REL 101-3 Reading Your Neighbor's Scripture • Zoloth • MW 11:00-12:20pm

This is a seminar in which we will slowly and carefully read the core sacred texts of three traditions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. At the heart of each of these religious is a Book that is considered holy. It is read and studied and used to justify behavior, especially ethical and moral choices. These texts have been treasured and taught, taken across thousands of years and miles to play a role in our contemporary public life. Typically, these books are only read carefully within their communities. But at the University, we study these texts seriously, thoughtfully and respectfully and pay close attention to their reasons and justifications. We live side by side in a pluralistic American democracy, and we should know what our neighbor holds most dear and finds most true. We will begin to learn by simply reading together and thinking about the reasons of these different Scriptural traditions. No prior expertise needed.

REL 101-4 Religion, Sexuality and Love • Jacoby • TTH 11:00-12:20pm

Why do different religions regulate and/or endorse particular forms of sexuality? What are the rationales for celibacy in different religious traditions? What makes certain forms of passionate desire dangerous according to religious dictums and others morally good? Is romantic love a universal phenomenon or a product of a particular historical development?

This course examines a range of ways in which celibacy, sexuality, and love figure in religious texts and in the study of religion. The course is broad in scope, both in terms of religious traditions—covering Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian texts—and temporality, including material written before the Common Era up to modern studies of romance and religion. We will devote attention to thinking through the writings of key theorists of religious studies and sexuality studies including Michel Foucault, J. Z. Smith, David Halperin, Janet Gyatso, Wendy Doniger, Anthony Giddens, Charles Lindholm, and more. In this process, recurrent themes will emerge, including rationales for celibate monasticism, religious uses of sexual and/or love imagery, views on desire and homosexuality, and the history of romantic love.

REL 170 Introduction to Religion • Dugan • MWF 10:00-10:50am

This course will introduce basic questions about religion, focusing on five specific religious traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This class is an introduction to religions of the world and how to study them. Part I is an introduction to five of the world’s religions. Part II studies themes in the study of religion. Among the topics we will study are: history and central tenets of the traditions; primary sacred texts; and how the tradition looks in contemporary life. The course will also examine questions of what is sacred and why; how people pray and perform rituals; and how religious communities navigate gender norms. Through this study, students will gain a foundation in the academic study of religion.
REL 200 Introduction to Hinduism • McClish • TTH 12:30-1:50pm

One of the largest and most ancient of all religions, ‘Hinduism’ is actually a family of related traditions. Over the last 6000 years, 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 Ganesha to the fierce goddess Kāli. 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 (yajñā), world renunciation (samnyāsa), law (dharma), spiritual discipline (yoga), devotion (bhakti), worship (pūjā), and theology. We will pay particular attention to how these traditions have contributed to the development of modern Hinduism, and students will have the opportunity to engage Hinduism in Chicago. We will explore the great works of Hindu literature, such as the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Rāmāyaṇa as well as other important sources such as art, architecture, anthropology, and film.

REL 210 Introduction to Buddhism • Bond • MWF 12:00-12:50pm

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

REL 272 / GERMAN 272 Luther and the West • Helmer • MW 9:30-10:50am

When the 16th-century Catholic friar, Martin Luther, stood up for his convictions before pope and emperor, the history of the West was changed forever. In this course we will study the powerful impact that Luther had on the West, both its history and aspects of its culture. Themes addressed are: the secularization of the modern West, economics, political theology, philosophy of religion (Kant and Hegel), anti-Semitism, reason and the will, modern subjectivity, the arts. The course aims to show how religion and theology are related to broader cultural, political, social, and aesthetic issues. Class evaluation is based on quizzes, study guides, class participation, and a written paper.

REL 329 The Gospel of Matthew • Senior • W 1:30-4:00pm

In its portrayal of Jesus and his mission, the Gospel of Matthew draws deeply on the Jewish heritage of early Christianity while, at the same time, orienting the Christian community to further engage the wider Greco-Roman world. The success of this gospel made it the dominant gospel of Early Christianity. This course will engage in a thorough reading of this foundational first century document and the historical and religious context in which it was composed. The format is primarily lectures and class discussion.
REL 339-20 The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction • Wimpfheimer • TTH 12:30-1:50pm

The Talmud is one of the most important works of Jewish literature. For the last millennium, Talmud study has been a central part of Jewish religious and cultural practice. Despite the splintering of Judaism into different denominations, Jews the world over are unified by their commitment to studying Talmud. The Talmud is an unusual work of literature, and it has been credited as an influence on codes of law, sermons, modern works of Jewish literature, and even Seinfeld. This course will explain the Talmud’s import and durability within Jewish culture while introducing students to the rigors of legal analysis that lie at the heart of most talmudic passages. The course is ideal for those interested in religion, law, logic games and questions of textual interpretation. The course will study the Talmud entirely in English translation; there is neither a language prerequisite nor an expectation of prior experience reading the Talmud.

REL 339-21 / GENDER ST 341-20/ SOC 376-24 Orthodox Feminist Activism in a Comparative Perspective • Israel-Cohen • MW 12:30-1:50pm

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

REL 349-20 Modern Christian Mystics • Newman • MW 2:00-3:20pm

We sometimes think of Christian mysticism—the experiential knowledge of God—as a tradition that flourished in the Middle Ages. But it is still very much alive and well. In this course we will read important mystical writers from the mid-20th century to the present in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican traditions. Some of the questions we will ask include: What is mystical or contemplative prayer? How is it possible to know God by experience in a secular, scientific age? What is the relationship between mystical prayer and political action? And why does mystical thought so often express itself in literary form?
REL 349-21 Why College? • Helmer • TH 2:00-4:50pm

This seminar will give undergraduates the opportunity to reflect critically, thoughtfully, and together with peers, on the question: why go to college? There are many expectations that parents and society place on the college experience. But now that we are in college, how shall we think about it? Is it an experience or is it an education? Is it a ticket to a job or is it the pursuit of knowledge? What do professors do? How is contemporary culture reflected in the university? We address various facets of college life, from diversity and justice to sex and sexism on campus, from the “party pathway” to technology. We explore the value of the humanities. We survey the history of the university, investigate its religious origins, and learn about the “crisis” of the contemporary university.

REL 369-1 / AMER ST 310-23 American Judaism • Sufrin • MW 11:00-12:20pm

As a nation of immigrants committed by the Bill of Rights to freedom of religion, the United States of America has offered Jews both a unique setting in which to live and work and a unique setting in which to worship and understand their God and observe the customs of their religion. In this course, we will examine the evolution of American Judaism from the colonial period through to the present day. Using a variety of perspectives, we will trace shifts in the situation of Jews in America and corresponding changes in the way(s) Jews have practiced and understood their religious traditions. Emphasis will be placed on critical understanding of theology and cultural materials such as short stories, films and music as well as other primary documents.

REL 374 God After the Holocaust • Sufrin • TTH 11:00-12:20pm

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

REL 377 Christian Thought in Global Perspective • Dugan • T 2:00-4:50pm

This course deals with the particular ways in which historical events and cultural transformations of the 19th and 20th century affected both the content and the method of Christian theology. Among these are the development of historical criticism; democratization; world war; and justice movements organized around race, culture, class, and gender. Views of sin and salvation, incarnation and redemption, and knowledge of God figure very differently in this period than the preceding ones. We will learn how representative modern and contemporary Western theologians have dealt with these issues. We will also discuss how they have responded to the pressures of intellectual, political, and cultural movements on theology.
REL 379-20 Religion, Politics and Power • McClish • M 3:00-5:50pm

This course explores the overlap between the domains we call “religion” and “politics.” We will look at the ways in which religions have served and serve as political resources primarily by examining the general role of ideology and ritual within politics. Throughout our analysis, we will ask how the religious/political binary both helps and hinders our understanding of the function of different ideologies and rituals in the pursuit of political goals. Ultimately, we want to scrutinize the concept of “religious authority” itself. Does religion provide access to unique political resources such that we might theorize the existence of “religious authority” as a specific kind of political power? Does religion play a specific role within political contest such that we can theorize a general relationship between religion and politics at all? We will find that such questions cannot be addressed without examining the history of secularism itself and contemporary debates about the relationship between religion in politics. Counts towards RLP Major Concentration

REL 379-21 Personal Narratives in 20th & 21st Century U.S. Religion • Brehm • TTH 9:30-10:50am

In this course, we explore the intersection twentieth-century American religious history and the changing media forms of personal narratives, memoirs, and autobiographies. We will engage questions of writing one’s story about spirituality and religion from a variety of sources that span the 20th and 21st centuries. Lectures and discussions will historically contextualize the primary source readings. We would also discuss changing media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, and how that changes how we self-narrate our religious lives. We will engage with documentary films, televangelism, and reality television programs to understand how Americans are broadcasting these personal narratives. The course builds towards a student portfolio, crafting a family history, fictionalized account, or autobiographical personal narrative presented in any mediated form they want. Additionally, students will analyze their own choices in crafting their narrative.

REL 379-22 Confronting Death: Past and Present • Balberg • T 4:00-6:30pm

Of all human phenomena, it is hard to think of one more universal, more all-encompassing, and more confounding than death. We are all advancing constantly toward our own death, and almost all of us, at one point or another, are confronted with the death of a loved one. Nevertheless, death is a remarkably silenced topic in our culture, mostly hidden from the public eye and barely receiving serious consideration in contemporary culture. This has not always been the case, and is not the case everywhere: in the ancient world “learning how to die” was perhaps the most important aspect of one’s life goals, and in various societies processes of burial, accompaniment of the dead, and mourning still constitute a fundamental part of one’s social and communal life. The purpose of this class is threefold: first, to get acquainted with some of the most interesting and influential ideas in the history of human civilization, by using the theme of death as a guiding compass. Second, to understand and appreciate the incredible diversity of human experiences and approaches across times and places, and thereby develop greater cultural sensitivity. And third, to acquire a kit of intellectual and conceptual tools to help us better understand our own death and the death of others as an inescapable part of life, and to utilize this understanding toward the development of deeper compassion and greater ethical consciousness. Counts towards RHM Major Concentration
REL 395 Theories of Religion • Taylor • TH 2:00-4:50pm

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

REL 471-20 / GEN 490-21 Feminist Theory and the Study of Religion • Jacoby • F 11:30-2:00pm

This course aims to put feminist theory and religious studies into conversation with each other in order to examine the resulting intersections, points of mutual illumination, and aporias. The course will investigate the history of feminist approaches to religious studies as well as new directions in current scholarship including feminist and womanist theologies, goddess feminism, secular and post-secular feminisms, and transnational feminisms. We will consider the following questions: What does it mean to apply a gender studies lens to the study of religion? How do feminist conceptions of "liberation" reinforce or reject religious conceptions of "liberation"? What are the implications of the “return of religion” currently invoked in some feminist discourses? In thinking through these topics, we will read works by Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Mary Daly, Saba Mahmood, and Rosi Braidotti, among others. This course seeks to move beyond prevalent assumptions of Judeo-Christian normativity in its analysis of feminist contributions to the study of religion. It pays particular attention to feminist approaches to the study of Asian religions, but with flexibility to highlight other geographic/thematic areas of interest to graduate students enrolled in the course. Counts towards RSG Major Concentration