

# FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINAR: PAYING ATTENTION

*Winter  
2024*

**REL 101-8-20**

**Kevin Buckelew**

**M/W 9:30-  
10:50am**



What does it mean to “pay attention”? What is the history of attention as a concept, and what is at stake when we talk about paying attention? What are the ethical implications of attention and distraction? How have religion, aesthetics, economic conditions, social norms, and technological change helped shape the ways we pay attention and the ways we think about attention? In the age of the “attention economy”—when digital technology is blamed for giving rise to a culture of distraction, and collaborations between neuroscientists and Buddhist meditators are credited with heralding the attentional key to happiness—this seminar provides an opportunity to reflect on attention as a key term in history and contemporary life.

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# PERSONAL NARRATIVES / RELIGIOUS HISTORY

REL 101-8-21

Robert A. Orsi

T/TH

3:30-4:50pm

This course explores how personal narratives—the stories people (we) tell or write about themselves in different circumstances and addressed to varied interlocutors, real and imaginary—may serve as sources for understanding religious histories. Such narratives may be about encounters with religious authorities or special beings (angels, gods, ancestors, and so on); or about the story-teller's involvement in religious movements; or his, her, or their religious crises. How do the stories people tell about religion(s) help us understand not only the tellers of these stories but also the religious and social worlds in which these stories arise and to which they refer? How do personal narratives open out to the world and perhaps at the same time deepen our self-understanding? Pairing personal narratives with adjacent historical sources and critical essays, we open with questions about narrative itself and end with the role of stories—as told by humans and non-humans—in the climate crisis.



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# INTRO TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

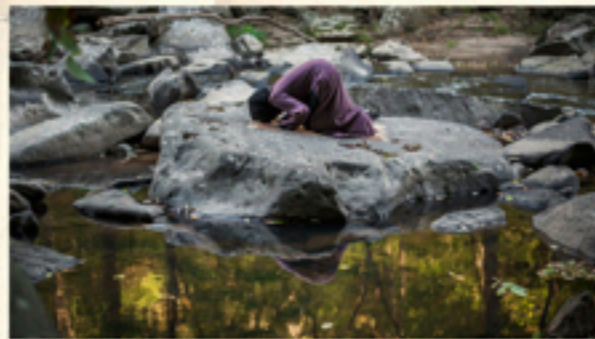


*Winter  
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**REL 170**

**Ashley King**

**M/W 12:30-1:50pm**



This course will guide students through a series of case studies that highlight the practical, ethical, and material dimensions of religions around the world. These case studies dramatize how religions are lived with and against the grain of established doctrine, so that students will gain a richer understanding of the ways religious customs have shaped the world around them. We will focus on three interrelated areas where religion has had a significant impact: (1) sexuality and gender, (2) health and medicine, and (3) law and politics. The course also serves to introduce students to the basic methods scholars employ to study religion, including history, ethnography, textual analysis, ritual theory, phenomenology, and comparison—tools through which students will formulate their own accounts of religious phenomena.

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# INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY



**How many ways are there to be a Christian? What counts as Christianity, what doesn't, and who ultimately gets to decide? Where and when does Christian practice take place and what does it look like? How has Christianity been shaped by cultures around the world, and how has it shaped those cultures in return?**

**This class explores Christianity from a perspective of religious diversity. Using case studies from documentaries, podcasts, scriptures, scholarly articles, short stories, music videos, and films, students will encounter a variety of Christian lifeways, practices, beliefs, and identities. They will consider how important concepts in Christianity—like faith, sacrifice, and sanctity—have been variously defined and experienced across Christian communities. We will ask what factors account for the broad range of Christian doctrines and denominations, and analyze the anxieties, conflicts, and points of creativity have arisen out of this diversity.**

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**REL 240-20**

**Lily Stewart**

**MW 11-12:20pm**



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**REL 250/  
MENA 290-5**

**Brannon Ingram**

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2024*

# **INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM**

**This course introduces Islam, one of the major religious traditions of world history, developing a framework for understanding how Muslims in varying times and places have engaged with Islamic scripture and the prophetic message of the Prophet Muhammad through diverse sources: theological, philosophical, legal, political, mystical, literary and artistic. While we aim to grasp broad currents and narrative of Islamic history, we will especially concentrate on the origins and development of the religion in its formative period (the prophetic career of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, Islamic belief and ritual, Islamic law, and popular spirituality) and debates surrounding Islam in the contemporary world (the impact of European colonialism on the Muslim world, the rise of the modern Muslim state, and discourses on gender, politics and violence).**



**T/TH  
9:30-10:50am**

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# LUTHER AND THE WEST

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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 study the powerful impact that Luther had on the West. Of particular interest are his concepts of freedom, politics, anti-Judaism, and the self. The course aims to show how religion and theology are related to broader cultural, political, social, and aesthetic issues.



**REL 272/GERMAN 272**

**T/TH 11-12:20pm**

**Christine Helmer**

**Northwestern**

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# **RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (RLP)**

**This course will examine the role of religion in post-1980's China with an emphasis on the political implications of the practice of religion in the People's Republic of China. Students will read various forms of literature and policy documents to assess the extent to which Marxist theory is central to the interpretation of "religion" in Communist China.**

**The first part of this course will investigate the expression of religiosity under Communism in China; the rehabilitation of Confucian values; the constitutional protection of religion and religious belief in China; the relationship between ethnicity and religious policies; the Sinicization of religion; and the administration of the five officially accepted religious traditions in the People's Republic of China (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam).**

**The second part of the course will focus on the recent cases related to the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang and the Tibetan Buddhists of Western China. The class will explore some of the most controversial issues related to these two ethnic minorities including terrorism, religious violence, nationalism, assimilation, foreign influence, and soft power.**

**REL 318-21**

**Antonio Terrone**

**T/TH 9:30-10:50am**



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# CHAN/ZEN BUDDHISM

The Chinese Chan (Japanese Zen) Buddhist tradition is one of the most famous branches of Buddhism in the world, but also one of the most widely misunderstood. This course explores the history, literature, philosophy, visual culture, and monastic practices of Chan/Zen Buddhism in East Asia. We pay special attention to the ways Chan/Zen innovated within the Buddhist tradition to establish a uniquely East Asian school of Buddhism. Along the way we consider the changing place of meditation in Chan/Zen practice, closely read Chan/Zen sermons and koans, analyze the role of women and gender in Chan and Zen, and conclude by considering the modern reception of Zen in the West.



REL 319-22

Kevin Buckelew

Mon/Wed 2-3:20PM



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# **MEDICINE, MIRACLES, & MAGIC: HEALTHCARE IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

Today, religion and science are often regarded as separate spheres of knowledge and practice, but was this always the case? In this class, we will explore the overlapping uses of medicine, miracles, and magic in premodern healthcare. We will ask what kinds of people were able to practice medicine (priests? physicians? nuns? magicians?), why a person's barber was also their surgeon, how the dead supported the health of the living, and why rituals like confession could treat stomach aches and other ailments.

We will learn what a vial of urine could tell a medieval physician about a patient's habits, consider how an individual's astrological sign influenced their treatment plan, and discuss what an excess of garlic in a person's diet might tell us about the moral state of their spirit. By the end of this course, students will be able to identify and analyze the complex, nuanced systems that medieval people used to theorize the body and its relationship to the soul, and will be able to articulate how physical, spiritual, and even supernatural medicines were often combined to treat both.

As we study the nuances of premodern medicine, we will also work to rethink the relationship between religion and science in our own world, and consider whether and where our modern healthcare practices align with the past as much as they depart from it.

**REL 349-20**

**Lily Stewart**

**MW 3:30-4:50pm**



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# RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE



"Tell me my dress is 'asking for it'  
one more goddamn time!"

What happens when religion goes digital? In this course we examine how religions are adapting to an increasingly digital world and how digital environments are shaping old and new religious practices. Through a series of case studies, we will consider how religious practitioners and the "spiritual but not religious" are using digital media to challenge established religious authority, create community, innovate devotional practices, and theorize their experiences.

We will examine, for example, collage and hip hop, virtual pujas, mindfulness apps, user-generated gods, emoji spells, tulpamancy, transhumanism, and Slender Man. Through these case studies we will explore how digital natives and adopters are reimagining religious presence, mediation, community, ethics, and ontology.

This class centers BIPOC, queer, and feminist voices, digital arts, memetics, lived religion, and social justice. Students will practice skills for digital humanities research, engage in ethical reflection, and apply course learning to creating their own digital artifacts.

REL 369

Eda Uca

M/W 2-3:20PM

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# PILGRIMAGE

**REL 379**



**Richard Kieckhefer**

**T/TH 2-3:20pm**



**Three ideas can be found widely among world religions: \* that some places are holy and worth visiting because of the historical events that happened there \* that some places are holy and worth visiting because of the miracles that about there \* that all of life is a pilgrimage. Explore these ideas with an instructor who has twice completed the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. We will discuss Christian pilgrimages, Muslim and Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimages, and theories of pilgrimage.**

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# **GRADUATE SEMINAR: TEXTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

**This seminar explores theoretical and methodological links between textual and ethnographic research. As an interdisciplinary and topic-motivated field, religious studies pursues research questions that can cross multiple disciplines and periods. This seminar takes up one of those crossings—text and ethnography—as a site of rich potential for methodological innovation and theoretical exchange. Responding to recent calls to decenter “the human” within the (post)humanities and social sciences, we will investigate what gets lost by dividing meaning from materiality, the natural from the cultural, the archival and literary from the ethnographic.**

**Troubling disciplinary boundaries and categorical binaries, students will be encouraged to explore what text and ethnography share as entangled sites of human and nonhuman production and what we stand to gain by linking them. What are the textual practices inscribed by our ethnographic fields and scholarly productions? How do we locate the sites in which textual projects emerge and include the bodies in which they come to live? Students will learn how to expand and deepen their own textual and ethnographic projects by incorporating research practices from both methods.**

**Readings will be drawn from fields like anthropology, textual, literary and media studies, queer and trans studies, lived religion, science and technology studies, antiquity studies, history. Assignments will position students to integrate course readings and topics to their own research projects, to develop interdisciplinary research methods across time and modality, and to apply that knowledge toward research proposal development.**

**REL 468/ANTHRO 490-28**

**Shira E. Schwartz**

*Winter  
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**W 2:30-5:00PM**

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## **SECULARITIES: THINKING WITH, THROUGH, AND AGAINST “RELIGION”**

This course will introduce graduate students to a range of approaches to theorizing the category of “religion” in recent interdisciplinary scholarship. In this course, these approaches will revolve primarily around theories of secularity – that is, theories of how the category of “religion” is produced, negotiated, maintained, and/or contested in its intersections with other domains of human life against which it is often defined, e.g. “culture,” “society,” and so on. We will also see some of the ways scholars have approached the ways that the category of religion informs, or intersects with, law and politics. We will begin with pioneering work in this subject from Talal Asad, Gauri Viswanathan, Winnifred Sullivan, and Saba Mahmood. We will then proceed to explore how a second wave of scholars on secularity put these foundational texts in conversation with a range of archives, drawing on scholars such as Elizabeth Hurd, Courtney Bender, and Hussein Agrama. Finally, we turn our attention to the most recent scholarship in this vein from the likes of Joseph Blankholm, Elayne Oliphant, John Modern, and Charles McCrary.

**REL 481-2**

**Brannon Ingram**

**T 3-5:30pm**



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