

Theology 200 Level Course Descriptions

Fall 2024

THEO 203-001: Social Justice & Injustice

TBA

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8:15AM – 9:05AM

THEO 203-002: Social Justice & Injustice

Dr. Tisha Rajendra

Thursday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

THEO 204-001: Religious Ethics and Eco Crisis

Schuck, Michael

Monday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

This course explores integral responses to environmental problems from the standpoints of three world religions. An integral response is observant (scientific), moral (ethical), meaningful (spiritual), and practical (operational) because human life itself is a moral and meaningful journey of sensory observation and practical experience. An integral response to contemporary environmental problems is a fully human response. In this course, specific attention focuses on models of integral living that engage the contemporary ecological crisis from the standpoints of three different religions: Potawatomi (Native American) religion, Buddhism (Pure Land), and Roman Catholicism (Christian). Three contemporary writers from each of these religious traditions are studied: Robin Kimmerer (Potawatomi), Thich Nhat Hanh (Buddhism), and Pope Francis (Roman Catholicism). Their responses to the contemporary ecological crisis--and the religions they represent--are a rich resource for all human beings, whether members of a religion or not.

THEO 231-001, 231-002: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Water Tower Campus

Dr. Mark Lester

231-001: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

231-002: Tuesday, Thursday 2:30PM – 3:45PM

This course introduces students to the Hebrew Bible, also known as the TaNaKh or the Christian Old Testament. The diverse texts in this collection tell the story of the Jewish people, offer compelling portraits of human love, violence, and loss, and ruminate on the deepest existential questions of life. But what kind of book is the Bible? How do we in the 21st century make sense of it? How have individuals and communities made sense of it in the over two-thousand years since it was compiled? The areas of focus will include: (1) genre; (2) background; (3) interpretation. **Genre:** What are the literary norms that shape these texts? How do these patterns shape our expectations as readers? **Background:** Where do these texts come from? How do they relate to history? Is it possible to discover the circumstances in which they were written? What about the cultures which shaped them? **Interpretation:** What assumptions do we (and others) bring to the Bible? How do these assumptions influence the meanings we find in the Biblical text? How have assumptions and approaches changed in the history of Biblical interpretation in Jewish, Christian, and contemporary critical scholarship?

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THEO 232-001: New Testament

Dr. Olivia Stewart Lester

232-001: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:30AM – 12:20PM

This course introduces students to the New Testament, including the gospels, the letters of Paul, the letters of other early Christian leaders, and the book of Revelation. We will situate these texts in their own historical moment, considering them within both Hellenistic Judaism and the larger Greco-Roman world. Diverse portrayals of the life and teaching of Jesus will emerge, and we will mark the ways that rich variety extends into the teachings of his followers. This course will also introduce students to modern methods of interpreting the Bible, including reading the New Testament in terms of postcolonialism, race, gender, sexuality, disability, and ecology, in addition to historical and literary approaches. This course considers the different questions each scholarly method asks of a New Testament text, and the tools it uses to answer them. This course will familiarize students with the history and contents of New Testament texts, as well as different approaches to interpreting them, in the interest of equipping students for knowledgeable and respectful dialogue about the Bible in their individual communities and our shared public life.

THEO 232-003, 232-004: New Testament

Dr. Teresa Calpino

232-002: Tuesday, Thursday 8:30AM – 9:45AM

232-003: Tuesday, Thursday 2:30PM – 3:45PM

The various documents of Christianity known as the “New Testament” form the foundation of Christian religious life and its doctrines. But because they were produced in societies that are far-removed from our own, they can easily be misunderstood. Too often we approach the Bible with the intention of finding the original meaning that is true for all people in all times. But no interpretation is developed in a vacuum. Interpretation of Scripture can never occur apart from the identity of the one doing the interpreting and their socio-cultural context. The Bible has been used throughout U.S. history to justify the oppression of Black and Brown people, Native Americans and the LGBTQ+ community. However, there is always a choice in how to read the text. The Bible can also be read “from the margins,” namely, in solidarity with communities that have been largely dismissed and ignored. Reading from the margins provides a message of liberation for all people, not just those in power. The course involves lectures, academic readings, comprehension quizzes, a midterm exam and a final project. Participation in class discussions are an integral part of the grading.

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THEO 265-01E: Sacraments & Christian Imagin.

Dr. Mara Brecht

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:20AM – 10:10AM

Christian sacraments and liturgy may seem to be removed from reality: apolitical in orientation, separate from the world, and metaphysical in their concern. And yet, sacramentality—the view that God is present in all of creation—is at the heart of Christianity and especially Roman Catholicism. From this sacramental standpoint, Christian sacraments and liturgy are deeply and necessarily interwoven in the world and its concerns. Our course will help students cultivate an understanding of and appreciation for sacramentality, and trace out the implications of a sacramental perspective for social justice. We will explore sacraments and liturgy as a basis for social justice and—by the same token—consider social injustices as threats to sacramentality.

While possible to explore the interconnection between sacramentality and justice in just theoretical terms, students in this Engaged Learning course will explore their interconnection through practice as well. **All students will commit to a minimum of 20 hours of service work over the course of the semester** to be completed at designated service organizations.

THEO 267-001: Jesus Christ

TBA

Tuesday, Thursday 8:30AM – 9:45AM

THEO 272-001: Judaism

TBA

Wednesday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

THEO 276-001: Black World Religion

Water Tower Campus

Dr. John Steenken

Wednesday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). In 1890 Afro-Caribbean scholar Edward Blyden adds, "If we live and move and have our being in Him, God also lives and moves and has His being in us," suggesting that each culture, race, and ethnic group reflects an image of the divine that no one else can duplicate. This course explores the revelatory manner in which the divine comes to unique presence and expression among African peoples throughout human history. It will examine: the religious experiences and faith traditions of Africa's ancient Nile valley civilizations, long recognized as cradling the world's spiritual and philosophical wisdom and as influencing the formative development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the religious experiences and faith traditions of indigenous Africans before and after European colonialism; the religious experiences and faith traditions of African descended peoples in the Americas, especially in the United States, during their centuries long liberation struggle to emancipate democracy for all by boldly resisting, countering, and overcoming slavery, legalized segregation, racial terrorism, and all other past and current forms of white supremacist ideology and abuse.

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THEO 278-001, 278-002: Religion & Gender

Water Tower Campus

Dr. Devorah Schoenfeld

278-001: Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

278-002: Tuesday, Thursday 1:00PM – 2:15PM

What is God's gender? The gender of Christ? Did God make covenants with women? Why can women be ordained in some denominations but not others? This course will look at Biblical and theological questions around gender in Judaism and Christianity and how they relate to ongoing questions about women in religious leadership. This course counts towards the Core requirement in theology as a second-tier course and has no prerequisites.

THEO 279-001, 279-002: Roman Catholicism

TBA

279-001: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:30AM – 12:20PM

279-002: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 12:35PM – 1:25PM

THEO 281-002: Christianity Through Time

Dr. Colby Dickinson

Thursday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

This course will conduct a survey of the history of Christianity from the standpoint of the history of mysticism, from the origins of Christianity to the present day. Mysticism, as the quest for a direct encounter with God, contains many insights about what it means to be human and to experience the depths of ourselves. Many writings focus on themes of love, detachment, wisdom, grace, forgiveness, poverty and much more. We will study mystical writings and many mystics considered to be heretics, including many female mystics who stood up to an all-male hierarchy. Through learning about mysticism through a variety of primary sources, we will simultaneously uncover the heart of Christianity and its claims made about humankind, while also inspecting what mystical writings have to teach us today about the nature of our humanity.

THEO 281-003: Christianity Through Time

TBA

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:25AM – 11:15AM

THEO 282-001: Hinduism

Dr. Tracy Pintchman

Tuesday, Thursday 1:00PM – 2:15PM

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THEO 282-002, 282-003: Hinduism

Dr. Yarina Liston

282-002: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:40PM – 2:30PM

282-003: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:45PM – 3:35PM

This course is designed to give the student a solid introduction to the Hindu religious tradition. The base of our study will be an examination of the Vedas and the Upanishads. This will lead us into a further exploration of various topics such as the social system, ethics, the relationship between gods and people, artistic impulses and rituals. We will focus on the historical perspective while delving into the beliefs, practices and texts associated with philosophy and literature. The primary methods of instruction will be lecture and discussion, but the ideas will be further developed through weekly writing assignments, small group work in class, as well as an exploration of yoga exercises.

THEO 293-001: Christian Marriage

Dr. Michael Murphy

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:20AM – 10:10AM

Marriage as a human institution has existed for a long time—so long that it belongs to the interesting category of “pre-history.” Its precise origins are lost to us; but, as the originating relationship that produces the family, marriage has always been understood as both a primary political unit and social cornerstone of human culture. The purpose of this course is to examine marriage as it exists today in light of both history and contemporary knowledge. Students will come to an understanding of contemporary Christian marriage and how it has evolved from antiquity through the late modern age. We will sort through a variety of interpretations of the meaning of marriage and, using critical reasoning, discern why and how these interpretations might contribute to current understandings of marriage and family—theologically, sociologically, and otherwise. Jesus’ first miracle was at a wedding; St. Paul interpreted marriage as a living symbol which displays and enacts the relationship between Christ and the Church. We are therefore called to examine marriage as a sacramental reality, an inroads to theological understanding, and a unique expression of human rationality. In addition, we will explore the anthropological role of marital vows (and the obligations of love that are expressed in these vows), delve into the mysteries of gender, and workshop healthy approaches to communication. Finally, we will analyze the religious, cultural, and legal debates about love and marriage as they are developing in contemporary culture.

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THEO 295-001: Islam

Prof. Omer Mozaffar

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8:15AM – 9:05AM

This course will provide you with an introduction to the study of Islam and the Muslims. If you are not at all familiar with Islam, your success in this course should provide you with the skills you need for further study on Islam. If you are advanced in your study, your success in this course should provide you with coherence in the subject matter that you might not have previously appreciated.

To achieve this goal, we will explore the primary sources, being the Qur'an and the life of the prophet Muhammad. We will look at personal narratives and will look at the legacies of past Muslims and the ways their ideas and actions influence our lives today, with the whole course culminating in a study of Islam in America, today. In studying a tradition as large and old as Islam, we will use class discussion to discuss ideas, reading materials to learn concepts and facts, and watch movies to explore real and fictional lives.

THEO 295-02W, 295-03W: Islam

Water Tower Campus

Dr. Marcia Hermansen

295-02W: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

295-03W: Tuesday, Thursday 1:00PM – 2:15PM

This course constitutes an introduction to the religion of Islam through the study of major religious ideas, movements, and figures prominent in the historical development of the tradition up to the present time. The course will move through three major phases: basic teachings of Islam (including the Qur'an and the role and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), the articulation of the classical tradition (including Islamic law and mysticism/Sufism), and contemporary developments. Discussion of major issues such as unity and diversity within Islam, the role of women, Islamic movements in the contemporary world, and Muslims in America will also be featured.

THEO 297-001, 297-002: Buddhism

Dr. Hugh Nicholson

297-001: Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

297-002: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

This course examines the essential teachings, historical development, and contemporary expressions of Buddhism. We shall look at the distinctive forms of Buddhism in places like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, and Japan.