forms of difference. (1) How do female and male bodies become the subject of a specific set of Buddhist gazes? What does Buddhist discourse say about the possibility of gaining enlightenment in the female body? (2) How do gender divisions reflect deeper social divisions such as class and race in Buddhist discourse? (3) How have feminist deconstructions of Buddhism transformed gender and social hierarchies in the contemporary world? This course fulfills the Exploring Diversity Initiative by seeking to theorize the ways that Buddhism has produced and reinscribed gender differences and social hierarchies.

Format: seminar. Requirements: two midterm papers, weekly Blackboard participation, final research papers, and class participation.

GUTSCHEW
RELS 272 Gods and Demons in East Asian Religion (Not offered 2009-2010) Scholars usually distinguish between three different religious traditions in East Asia: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism (with Shinto standing in for Daoism in the Japanese case). Yet, this tradition-based approach ignores the rich landscape of East Asian religion, which encompasses another world of gods and demons only loosely connected with established institutions. Even today, at popular sites all over China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, people offer incense to a heterogeneous collection of supernatural entities—sometimes called gods, goddesses, demons, immortals, ancestors or even buddhas. The "same" entity can be simultaneously a beneficent god to one group and a malevolent demon to another. Rather than being static, this rich tapestry is constantly in evolution, elevating historical heroes (or philosophers) to godhood, while others are deposed and dismissed as monsters. This course will address this stratum of "popular" religion in East Asia. Focusing on contemporary scholarship on China and Japan, we will take a multi-disciplinary approach to this material to provide a very different picture of East Asian religion as a lived tradition.

Format: seminar.
Requirements: active participation, class presentations, one 15-page research paper.
No prerequisites.
Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).
PREFERENCE GIVEN TO RELIGION AND ASIAN STUDIES MAJORS.

JOSEPHSON

RELS 259 Japanese Religions and the State (Same as History 214) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W) For most of Japanese history religion and government have been closely intertwined. This course will examine the parallel evolution of political structures and religious institutions in Japan, beginning with the articulation of the mythological narrative of divine sovereignty in the Kojiki (712) and ending with the separation of Shinto from the state after World War Two. It will situate concepts such as law, punishment, emperor and nation within the context of wider political-religious discourse. We will address issues of religion and violence, nationalism and utopian imagery, and will raise larger questions about the relationship between human religiosity and power.

Texts to be considered will include selections from law codes and primary works in translation (the Kojiki, The Constitution of Prince Shotoku, The Tale of Heike, The Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the State, and The Constitution of the Empire of Japan) as well as secondary works (Botoman, Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan, Hardcase, Shinto and the State, Victoria, Zen at War).

Format: lecture/discussion.
Requirements: active participation, three short writing assignments of 3-5 pages, one 15-page research paper.

No prerequisites.
Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).
PREFERENCE GIVEN TO RELIGION, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ASIAN STUDIES MAJORS.

JOSEPHSON

TRADITIONS OF AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

RELS 261S Rastafari: Dread, Politics, Agency (Same as Africana Studies 302 and Political Science 234) (See under AFR 302 for full description.)

ROBERTS

COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

RELS 270T Father Abraham: The First Patriarch (Not offered 2009-2010) (W) The figure of Abraham in the Hebrew scriptures is interesting for at least two reasons: he comes first and seems more universal rather than particular. He first received the covenant and the promise of the land of Israel, but before the full revelation of the Torah to Moses. He fathers both the Jewish people and the Arabs and is therefore the prototype of that wider identity which was later captured by Christianity in the works of Paul and in the Qur'an where Muhammad identified with Abraham as the prototypical and non-sectarian monotheist prophet. This course will trace the figure of Abraham by a close and multidisciplinary reading of the Jewish, Pagan, Christian and Muslim sources on Abraham. Our task is not to decide on the historicity of Abraham, but rather to explore the history of the figure and his continuing relevance for today in understanding Jewish-Christian-Muslim conflict and cooperation. We will begin with an intensive reading of the Genesis material (the first chapters) where the issues of idolatry and monotheism, the covenant and circumcision, relations of the patriarch to his women and sons, and the primordial model of faith all are articulated. We will then turn to later Jewish developments in the figure of Abraham in midrash and apocalyptic. We will then explore the view of Abraham in the classical world, the uses made of Abraham by Christianity as it broke from an emerging Rabbinic Judaism and the development of Abraham's specific connection with the view of the afterlife. We will then treat the figure of Abraham in the Qur'an and later Islamic traditions. We will conclude with an examination of the cult surrounding Abraham in the city of Hebron, a currently-contested site on the West Bank where we will consider the current religious practice regarding Abraham by both Jews and Muslims. The purpose of this tutorial is to read closely a variety of primary religious texts and to explore the variety of tools available for the reading of these texts.

Format: tutorial.
Requirements: each student in the tutorial will write and present orally five 5- to 7-page essays every other week on the readings for the week and a final 10- to 15-page essay. Students not presenting an essay will be responsible for offering an oral critique of the work of their colleague. Evaluation will be based on written work and critiques.

No prerequisites.
Enrollment limit: 10 (expected: 10).
Open to all.

DARROW

RELS 271 Religion and the Modern Literary Imagination (Same as Comparative Literature 271 and English 271) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W) In this course we will examine themes of religious life such as ritual, sin, redemption, evil, magic, heresy, prophecy, faith and devotion as they appear as sources of conflict and reflection in novels, poems and short stories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our task will be to consider first, how literary form can be used as a tool to conceptualize religious experience, but second the ways in which literature, in its expressions of wonder and despair, convenes or conflicts with the aims of worship and religious performance, producing either modern sacrament or idol. Of the novels, stories and poems that we will read, some will arise directly out of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions, while others will have more explicitly tangential, or even heretical relations with these traditions. We will consider a range of novelists from Dostoevsky to Cynthia Ozick and Orhan Pamuk and a range of poets from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Wallace Stevens and Paul Celan. Assignments will be both critical and creative. You will be asked to think like a writer and a critic and thus to try your hand at writing a sestina as well as a personal essay.

Format: seminar.
Assignments will include bi-weekly response papers of 1-2 pages, a short essay of 5-7 pages and a final writing assignment of 8-10 pages.

No prerequisites.
Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 19).
PREFERENCE GIVEN TO FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AND RELIGION MAJORS.

HAMMERSCHLAG

RELS 272F (formerly 302) Sex in Society: Cultural Constructions of Reproduction (Same as Anthropology 272 and Women's and Gender Studies 272) (See under ANTH 272 for full description.)

GUTSCHOW

RELS 273F Scriptures and Race (Same as Africana Studies 273 and Latina/o Studies 273) (formerly 305) Amidst a cast of characters and concepts ranging from Bartolomé de las Casas to the myth of Ham, ideas from and about “scriptures” appear ever entangled with identities in the transactions of modernity. What do we presume when we use the word “scriptures”? What do we now mean and what has often been meant by the term “race”? How and why did these two terms come to have any relationship to each other? Why, in the violent encounters of peoples, did these categories come to implicate each other? This course begins with these questions and explores how practices surrounding each term’s imagination have fostered the construction of the other in the contexts of modernity, specifically across dynamics of power. While this course will focus on the relationships between constructions of race in the post-1492 Atlantic world and “Christian scriptures,” we will also consider other historical moments and places where “race” is engaged, as well as other texts and practices identified with “scriptures.”

Format: lecture/discussion.
Evaluation based upon participation, short writing exercises, a 5- to 8-page take-home midterm essay, and a 10- to 15-page final essay.

No prerequisites; open to all.
Enrollment limit: 20 (expected: 15).
Hour: 11:20-12:35 TR

HIDALGO

CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL INQUIRY

RELS 282T Immortality and the Soul in Ancient and Medieval Thought (Same as Philosophy 220T) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W) (See under PHIL 220 for full description.)

MCFARTLAND

RELS 285T Haunted: Ghosts in the Study of Religion (W) Haunting offers a powerful way to speak about forces that affect us profoundly while remaining invisible or elusive. “What is it that holds sway over us like an unconditional prescription? The distance between us and that which commands our moves or their opposite, our immobility–approaches us: it is a distance that closes in on you at times, it announces a proximity closer than any intimacy or familiarity you have ever known” (Avital Ronell, Dictations: On Haunted Writing [1986] xvi-xvii). The figure of the ghost has been developed by those seeking to grapple with the ongoing effects of modern slavery, colonialism, state-sponsored terrorism, the holocaust, and personal trauma and loss. Building upon the insights about memory, history, and identity that haunting has been used to address, this
course will challenge students to explore the study of religion by way of its “seething absences.” We shall ask how the study of religion has endeavored to address loss, trauma, and its persistent effects, what “holds sway” over various approaches to the study of religion, as well as how “religion” constitutes its own ghostly presence, haunting other domains.

Format: tutorial. Requirements: meeting in pairs, each student will either write and present a paper or respond to their partner’s paper. Each student will write and present two 1-page papers, five 5-page papers, and five oral critiques (based on written notes) of their partner’s paper. Students will revise two papers.


Tutorial meetings to be arranged.

BUELL

REL 287(S) The Dynamics of Globalization: Society, Religion and the Environment (Same as Environmental Studies 287) (D)

This course offers a theoretical reflection on the social, cultural and environmental dynamics of globalization and their consequences for the nature and place of religion. Rather than argue for or against globalization, we examine the nature of this new configuration and its relation to (post)modernity, asking questions such as: What are the cultural and social dynamics of globalization? What are the effects on the nature of the state and the political practices that take place in the global world? What are its environmental consequences? We then shift to examining the role of culture in general and religion in particular, arguing that its renewed relevance is a function of the socio-cultural transformations that globalization brings about, particularly the loss of community and the atomization of individuals in an ever more inter-connected world. In this way, we come to understand some of the dominant features of the global age, the role of cultural differences and the growing concern for questions of meaning and personal identity. We conclude by examining some of the perspectives created by the new religious expressions that attempt to respond to this situation, from personal spiritual quests as manifested in interest in Buddhism, ecology or mountain climbing, to various forms of fundamentalism, such as Evangelicalism, the fastest growing religious movement in the Americas, and the most radical forms of Islamicism. Reading list: Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity; Castells, The Rise of the Network Society; Bauman, Globalization; Kristeva, Multiculturalism in a Global Society; Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World; Ortner, Life and Death on Mt. Everest. Matthews, Global Culture/ Individual Identity. Shuck, Mark of the Beast. Roy, Globalized Islam.

Requirements: a class presentation and a research paper (15 pages).


Hour: 1:00-4:00 T

DREYFUS

REL 288(S) The Embodied Mind: A Cross-Cultural Exploration (Same as Philosophy 288)

This course examines some of the central questions raised by the study of the consciousness: the place of intentionality, the role of emotions, the relation with the body, the nature of subjectivity, the scope of reflexivity, the nature of perceptual presence, etc. In confronting these difficult questions, we do not proceed purely through the dogmas of the theory of mind, but rather through the contributions of various observation-based traditions, from Buddhist psychology and meditative practices to phenomenology to neurosciences. We begin by examining some of the central concepts of Buddhist psychology, its treatment of the mind as a selfless stream of consciousness, its examination of the variety of mental factors and its accounts of the relation between cognition and affects. We also introduce the practice of meditation as a way to observe the mind and raise questions concerning the place of its study in the mind-sciences. We pursue this reflection by examining the views of James, Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, particularly as they concern the methods for the study of the mind and the relation between consciousness, reflexivity and body. In this way, we develop a rich array of analytical tools and observational practices to further our understanding of the mind. But we also question the value of these tools based on first person approaches by relating them to the third person studies of the mind. In this way, we come to appreciate the importance of considering the relations between mental processes and the body and the light that can be thrown on the nature of consciousness and its neurobiological underpinnings. We conclude by considering the relation between first and third person studies of the mind, focusing on the concept of the embodied mind as a fruitful bridge between these different traditions.

Format: seminar. Requirements: regular practice of meditation, a class presentation, a short essay (6-pages) and a final research paper (15 pages).

Prerequisites: some background in either psychology, cognitive sciences, philosophy or permission of the instructor. Enrollment limit: 18 (expected: 18). Preference given to Religion and Philosophy majors.

Hour: 7:00-9:40 p.m. M

DREYFUS and CRUZ

REL 289T (former 309) Exile, Homecoming and the Promised Land (Same as Comparative Literature 309T and Jewish Studies 491T) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W) (D)

In terms of vocabulary and metaphor, the Jewish experience of exile pervades modern, western discourse on the experience of being alienated, severed, and separated from one’s national and cultural home. Thus in this course we will take the Jewish experience of exile (galut) as our point of departure for a broader discussion of these themes as they relate to other diasporic communities. As a consequence of increased mobility, political instabilities, economic insecurity and the proliferation of means of communication, the state of Diaspora increasingly characterizes populations across the globe, from Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe. While we will not specifically focus on these communities, one of our tasks will be to discover how the Jewish experience shapes the discourse on exile and Diaspora that pervades modern discussions of displacement and emigration. We must further consider what is at stake politically and philosophically in progressing from the personal experience, especially the contemporary situation of Palestinian refugees. To illuminate this discussion we will draw on the literature of the Jewish tradition from the Hebrew Bible and rabbis to Twentieth Century accounts and reflections of Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Lévi-纳斯, as well as materials that reflect the voices of other refugee communities. We will then move to examine the relationship of the notion of the homeland to that of the Diaspora. We will consider the philosophical implications of the concept of diaspora in the nineteenth and twentieth century concerning blood and soil, and the consequent possibility that exile and rootlessness could signal positively.

Format: tutorial. Requirements: meeting in pairs, each student will either write and present a paper or respond to their partner’s paper. Each student will write and present a 5-page paper on alternating weeks. On the weeks in which the student is not presenting, they will be expected to write a 1- to 2-page critique/response to their classmate’s paper. The final assignment will be an 8- to 10-page paper that expands on an issue or question raised in class.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 10 (expected: 10). Preference given to Religion majors. This course will also serve as the capstone course for senior Jewish Studies Concentrators.

HAMMERSCHLAG

REL 290T(S) Explorations of the Afterlife (W)

From Heaven to Hell, Valhalla to Hades, the Fields of Aaru to the Land of Yellow Springs, all cultures have generated images of other worlds that lie beyond death. Whether from examples from a remote culture or from a tutorial exploration of the topographies of these shadow-lands, in an effort to map the continuities and discontinuities between these visions of the hereafter, we will consider them as reflections of existing social hierarchies, examining their underlying assumptions about punishment and reclamation, family, and ethics. Along the way, we will discuss culturally specific notions of death and mourning, attitudes towards the bodies of the dead, and the resolution of the nature of the soul. Texts will include selections from primary works in tradition, such as Dante’s Divine Comedy, Dante’s Inferno, and The Tibetan Book of the Dead, as well as selections from secondary literature, including Tennyson’s The Charge of the Ten Kings, Gauche’s The Disenchantment of the World, and Bremner’s The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife.

Format: tutorial.


Tutorial meetings to be arranged.

JOSEPHSON

BODY OF THEORY (301-309)

REL 301 Word Virus: Cultural Theory after the Linguistic Turn (Same as Comparative Literature 301 and Linguistics 301) (Not offered 2009-2010)

“My general theory since 1971 has been that the Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has a achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host.” (William S. Burroughs 1986, 47). Parallel movements in continental European and Anglo-American philosophy (known popularly as the “linguistic turn”) led to an effort in cultural studies and the language constitutes research to argue that language could no longer be thought of as simply a mechanism for the transmission of “facts.” Increasingly, theorists recognized that differences in language created incommensurable worlds of meaning; that specialized forms of linguistic discourse are both determined by and constitutive of their putative objects. Accordingly, linguistic phenomena have taken center stage not only in philosophy, but also in the study of culture and society. The influx of these new theories of language has also dramatically reshaped the discipline of religious studies. By examining the linguistic turn and its implications for the study of cultural phenomena, this course will introduce advanced
students to some of the most important theoretical approaches to come out of this movement. Authors whose work will be considered include: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ferdinand de Saussure, Benjamin Whorf, George Lakoff, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, Mikhail Bakhtin, Luce Irigaray, and Dan Spectre.

Format: seminar. Requirements: active participation, class presentations, short writing assignments, and a take-home final exam. Prerequisites: Religion 101 or Comparative Literature 117 or permission of instructor. Enrollment limit: 15 (expected: 15). Preference given to Religion and Comparative Literature majors.

JOSEPHSON

REL 302T (S) Philosophy of Religion (Same as Philosophy 281) (W)
(See under PHIL 281 for full description.)

BARRY

REL 303 (formerly 280) The Turn to Religion in Post-Modern Thought (Same as Jewish Studies 280 and Philosophy 282) (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011) (W)
As thinkers of the 20th century came to question the Enlightenment ideal of human self-sovereignty, both for its intellectual and political consequences, many turned back to religious imagery and concepts in pursuit of alternate modes of conceptualizing the human being. This course will examine some such endeavors in the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature. While none of the texts we examine will be explicitly theological, all will, in some form or another, make use of theological notions such as revelation, redemption, or sacrifice. In examining these texts we will be asking some fundamental questions: What meaning do religious concepts have when emptied of dogmatic content? How effective are these concepts when employed in the service of cultural critique? How might such efforts reflect back on the theorizing and practice of religions in contemporary society? We will, furthermore, analyze the very category of the post-modern by continuing whether captivity or both, and dissecting the critique that post-modern philosophy’s concern for religion is a sign of its nostalgic or reactionary nature. Readings will include Immanuel Kant’s Religion within the Limits of Reason alone, Friedrich Nietzsche’s Twilight of the Idols, Jacques Lacan’s Feminine Sexuality, as well as essays by Luce Irigaray, Georges Bataille, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida.

Format: discussion. Requirements will include regular participation and four writing assignments: three shorter papers of 3-5 pages on a question assigned by the instructor and a longer essay of 12-15 pages on an approved topic of the student’s choice.


HAMMERSCHLAG

REL 304 From Hermeneutics to Post-Coloniality (Same as Comparative Literature 344) (Not offered 2009-2010) (D)
This course explores some of the theoretical trajectories available in “our” pluri-cultural and (post)modern world by focusing on the relation between truth and interpretation, particularly in a pluri-cultural context. We start with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which stresses the importance of being aware of one’s cultural background and prejudices, an important prerequisite for understanding cultural differences. Hermeneutics has also, however, several blind spots, which we examine through the critiques of Derrida, Foucault and Said. With Derrida we learn the critical tools and the rigor necessary to question some of the central notions and differences which are often taken for granted. With Foucault we question the relation between truth and power in interpretation, and thereby the complexities of power. With Said’s Orientalism, a seminal description of the ways in which the West has (mis)represented the “East,” we examine the nature of (mis)interpretation of other cultures and the role that ethnocentrism has played in the formation of modernity. We also consider some of the more compelling critiques of Said’s work such as Bhabha’s warning against the essentialization of difference and Spivak’s argument against the often too apologetic presentation of cultural differences. We conclude by considering two concrete situations in India and Egypt which illustrate the relevance of the post-colonial critique and its main proponents, Said, Spivak and Bhabha (otherwise known as the “Holy Trinity”). Reading list: H.G. Gadamer, Truth and Method, F. Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, J. Derrida, Of Grammatology, P. Rabinow, Foucault Reader, E. Said, Orientalism, T. Mitchell, Colonizing Egypt, Hawley, Sati: The Blessing and the Curse.

Format: lecture/discussion. Requirements: full attendance and participation and three essays (4-6 pages).

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 30 (expected: 20).

DREYFUŞ

REL 305 (formerly 254) Foucault (Not offered 2009-2010) (W)
Michel Foucault was first and foremost a scholar of power. His iconic “genealogies” of how the Enlightenment promised freedom but instead delivered intracultural and international lines of control have inspired philosophers, intellectual historians, and even novelists. Yet for all of this Foucault is often thought of as having posited a helpless subject trapped in an inescapable web. Worse, scholars such as Rosie Braidotti have seen this subject as a uniquely masculine maneuver-ignoring women’s struggles. This course will concern itself with Foucault and his own “mentors,” Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kant, among others, as well as exploring central questions as Foucault’s views on gender and sexuality. We will also examine whether Foucault was able—as he intended—to move beyond “resistance” in his later writings and help post-Enlightenment individuals engender a more empowered sense of subjectivity.

Format: seminar. Prerequisites: none, although some work in Continental Philosophy will be helpful. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 10). Preference given to Religion majors.

SHUCK

REL 306 Feminist Approaches to Religion (Same as Women’s and Gender Studies 307) (Not offered 2009-2010) (W) (D)
What does feminist theory have to offer the study of religion? How have participants in various religious traditions helped to produce and enact feminisms? Feminist scholars have a long though often troubled history of interconnection. In this course, we shall explore a range of feminist theoretical analyses that have either emerged out of particular religious contexts or have been applied to the study of religious traditions and practices. We shall consider how conflicts within feminism—especially those pertaining to issues of sexuality, race, class, nationality, ethnicity, and religious affiliation—make a difference for the ways that religion is interpreted and practiced. Satisfies the Women’s and Gender Studies theory requirement for the major.

Format: seminar. Requirements: Assignments will include: one “position paper” for class discussion (3 pages), one analytical essay (4 pages), participation in writing workshop on drafts of final papers, one 15-page final paper.

No prerequisites. Enrollment limit: 19 (expected: 15). Open to all. Preference given to majors in Religion and Women’s and Gender Studies. Satisfies the Women’s and Gender Studies theory requirement for the major.

BUELL

REL 307 Thinking Gods: Cognitive Theories of Religion (Not offered 2009-2010; to be offered 2010-2011)
Although it is still in its infancy, the so-called “cognitive turn” has already become one of the most exciting contemporary developments in the study of religion. During the past twenty years, scholars influenced by cognitive science have begun to formulate new models and challenge old assumptions about human religiosity and its relationship to the mind. In so doing, they have articulated theories about the evolutionary origins of religious concepts, reassessed the role of memory and imagination in religion, and developed new concepts such as “theological incorrectness” and “systematic anthropomorphism.” By examining the cutting-edge work produced by members of this movement on both sides of the Atlantic, this seminar for advanced students to trace the historical roots of the cognitive turn and introduce some of its most important recent products. Authors to be considered include: Sigmund Freud, Ludwig Feuerbach, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, D. Jason Slone, Pascal Boyer, Veikko Anttonen, Scott Atran, Richard Dawkins, Dan Sperber, and Ilkka Pyysiäinen.


JOSEPHSON

REL 308(F) Nietzsche and Religion
Few thinkers have been as controversial or as obsessed about religion as the nineteenth century German theorist/philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. His work was not understood during his lifetime, or so he thought, and there are definitely controversies surrounding the way the writings of Nietzsche ought to be applied in the early twenty-first century. We will see Nietzsche as a lonely curmudgeon who hated his rigid, Lutheran upbringing, as well as his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. But we will also see the many fruitful dialogues created by his fractured personality and vitriolic books which, perhaps despite his intentions, speak to religion in both a destructive and constructive way, as well as to later thinkers.

Format: seminar. Evaluation will consist of two 5- to 6-page response papers, a midterm exam, and a 10- to 15-page final paper, and thoughtful participation.


Hour: 2-2:55, 3-50 MR

SHUCK

REL 397(F), 398(S) Independent Study

REL 401(F) Issues in the Study of Religion
To be conducted as a working seminar or colloquium. Major issues in the study of religious thought and behavior will be taken up in a cross-cultural context enabling the student to consolidate and expand perspectives gained in the course of the major sequence. Topics will vary from year to year. In keeping with the
seminar framework, opportunity will be afforded the student to pursue independent reading and research.
Requirements: class reports, papers, and substantial research projects. Topic for 2009-2010: Futures and Pasts in the Study of Religion.
Prerequisites: senior Religion major status or permission of instructor. Enrollment limit: 15 (expected: 15).
Hour: 1:10-3:50 W

REL 493(F)-W31; W31-494(S)  Senior Thesis

REL 497(F), 498(S)  Independent Study