ISLAMOPHOBIA

This course examines the history, politics, culture and economy of how Islam and Muslims have been represented in the north Atlantic world (the ‘West’). It begins with a brief overview of Western representations of Muslims during the early modern period, then explores how colonialism shaped the modern history and politics of contemporary Islamophobia. The bulk of the course will focus in depth on the politics, culture and economy of Islamophobia in the United States, aiming to empower students to understand and navigate the contemporary context. The course gives particular attention to ways that Muslims have sought to challenge, complicate and subvert how they are represented.
In developing Middle-earth, Tolkien intentionally sought to create a mythology. In this course, we will read The Silmarillion, The Hobbit, and The Lord of the Rings as mythology. We will analyze theories of myth, examine how Tolkien’s scholarship and understanding of mythology shaped his tales, and explore the mythic themes in these works. We will also consider the enduring appeal of these stories as modern myth.
Why do we say “bless you” when someone sneezes? How did the design of Starbucks’ holiday-themed cups lead to a consumer boycott? Why did the University of Ottawa cancel its yoga classes? And are celebrities the new gods? This course sets out to develop a deeper and broader understanding of religion as a human phenomenon, by focusing on three interrelated questions: What is religion, How to study religion, and Why study religion.
One of the largest and most ancient of all religions, ‘Hinduism’ is actually a family of related traditions. Over the last 4000 years or more, the Hindu traditions of South Asia have developed an astonishing diversity of rituals, beliefs, and spiritual practices and a pantheon of hundreds of gods and goddesses, from the elephant-headed Ganeša to the fierce goddess Kālī. This course will examine the breadth of the Hindu traditions as they developed over time, highlighting the shared features that make them a family, such as ritual sacrifice, world renunciation, law, spiritual discipline, devotion, worship, and theology.
INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

This course provides an introduction to key aspects of the Buddhist religious traditions of multiple Asian countries and the United States. Through careful examination of a variety of literature produced by these traditions, we will consider the ways in which Buddhists have understood human suffering, life after death, karma, merit, the nature of the world and human’s place within it, and the path to enlightenment. Our emphasis will be on attempting to understand the moral values, philosophical insights, ritual practices, and social concerns that have shaped Buddhism over centuries of dynamic change in diverse cultural contexts.
AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY FROM 1865 TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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

This course explores the historical development and socio-political impact of the relationship between religion and state in Israel both in terms of its domestic and foreign policies. As part of our exploration, we will delve into the extent to which the Israeli model represents broader trends in the Middle East specifically and in the world at large; the complex nature of the relationship between democracy and religion, and between religion and politics in a democracy; and the impact of religion on political violence and peace-making.
The past few years have come to be labeled a “transgender moment” because of the increasing visibility of transgendered individuals in law, the media and popular culture. This course is a theoretical rumination on the intersection of Jewishness and gender fluidity in terms of personal identity, cultural politics and institutional normativity. Both Jewishness and gender identity are cultural constructions with strong relationships to biological “facts.” They share the experience of internal cohesion through external labeling and persecution. Modernity has transformed both gender identity and Jewish identity into somewhat autonomous self-characterizations even as the choice to transform one’s identity comes with significant social judgment and cost.
The phenomenon of sainthood opens a range of issues: a saint is an exemplar of heroic virtue, and ideas of sainthood reflect the ethical norms of a particular Christian society; a saint is the focus of veneration, and the ways people behave toward saints (going on pilgrimage to venerate their relics, showing reverence to their images, etc.) tells a great deal about official and unofficial Christian piety; a saint is a figurehead for some interest group such as a religious order or a city, and in churches that have a process of canonization this becomes a mirror of ecclesiastical politics.
Throughout the history of the Jewish religion, times of crisis and collective suffering have given rise to theological innovation and creative shifts in religious expression as Jews sought to understand their tradition in light of their experiences. In the wake of the Holocaust, Jews and others faced a similar need for religious rethinking. In theological terms, they asked: where was God and should we expect God to act in human history? What does this event indicate about God’s existence? In human terms, they asked: how do we live as Jews today? How do we live as human beings?
This course will examine the central issues in premodern Christian thought. We will begin with two works that show Christian thinkers struggling with theological issues that arise largely from their own experience: St. Augustine's Confessions and Julian of Norwich's Showings. Then we will examine the teachings on God and Christ, as set forth by writers in the Eastern and Western Churches.
Roman Catholicism was one of—if not the—major force in shaping modern sexualities, as irritant, fantasy, boundary, and more. From whatever perspective—aesthetics, theology and ritual, penitential practice and disciplines, of the control of bodies and desires, the construction of sexual identities over time, missionaries and the extension of Catholic sexuality beyond Europe and North America—the Catholic imaginary is central to the history of modern sexuality. In the era after the Council of Trent in 1545, when the history of modern Catholicism begins, there was a determined effort within the Church to discipline Catholics around the world into obedience and submission to Roman rules and rubrics.
TIBETAN BUDHIST STUDIES

This course will survey the state of the field of Tibetan Buddhist Studies by examining a selection of recent monographs in the field covering a broad array of topics including tantra, medicine, ritual, literature, history, and art history. The focus will be on analyzing how authors of recent monographs in Tibetan studies constructed these works including their main methodological influences and primary sources with an eye towards preparing graduate students for their own writing projects.
CLASSICAL THEORIES AND METHODS

This course covers the emergence of the field of religious studies by exploring its early theorists and their impact. Authors covered include but are not limited to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, William James, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, E.B. Tylor, and Ludwig Feuerbach. Students will give brief presentations on resources they have prepared for common use and will write a final paper on the reception history of one author.