

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Spring 2015

RLST 1620-003

Religions & Human Experience

John Kinsey

HUMN 250, MWF 2:00 – 2:50

***Approved for Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum: Ideals and Values.**

Studies religion as individual experience and social phenomenon. This course will particularly address the relationship between new ideas in science--especially new or recent science that presents ideas that confound how we usually think of the world including the strange science of quantum mechanics, the mystery that is the origin of the universe, the destiny of humans as they merge more and more with machines. This class will address the religious implications of some of these more recent scientific ideas that necessitate thinking about ideas of the soul and God in our new scientific world today.

RLST 2400-001

Religion and Contemporary Society

Ira Chernus

GUGG 205, MWF 2:00 – 2:50

This course will not focus primarily on organized institutional religions (Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, etc.). Rather, we will look at underlying values and worldviews that are common to all groups in contemporary U.S. society and how they are expressed in cultural symbols. We will examine some of the trends that are most common and dominant in U.S. society, as well as critiques of and alternatives to those dominant trends, paying special attention to the interplay between religion and other facets of American life. Course requirements will include three take-home essay exams.

RLST 2500-010

Religions in the United States

Denice Walker

HUMN 250, MW 11:00 – 11:50

Recitations W

***Approved for Arts & Sciences Core Curriculum: United States Context or Ideals and Values.**

This course will introduce students to the historical and contemporary study of religions in the United States. It will not seek to give either a comprehensive historical account of the development of *all* American religions, nor a survey of *all* religious institutions, movements, and traditions that have made up the vast and diverse U.S. religious landscape. Rather, the course approaches the topic of religions in the U.S. through the investigation of primary source texts, which, set in context, will give us glimpses or “snapshots” of religion as lived, practiced, and experienced by Americans of all backgrounds during the past 400 years. Along the way we will encounter many of the key religious traditions, movements, and figures that have shaped American religious belief and practice. In addition the course will consider such questions as: What major cultural forces shape and have shaped religions in America? How have Americans of different faiths and nationalities encountered, interacted, argued, clashed, and cooperated with one another? Have they seen America as a promised land or place of refuge—or as a place of conflict and suffering? What are some ways that religious Americans think about faith, spirituality, religious diversity and church and state? Ultimately, how does the academic study of religion shed light on what it means to be an “*American*” or a religious American?

Department of Religious Studies

Course Descriptions Spring 2015

RLST/JWST 2600-001

Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Sam Boyd

HUMN 150, TR 2:00 – 3:15

***Approved for Arts & Sciences core curriculum: Ideals & Values.**

Introduces literature, beliefs, practices and institutions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in historical perspective. This course will adopt a phenomenological and comparative approach to the study of religious traditions. Such an approach proposes to study religion on its own terms without discounting the role of “nonreligious aspects of human existence” in religiosity. Our aim will be an in-depth understanding of the myths, rituals, symbols and practices that constitute each tradition by means of the identification and analysis of patterns of similarity and dissimilarity within and between traditions.

RLST 2620-010

Religions of East Asia

Rodney Taylor

HUMN 1B80, MW 12:00 – 12:50

Recitations R

***Approved for Arts and Sciences core curriculum: Ideals and Values**

This course is designed to provide the student with an introduction to the religious traditions of China and Japan, including Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Shinto. The course assumes no previous background in either the history of religions or the cultural history of China or Japan. The object of the course is to understand types of religious expression within Chinese and Japanese culture and something of the phenomenon of religion as a component of human culture.

RLST/WMST 2800-001

Women and Religion

Denice Walker

EKLC 1B20, TR 12:30 – 1:45

***Approved for Arts & Sciences Core Curriculum: Human Diversity**

This course examines the intersection between religion and gender, considering the ways in which religion informs understandings and assumptions about gender and, in turn, how gendered assumptions shape and inform religious practice. Thus, we will employ gender as a category of analysis for the study of religion, asking several key questions. To begin we will consider what various religious traditions teach about gender roles and the accompanying gendered responsibilities of women and men. What do they teach about sexuality? About bodies? What do they say—if anything—about alternative gender roles? Having established a baseline of understanding, we will explore ways in which religious teachings, in both historical and contemporary contexts, have informed secular understandings of gender and the ways in which contemporary conceptions of gender have informed religious practice. We will consider these questions from the perspective of five religious traditions: Native American, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Feminist/New Age spirituality, all set within the context of religion in the United States. Same as WMST 2800

Department of Religious Studies

Course Descriptions Spring 2015

RLST 3010-001

Religion and the Senses

Professor Sam Gill

HLMS 211, TR 12:30 – 1:45

“Religion and the Senses” constructs an understanding and appreciation of the human senses based on several parallel and interconnected perspectives or bodies of research: neurobiology, cognitive science, and phenomenology and plays out the potential implications for anthropology and the academic study of religion. Perception is understood as an active and creative function and the body and mind are inseparable in perception. Being human is constituted in an interaction between bodied beings and their environment. What has yet to take place is to examine these disparate, yet exciting, areas of research and emerging perspectives and insights as they cross from discipline to discipline (neurobiology to cognitive science to philosophy for example) and to chart the implications for the academic study of religion and culture; indeed, the deeper appreciation of these areas of human behavior. “Religion and the Senses” then is ambitiously directed to providing a fertile approach to understanding and appreciating cultures and religions in terms of exciting emergent perspectives while also offering students a greatly enriched understanding of their own embodied humanity.

RLST 3200-001

Hinduism

Loriliai Biernacki

HLMS 241, TR 2:00 – 3:15

This class will explore the variety of traditions subsumed under the rubric of Hinduism. Attention will be given to philosophical traditions as well as to the hands-on everyday practice of Hindu rituals. We will cover the religious practice and thought of ancient Indians and examine the permutations these bodies of religious ideals and ideas undergo up through the centuries continuing into the practice of Hindu traditions in India today. In particular special attention will be given the variety of manifestations Hinduism takes with respect to society and social relations.

RLST 3300-001

Foundations of Buddhism

Holly Gayley

MCOL W100, TR 11:00 – 12:15

This course provides an introduction to Buddhist thought and practice in the variety of its historical and geographic contexts. We begin with the story of the Buddha, his teachings, and the early Buddhist community in India. We then trace the expansion of the Theravada to Sri Lanka and Thailand with a focus on the role of images and relics in Buddhist ritual and kingship. Next, we consider the rise of Mahayana in India including the bodhisattva ideal, doctrine of emptiness, and cosmology of Buddha lands. Finally, we explore the diverse conceptions of the Buddhist path in the many areas in Asia where the Mahayana spread, including China, Japan, Tibet, and Vietnam.

RLST 3820-001

Buddhist Art and Ritual

Ariana Maki

HUMN 1B80, MWF 3:00 – 3:50

Beginning with the life of the Buddha, this course will explore how Buddhist art developed in India and was adopted and adapted by the cultures of China, Japan, the Himalayas, and Southeast Asia. We will examine the intersections between Buddhist doctrine, art, and architecture through extensive and close analysis of visual forms and materials. This course focuses on objects and their usage in ritual contexts, though we will also explore how Buddhists have historically employed art, architecture and performance to legitimize claims of political, social, and/or cultural power. The course provides students with the tools to view and interpret sacred images in their lived contexts in temples, processions, and festival performances. We will also study the critical transformations occurring in the modern and political dimensions of Buddhist art, addressing such issues as self-immolation, identity, and global consumer culture.

Department of Religious Studies

Course Descriptions Spring 2015

RLST 4/5250-002

Topics: Transnational Buddhism

Holly Gayley

HUMN 270, W 3:00 – 5:30

Buddhism has become a global religion with transnational connections across Asia and to diaspora and convert communities in the West. Though Buddhism had long thrived with pan-Asian connections, such as along the Silk Road, this seminar explores the processes by which Buddhism has become global in the past century. We explore a range of transnational processes, including colonial contact, migration and diaspora, international tourism, and the internet. What new understandings of Buddhism and new forms of practice have emerged through transnational connections and interactions? How are ethnic and sectarian identities being shaped in new ways as a result?

RLST/JWST 4260; RLST 5260; ANTH 4050-001

Topics: Post Holocaust American Judaism

Moshe Kornfeld

HLMS 267, M 3:00 – 5:30

From Holocaust memory to Jewish-themed YouTube spoof videos, this course explores the history and culture of postwar American Judaism. Course units will focus on diverse and creative formulations of Jewish life, religion, and culture. For example, participants will study Holocaust commemoration, Jewish social movements (e.g. feminism, queer activism, environmentalism, and social justice activism), religious movements and revitalization, race and identity politics, and humor/satire. Ultimately, course participants will develop original research projects that draw on ethnographic and archival materials in order to situate a uniquely American expression of Judaism and/or Jewish culture in relation to a variety of political, social, and cultural contexts. These projects will contribute to ongoing efforts to develop the Post-Holocaust American Judaism Archive, a collection dedicated to documenting and understanding the diversity, creativity, and paradoxes of postwar American Jewish life.

RLST 4/5820-002

Topics: Religion and the Body

Sam Gill

HUMN 270, TR 2:00 – 3:15

***This is a SASR course.**

“Body” has become of increasing interest to the study of religion recognized as relevant to such areas as lived and everyday religion, materialist theories of religion, feminism and religion, ritual, science and religion, and dance and the arts and religion. While “religion and body” studies have a considerable history, they remain marginal. The core of the body-related studies of religion is located outside of religious studies in such fields as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and cognitive science and neuroscience. The proposition of this course is that religion is always already the moving body, a position not recognized by current studies. The course will establish a foundation through the critical review of the finest and most influential examples of religion and body studies and the classic studies on which they depend. Yet the course will continue on to the extended presentation of an account of religion based on religion being inseparable from the self-moving body. This account developed by the instructor is available in his recently published book on dancing and in his two forthcoming books. This account of religion as always already the moving body will be presented in conversation with current religion and body studies in order to evaluate its potential.

Department of Religious Studies

Course Descriptions Spring 2015

RLST 4/5820-003

Topics: Medieval Spain: Religion and Culture

Brian Catlos

HUMN 270, T 11:00 – 1:30

***This is a SASR course.**

Medieval Spain is famously known as a “land of three religions” – where Christians, Muslims and Jews, lived side-by-side in both conflict and collaboration, and engaged each other as members of rival faith communities within a common religious framework. This course, covering roughly 650–1600 C.E. will look at ethno-religious identity in the Iberian Peninsula during this period of plurality, focusing on cultural, political and social interactions. The seminar will serve as a framework for students to develop research projects relating to any aspect of these processes. It is interdisciplinary in approach and students from any relevant departments (e.g.: Religious Studies, Art History, History, Spanish and Portuguese, English, Philosophy, etc.) are welcome. No foreign languages are necessary, but students who can work with original sources or foreign language texts will be encouraged to do so. During the period of the course, there will be opportunities to meet with leading scholars including: Thomas F. Burman (U Tennessee), Mark D. Meyerson (Toronto), and Paul Freedman (Yale).

RLST 4/5820-001

Topics: Subtle Bodies, New Materialism

Loriliai Bierkacki

HUMN 270, R 3:30 – 6:00

This class seeks to explore the relationship between body and mind through examining medieval conceptions of body as subtle body, a kind of hybrid entity that acts as interface between body and mind. We will use three theoretical points of reference to examine the nature of mind-body relations, especially for exploring a notion of the subtle body, namely, recent work associated with the “new materialisms,” contemporary reflections on the mind-body interface from philosophers of consciousness and science, and the medieval reflections on subtle body that we find in the 9-11th century school of nondual Kashmiri Śaivism. Additionally we will use the idea of wonder as a lens for thinking through ideas of the materiality of the body.

RLST 4830-001

Senior Seminar

Deborah Whitehead

HUMN 270, M 3:00 – 5:30

This seminar is designed to serve as the capstone course for senior majors in Religious Studies and is required for all graduating seniors. This semester, our seminar theme will be “Circumscribing a Discipline: Religious Studies in the University Today,” a topic we will consider and problematize in a number of ways. We will engage the topic through a consideration of theoretical materials in the academic study of religion, both classic and contemporary sources, as well as via historical and contemporary accounts. Throughout the semester, we will be in conversation with ongoing debates in the field of the academic study of religion.

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