Comparative Religion Program Courses

Spring 2015

JSIS 201
MWF 11:30-12:20
Chirot

If the first half of the 20th century was one long series of global catastrophes (two world wars, the rise of totalitarian tyrannies, and a long great depression) the second half turned out better. Despite continuing wars, world war was avoided. Communism failed after a long Cold War. Reforms in East Asia eventually spread to China and brought it into a relatively harmonious relationship with the rest of the world. Democracy spread in Eastern Europe and parts of Latin America and Asia. For Americans, the century ended on a high note of success and prosperity. Will this good fortune continue into the 21st century? This course will address this contemporary question.

There are a number of critical international problems that could easily bring about some very negative outcomes. The course will present a series of readings, lectures, and films that will explore some of the main problem areas so that students will leave the course better prepared to understand the unfolding 21st century and to make up their minds about how to interpret the main crises that seem to pop up all the time but that are actually all related to larger global issues. Particular attention will be paid to the international political role of the United States, to the nature of globalization, to China’s economic and political rise, to the endless troubles in the Middle East, and to the progress as well as enormous problems of the Spanish speaking world’s largest country, Mexico.
This course is not your typical introductory undergraduate course. JSIS 200-series courses are among the most difficult introductory courses at the UW. In these classes we cater to students who are making the most of their education; we take you seriously as students who want to learn. We provide students with the opportunity to acquire and refine their analytic skills, writing abilities as well as developing the application of theory to everyday life, including one’s own culture as well as the cultures of the world.

This course in particular takes seriously the cultural factors that create the preferences, biases, behaviors, moral forms that shape and guide everyday thinking and behaving. The course will introduce students to the ways scientific knowledge (whether humanistic, social or scientific) always assumes a personal bias. We first understand our own cultural constructions that shape our perspectives and then expand and make a more sophisticated analysis using reflexive sociology and anthropology. We then tackle social and cultural interactions on a comparative basis on the topic of culture and violence. Additionally, we will focus on violence as it relates to race, genocide, war, political resistance, gender and torture; ending with a section on violence and religion. Violence is the theme of the course in the sense that violence or forms of coercion are one of the fundamental ways culture is created, maintained and destroyed—whether in developed or less developed societies. It is also a way for us to deconstruct our cultural and social worlds in order to understand, explain and even to change them. In this sense, cultural analysis is a moral enterprise; we recognize our own moral suppositions—reconstruct and develop new ones, and then use them to judge culture and if necessary change it based on a sense of what is needed and wanted.

This course introduces the modern scholarly study of the New Testament and the sociocultural milieu within the New Testament literature originated. Attention is given to significant Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions and institutions that were of importance in shaping the earliest Christian movements. The various writings in the New Testament are examined individually, with interest in such issues as: The relationship between the author and audience and the immediate historical context of the writing, if known; literary genre; intertextuality; key religious issues of concern in a given writing, and their relation to the diverse spectrum of developing early Christian thought, practice, and social formation.
**JSIS C 212/NEAR E 231**  
*Introduction to the Quran*  
MTWTHF 2:30-3:20  
*DeYoung*  
Emphasis on the historical context of the Quran, the history of the text, its collection, organization, and interpretation. In English. Offered: jointly with JSIS C 212.

**JSIS C 269**  
*Holocaust: History and Memory*  
TTh 2:30-4:20; Qz F  
*Naar*  
This course explores the Holocaust as crucial event of the twentieth century. We will examine the origins and impact of the Holocaust; perpetrators, bystanders and victims; resistance, rescue and survival; and efforts to come to terms with this genocide in Europe, Israel, and the United States. We will consider primarily the Jewish experience, in addition to those of other persecuted groups (Gypsies, homosexuals). Our study of the Holocaust will be situated within the context of European and Jewish histories, the Second World War, comparative genocide, and memory studies. To explore these themes, we will examine major scholarship in the field, as well as a wide range of primary sources, including government documents, newspapers, diaries, memoirs, trial proceedings, photographs, paintings, poetry, film, a graphic novel, monuments and memorial museums.

**JSIS C 380**  
*Theories in the Study of Religion: Religion and Modernity in Western Thought*  
MW 12:30-2:20; Qz F  
*Novetzke*  
This course provides students with a variety of approaches to the study of religion centered on examining the relationship between religion and modernity in the tradition of post-enlightenment, Euro-American scholarship. The central thesis of this course is that what we understand to be “religion” today was fashioned out of Western modernity, similar to other “modern” ideas such as science, democracy, the modern state, humanism, and capitalism. Religion is not a relic from a premodern period or the purview of non-modern, non-Westernized, “irrational” societies, but rather is the creation of the modern world itself. We will examine this thesis in relation to several disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, political theology, and Freudian psycho-analytical theory. As a survey course, we will survey these areas with the goal to provide opportunities for future study and ideas for critically thinking about the history and role of religion in modern public and political culture.
JSIS C 445  
**Greek and Roman Religion**  
MTWThF 12:30-1:20  
*Hollmann*  
Religion in the social life of the Greeks and Romans, with emphasis placed on their public rituals and festivals. Attention is given to the priesthoods, personal piety, rituals of purification and healing, and the conflict of religions in the early Roman Empire. Many lectures illustrated by slides. Offered: jointly with JSIS C 445.

JSIS 451/NEAR E 452  
**Biblical Song of Songs**  
MW 1:30-2:50  
*Martin*  
Examines the erotic and beautiful Song of Songs within the context of ancient (and medieval) Near Eastern love poetry and correlates close readings of the book with various interpretations it has received from antiquity until today. No knowledge of Hebrew or the Bible required. Offered: jointly with JSIS C 451.

JSIS C 456  
**Perceptions of the Feminine Divine in Hinduism**  
TTh 12:30-2:20  
*Pauwels*  
Explores implications of the perception of a feminine divine for gender issues in South Asia. Includes historical overview of goddess worship in South Asia, mythologies, philosophical systems, cults, and rituals associated with the major goddesses, the phenomena of suttee, goddess possession, and goddesses, women’s goddess rituals at the village level.

JSIS C 502  
**Religion in the Comparative Perspective: Political Theories of Religion**  
T 11:30-2:20  *Novetzke*  
Religion is one of the key subjects of the political field and the public sphere, and this is true in the modern world as much as in the pre-modern period. Despite the inclination of the social sciences of the 19th and 20th centuries to declare the decline of religion in the modern world—and Orientalist associations with religion and the non—West—religion has not declined in modernity or in the West; by some measures, it has significantly increased in scope around the world. Give the centrality of religion to questions of political, cultural and social life, it is striking to see that the social sciences have not produced a cohesive political theory of religion. In lieu of such a theory, most social scientists use ideas that assume a disjuncture between religion and modernity—a common idea in the works of founding figures of social sciences disciplines. This course explores this lacuna in social scientific theory and seeks to equip students with the intellectual tools to fill this space by formulating their own approach to a political theory of religion.
Identity politics have once again become the main source of contemporary wars and other conflicts. For much of the twentieth century it seemed that ideological conflicts, between capitalist democracies and totalitarian fascist and communist states, were the main source of trouble. Now civil wars seem to stem mostly from contentious relations between groups that identify themselves according to various cultural criteria—language, religion, ethnicity, in some cases just regional differences, and sometimes nationality. Such conflicts can and have spilled over state boundaries and can still produce transnational wars, as they did in the past. When looked at closely many different kinds of group identity that seem to be very different from each other actually begin to look more similar and overlap. Thus religion, ethnicity, language, and nationality as well as other sources of deeply felt identity are sometimes highly correlated, though not always. Even when they are not, they can act in very similar ways. In this course we will look at some of the major sources of identity differences in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and in particular why some of these have turned violent, but others have not, and some never even rose to the level of conflict. We will do this through the readings of some important theoretical texts and some case studies. This is a seminar for graduate students, but qualified undergraduates are welcome to take it. There will be no exams. During the first two weeks the instructor will discuss the readings. After that, students will report on the weekly reading. Depending on how many students enroll for the course, we will have one or two presentations per week during weeks 3-10. Class discussion will be divided half into presentations, and half for general discussion.
HEBR 426  
Biblical Hebrew Prose  
MWF 10:30-11:50  
Martin

HSTCMP 490  
History of Christianity  
MW 4:30 p.m. - 6:50 p.m.  
Felak