INTRODUCTION

The Level I religion course introduces first-year students to the dialogue between the Biblical traditions and the cultures and communities related to them. Students study the Biblical storyline, major Biblical texts and their interaction with, for example, theology, religious practice, ethics, and social values, while considering methods and fields in the study of religion in a liberal arts setting. An additional prospectus describes the theme of each section. For details see below.

121 A: ERICKSON, 800-855, MWF

A “GREEN” BIBLE? : EARTH, ITS CREATURES, AND ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION. Adam and Eve frolic through a garden of living things, and Noah navigates a floating zoo. Jonah gets stuck in the belly of a big fish, and Job faces the unseemly monstrosities of Behemoth and Leviathan. Strange lambs, lions, beasts, dogs, doves, donkeys, and other creatures populate biblical texts, often unnoticed. With these nonhuman creatures in mind, this section will focus on 'ecotheological' and 'ecocritical' readings of creation in biblical narratives. We'll examine the bible’s relationship to environmentalism and critical animal studies—paying particular attention to how these texts portray what it means to be a "human" or “nonhuman” creature. We'll look at the vital roles nonhuman creatures play in these stories, and we'll ask what kinds of perspectives these creatures may give on the earth and contemporary environmental issues.

121 B: RIPLEY, 800-855, MWF

THE BIBLE AND SALVATION. Like the Philippian jailer, who cries out for salvation while his life crumbles around him, people for millennia have turned to the God of scripture for hope in the midst of brokenness. From images of personal healing to cosmic renewal, the Bible employs a surprising variety of metaphors to speak of God’s care and faithfulness toward God’s creation and covenant people. Employing both literary and historical approaches to reading, we will explore the rich diversity of biblical images of salvation. We will also delve into ways select theologians, artists, and filmmakers have utilized these biblical motifs to address specific cultures and contexts, with an eye toward exploring metaphors of salvation appropriate to our contemporary situations.

121 C: SCHILLINGER, 905-1000, MWF

ABRAHAM’S CHILDREN. Daily news reports regarding violence between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, make remembering these religions share common roots difficult. Yet, all three trace their lineage back to Abraham. This section explores the common roots of these religions by introducing students to the Bible and the Qur’an, and examining the parallel characters and narratives found in each. At the same time, the individual beliefs and practices of each religion will be investigated in order to better understand what makes these religions distinct despite their similarities. In our multicultural world, a basic understanding of the relationship between these three monotheistic religions is perhaps more valuable now than ever before.
121 D: SCOPATZ, 905-1000, MWF

STORY AND LAW. Stories shape our perception of our world and our decisions. They influence us as individuals and our shared stories influence how we structure our communities and even write our laws. Stories can enlighten, comfort, provoke, and inspire. They can provide justification for laws and commands, or they can undermine them. In this section we will look at the relationship between story and law in the Bible and in how biblical texts have influenced and been used by various communities as law and as community-shaping story.

121 E: WALTER, 1045-1140, MWF

THE BIBLE AND COMIC BOOKS. The Bible is reproduced in many ways in contemporary culture, whether secular and religious. It has shaped, both positively and negatively, the hopes, histories, and other expressions of many emerging medias, such as comics, digital medias, and other hybrid forms. In this section of Bible, Culture, and Community, students examine the genres, historical context, and major narratives of the Bible through the juxtaposition of the biblical texts and their contemporary reproductions in graphic novels and comic books. This juxtaposition shall enable students to encounter the theological and enduring significance of biblical writings.

121 F: BOOTH, 1045-1140, MWF

LAND, FOOD AND JUSTICE IN BIBLICAL TRADITIONS. This section uses food as a lens for understanding the Bible, both in the context of cultures that wrote it, and in the context of contemporary discussions of sustainability. Because food is prominent in biblical narratives it is a useful interpretative lens. Biblical prophets make food central in their vindication of the poor and hungry. Biblical communities announce, debate, adjust, and renounce dietary prescriptions. Biblical texts employ similes, metaphors, and parables derived from food to advance larger points about spiritual growth or fulfillment. Guided by these considerations, we will address four main themes involving food and biblical traditions: (1) distributive food justice; (2) food production and care of the land; (3) food and just treatment of animals; and (4) food choices as religiously meaningful.

121 G: SCHILLINGER, 1150-1245, MWF

For a description of this section, see the description for Section C.

121 H: REED, 1255-150, MWF

COMPARATIVE SCRIPTURES: THE BIBLE AND OTHER SACRED TEXTS. What is the place of the Bible in our religiously diverse world? In this section of Religion 121 we will study the Bibles of Judaism and Christianity together with scriptures of other religious traditions. We will consider the following questions: What is scripture? What kinds of literature are found in scriptures? What kinds of questions do scriptures address? How are scriptures used by religious people around the world? What is the relevance of scripture in the 21st century? We will carefully read and discuss selections from the Hebrew Bible of Judaism, the Old and New Testaments of Christianity, the Qur’an of Islam, the Vedas and other sacred texts of Hinduism, and various Buddhist sutras.
121 I: RIPLEY, 1255-150, MWF
For a description of this section, see the description for Section B.

121 J: WALTER, 200-255, MWF
For a description of this section, see the description for Section E.

121 K: REED, 200-255 MWF
For a description of this section, see the description for Section H.

121 L: LAGERQUIST, 800-925 T, 800-920 TH
READING THE BIBLE AROUND THE WORLD. Composed in what we call the Middle East, the Bible has been carried around the world. The Bible is one thing Christians in have in common, though the context in which they read it varies. Protestant Reformers insisted that the Bible be made available in the vernacular, common language of believers. Missionaries make translating the Bible among their first tasks. Despite agreement that the Bible is central to faith differing readings of the Bible often lead to disputes and divisions among Christians. In this section we consider both what the Bible says and to how it is heard/read by various audiences. We pay particular attention to readers in the global south, where Christianity is growing, read this book. We ask what constitutes a “good” reading and what factors contribute to one.

121 M: FILLER, 935-1100 T, 930-1050 TH
ENCOUNTERING OTHERS IN THE BIBLE. In addition to Israelites, Jews, and early Christians, the Bible describes a diverse array of other groups: Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Greeks, other Jewish sects, and many more. When the Bible's "main characters" encounter these other communities, the consequences range from humorous to murderus. In this course, we will study the Bible through a focus on these frequent interreligious and intercultural encounters, and considers themes such as divine election ("chosenness"), intermarriage, holy war, and missionary work in the biblical text. We will also consider the role of these texts and themes in contemporary interfaith encounters. This course will introduce students to a variety of biblical interpretive strategies, theological controversies in Judaism and Christianity, and methods of interreligious dialogue.

121 N: LAGERQUIST, 935-1100 T, 930-1050 TH
For a description of this section, see the description for Section L.

121 O: HANSON, 1145-110 T, 1245-205 TH
THE BIBLE AS SCREEN PLAY. Movies have become our common language, one of the principal means by which we communicate and interpret our experiences and ideas (not to mention our primary form of entertainment). Biblical stories and themes have been a central source for filmmakers from the very beginning of the medium. What happens to those stories and themes in the process? What does the process of filmmaking teach us about how the Biblical authors may have brought their stories to life in their time? How do films illuminate the Biblical text, and how are contemporary perspectives, values, and prejudices reflected in the filmmakers' work? The balcony is open. Please note that the films will be screened outside of class; there will be a weekly scheduled screening, and the films will be available on library reserve for those unable to attend.
GENDER IMAGININGS. Debates about the Bible’s role in defining “male” and “female” as well as the marital, sexual and social roles that flow out of gender are a lively part of contemporary culture. This section will think about the Bible in relationship to such debates. In particular, two questions will inform our conversations: 1) How is gender presented within the biblical world? 2) How does the Bible shape how we “imagine” gender? In order to ask these questions, we will examine a variety of ways contemporary thinkers understand gender within the biblical canon, ideas about the moral and social authority of the Bible and how the Bible is employed within contemporary debates about gender.

FROM SINAI TO FACEBOOK: LAWS, RULES AND CUSTOMS. Rules are all around us. They direct our behavior, distinguish between right and wrong, and regulate our social groups. Rules take their most visible form in legal systems with codes and courts; but rules also operate at a more subtle level: we internalize social expectations, cultural norms, and family customs, and these produce socially acceptable behavior. This seminar explores how this happens by looking comparatively at the relationship between rules and behavior in a variety of contexts. The Bible will be our primary resource. But we will also examine some extra-biblical resources, including some theories that look at the relationship between human behavior, culture, and power. And lastly, we will explore how rules operate in the world of social media, guiding our “virtual” behavior. Our primary question is: why do we do what we do?

For a description of this section, see the description for Section O.