AREA II: THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The work of this area includes analysis of the development, thought, and institutional life of the Christian community in various periods and contexts, and training in the substance and forms of theological positions and argumentation.

1. The comprehensive purpose of the courses designated Theological Studies is to foster an understanding of the classical theological tradition of Christianity, acquaint the students with contemporary theological thought, and develop the skills necessary to engage effectively in critical analysis and constructive argument.

2. The comprehensive purpose of the courses designated Christian Ethics is to foster an understanding of the classical theological tradition of Christian moral thought, acquaint the students with contemporary Christian moral reasoning, and develop the skills necessary to engage effectively in critical analysis and constructive argument.

3. Liturgical Studies is intended to foster a serious and scholarly engagement with the origins and historical evolution of inherited patterns of worship, and to prepare the students to lead the worship of contemporary Christian communities with competence and sensitivity.

4. The Denominational Courses are offered primarily, although not exclusively, for the constituencies of particular denominations. Distributional credit in Area II will be granted for only one denominational course.

THEOLOGY

REL 600a, Introduction to Theology  Linn Tonstad
This course aims to provide a working knowledge of key vocabulary, topics, and traditions in Christian theology; to spark an interest in theology; and to develop the theological literacy needed to take part in cultural or ecclesial contestations and/or to pursue personal decisions about faith and practice. No particular faith commitment or background is assumed. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 623a, Theologies of Religious Pluralism  Mark Heim
This course explores the primary theological perspectives through which Christians interpret the fact of religious pluralism and the substance of diverse religious traditions. It also introduces students to the area of comparative theology. The primary aim is to allow students to develop a constructive theology of religious pluralism to support leadership for religious communities in pluralistic societies, participation in interreligious dialogue, and engagement with the reality of multiple religious practice and belonging. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 626b, Systematic Theology  Willie Jennings
This course introduces students to the art of Christian theological reflection. It initiates students in the practice of systematic thinking by exploring the interconnections between contemporary issues, doctrines, and the perennial challenges that are central to Christian faith and life. The central purpose of the course is to expose students to the inner logics of Christian thought. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 627b, Passion and Atonement: The Cross in Contemporary Theological Discussion  Mark Heim
This course explores the significance of the death of Jesus and engages contemporary discussion of theologies of atonement. The objectives are for students to demonstrate knowledge of major interpretive views of the cross in the Christian theological tradition; demonstrate understanding of major contemporary criticisms of atonement doctrine and some major reconstructions of it; encounter the work of René Girard and its relevance for theological reflection; and develop and state their own theological framework for addressing these issues personally, pastorally, and institutionally. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 629a, Theology and Medicine  Mark Heim and Benjamin Doolittle
Team-taught with a member of the Yale School of Medicine faculty, this course explores the challenges of contemporary medicine from a theological perspective. It considers theological resources relevant for the practice of medicine and examines the practice of medicine as a resource for deepening theological reflection. Topics of traditional interest in both fields—suffering, illness, healing, and well-being—are addressed in interdisciplinary terms. The focus is not on chaplaincy ministry but on a conversation among those who reflect on the application of physiological science and religious wisdom to human need. Key to this conversation is recognition that doctors and theologians share a need for the healing and spiritual health they hope to nurture in others. There are several field trips to and class meetings at Yale New Haven Hospital. Students attend rounds with medical teams, explore laboratory settings, and meet with faculty who practice in settings where the spirit and body intersect, through cooperation with the Program for Medicine, Spirituality, and Religion at Yale School of Medicine. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 632b, Theology through Music  Awet Andemicael
In this course, we examine different approaches to doing Christian theology through music. As we read, discuss, and analyze selected works, primarily by systematic/constructive theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we grapple with the following questions: What is the difference between theologies of music and theology through music? How have theologians used music to help them theologize (e.g., using musical metaphors, borrowing musical terminology, illustrating theological concepts with musical examples, adopting music as a mode within which to theologize)? What, if anything, does a deep engagement with music permit theologians to do that they cannot otherwise accomplish? How do sociocultural location, theological perspective, and aesthetic frameworks interact in shaping particular music-driven theologies? What are the limitations of doing theology through music? Familiarity with musical terminology and experience reading Christian theological texts are helpful. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr
REL 634b, Friedrich Schleiermacher's Christian Faith  Kathryn Tanner
The course involves a close reading of the whole of The Christian Faith, one of the greatest works in Christian theology by one of the most influential and controversial theologians of the modern period, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Students come to understand the text both comprehensively and in detail, and to understand its general significance for the history of modern Christian thought. Area II.
Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent.  3 Course cr

REL 637a, Doctrine of Creation  Willie Jennings
This course explores the Christian doctrine of creation, which continues to be one of the least appreciated and poorly deployed aspects of Christian thought. Understanding the human as “a creature” and the world as “created” plays a crucial role in addressing issues of personal identity and our life in the world. The purpose of this course is to consider how the doctrine of creation helps us think through many of the most pressing matters of life today, such as (1) ecological and technological perspectives on human existence, (2) gender construction and sexual identity, (3) social and familial life, and (4) the formation of people groups and structures of belonging. Area II.
Prerequisite: one theology course.  3 Course cr

REL 640b, Body and Land  Willie Jennings
This course considers the relationship between the body and land, between bodily awareness and awareness of place, space, geography, and animals. The questions it seeks to answer are: What is the status of the geographic in the Christian imaginary? How do land and animal figure into contours of consciousness, theological vision, and life? How do ideas of private property, land enclosure, and spatial and racial segregation inform theories and theology of the built environment? Our goal is to construct a cognitive map that integrates a theology of connectivity of body and land to a theology of relationality of peoples to each other, to the material world, and to God. Such a map might enable the formation of a moral geography that informs the creation of more just, inclusive, and nondestructive living spaces. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 644a, Christianity and Social Power  Kathryn Tanner
This course examines intersections between Christian theology and issues of sociopolitical equality through the study of historical cases. Cases include Christian justifications of hierarchical rule in the early church, medieval arguments over the status of women in church and society, controversies over “New World” colonization, leveling movements in the English civil war, arguments for and against slavery in the United States, nineteenth-century reactions to democratic reform movements on the continent, and contemporary controversies over the ordination of women and gay people. The course helps equip students to answer the following general questions: What is the relation between Christian belief and action? When is Christian belief being used ideologically, to serve independent interests in gaining and maintaining power? On what basis can one judge between conflicting uses of the same Christian beliefs? Area II.
Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent.  3 Course cr

REL 640b, Asian American Theologies  Chloe Starr
This course examines the development of Asian American theologies and their key themes: migration, intercultural theology, autobiographical narratives, political activism. The course looks at marginality and intergenerational conflicts, Asian American biblical hermeneutics, and questions such as why Korean Buddhists might attend church when in America. Students are encouraged to undertake a fieldwork project of their own choosing on an aspect of Asian American Christianity. This course is aimed at all students: the topics and methodologies are highly relevant to anyone doing theology in contemporary society and promote a greater awareness of the need for inter-multicultural theologies in today's America. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 644b, Christ and the Bodhisattva: Comparative Theology and Buddhist Wisdom  Mark Heim
This course provides a brief introduction to the general field of comparative theology, a basic orientation to Mahayana Buddhist teaching and practice (with a particular focus on the case of the bodhisattva through the lens of Shantideva's classic The Way of the Bodhisattva), and an exploration of Christian comparative reflection on these sources. The class engages several prominent theologians working in the Buddhist-Christian theological conversation and explores the ways in which Christian thought and practice can be informed by comparative learning from Buddhist sources. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 660b / WGSS 661b, Queer Theology  Linn Tonstad
This course provides an introduction to queer theology, its theoretical grounding in queer theory, and some of the controversies and possibilities that make up its current shape. Questions considered include whether Christianity can or should be queer; the implications of contemporary debates in queer theory over temporality, futurity, sociality, and spatiality for the shape and possibility of queer theology itself; how to use art and performance as theological sources; and the way queer theory's anti-essentialist stance shifts the stakes of debates over the theological and political status of LGBTQ+ persons. The course also considers the impact of HIV/AIDS on notions of community formation, risk, and finitude. Area II.
Prerequisites: at least one term of theology at the graduate level (introduction to theology or systematic theology) or permission of the instructor; and preferably at least one course in gender studies.  3 Course cr

REL 664a, Contemporary Black Theologies and the Early Church  Awet Andemicael
This course focuses on recent constructive theological engagement with early Christian texts. Specifically, we gain familiarity with a set of black and womanist theologies that engage early Christian texts, alongside some of the key texts they interrogate, as we consider the role of early Christian thought in promoting promising and problematic dynamics in contemporary Christianity. We also discuss how theologians engage sources, assess critically the hermeneutical value of adopting a sociopolitical lens in Patristic studies, evaluate the effectiveness and validity of various methods of constructive engagement with historical theological texts, and consider the potential relevance of early Christian texts to our own historical and constructive theological interests. Previous experience reading early Christian texts and/or contemporary black and womanist theology is helpful. Area II.  3 Course cr
REL 667a, Medieval Latin for Saints and Sinners  John Dillon
This is an introductory reading course in Late Antique and Medieval Latin that is intended to help students interested in Christian Latin sources improve their reading ability. The primary objective is to familiarize students with Medieval Latin and improve their proficiency in reading and translating Medieval Latin texts. Students come to recognize the features (grammatical and syntactical) that make Medieval Latin distinct, improve their overall command of Latin by reviewing grammar and syntax, and gain an appreciation of the immense variety of texts written in Medieval Latin. Area II. Prerequisite: basic knowledge of Latin grammar and syntax, equivalent to the elementary Latin grammar courses offered by the Classics department (LATN 110, LATN 120). 3 Course cr

REL 679a, Slavery and Obedience  Willie Jennings
This course considers the theological architecture of Christian obedience. Students examine obedience in relation to its historic social couplet—slavery. Slavery, especially in its modernist reformation from the fifteenth century forward, framed the problems of Christian obedience with great urgency. The articulation of Christian obedience is plagued with two problems: problems of identity (Who obeys whom?) and problems of time (What is the relation of ancient forms and regimes of obedience to current forms and regimes of obedience?). These two problems build from a more basic theological challenge of articulation—What is the relationship of the obedience of Jesus to our obedience? The goal of this course is to formulate a theology of obedience that is attuned to questions of gendered and racial identities and history, as well as the ongoing realities of slavery’s social and economic echoes. Such a theology would articulate more deeply what it means to be an obedient church. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 698b, Religious Eros  Kathryn Tanner
This course concerns Christian interpretations of human desire, dissatisfaction, and the search for human happiness: the desire for God as the ground and goal of all human thought and action. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent. 3 Course cr

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

REL 615b, Introduction to Christian Ethics  Clifton Granby
This course is an introduction to Christian moral norms, ideals, and practices, and to some perennial disputes over their substance. Drawing upon a range of historical and contemporary sources, the course examines what difference Christian commitment makes for moral assessment—for considering the ends that human beings endorse, the actions we permit or prohibit, the traits of character we praise, tolerate, or admonish. The course takes as its point of departure some recent and influential work on the moral vision of the New Testament canon. On this basis, the course then asks how different Christians throughout the ages have looked to scripture for help thinking about the tightly interlocking issues of war, poverty, and politics. Throughout, the course brings these matters to bear on our own social moment, asking: How shall Christians love God and neighbor, show hospitality to strangers, and speak truth to power in this present age? Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 631a, Theological Ethics  Jennifer Herdt
This course grapples with some of the basic (albeit deeply contested) ideas by which Christian moral discourse is governed. Students examine theological accounts of what it means to live well, focusing mainly on classical and contemporary works of relevance to central problems in the academic study of Christian ethics, and religious ethics more generally: whether teleological conceptions of human flourishing comport with Christian faith; whether those conceptions can withstand philosophic critique; whether certain moral obligations can be universally applied to all; the sources of human action; the ethical significance of divine commands; and the concepts of virtue, goodness, evil, horror, and the sacred. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 615 or equivalent in terms of theological/philosophical background. 3 Course cr

LITURGICAL STUDIES

REL 651a, Digital Media, Liturgy, and Theology  Kathryn Tanner and Teresa Berger
This course inquires into ecclesial practices that have migrated online and are digitally mediated, especially those of prayer and worship. In recent years, both very old and entirely new liturgical practices have flourished in digital social space, from the live streaming of worship services to digital prayer chapels, virtual choirs, online pilgrimages, and digitally mediated devotions such as daily prayer via tweets or “pray-as-you-go” apps. Some communities have experimented with so-called cyber-baptisms and cyber-communions. And digital social space hosts communities of faith that exist only online, for example, in web-based interactive virtual reality environments. This course brings the tools and insights of new media theories, liturgical studies, and constructive theology to the inquiry into these ecclesial practices. Area II and Area V. Prerequisite: at least one liturgy and/or theology course (previous or concurrent) is highly desirable. 3 Course cr

REL 682a, Foundations of Christian Worship  Teresa Berger
This is the core course in Liturgical Studies. The course focuses on theological and historical approaches to the study of Christian worship, with appropriate attention to cultural context and contemporary issues. The first part of the course seeks to familiarize students with the foundations of communal, public prayer in the Christian tradition (such as its roots in Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament; its Trinitarian source and direction; its ways of figuring time, space, and human embodiment; its use of language, music, the visual arts, etc.). The second part offers a sketch of historical developments, from earliest Christian communities to present times. In addition, select class sessions focus on questions of overall importance for liturgical life, such as the relationship between gender differences and worship life, and the contemporary migration of liturgical practices into cyberspace. Area II. 3 Course cr
REL 687a, The Books of Common Prayer  Andrew McGowan
A historical introduction to Anglican liturgical tradition from the sixteenth century to the present. After considering the origins and development of the first Books of Common Prayer during the Reformation, the course traces the English and American prayer book tradition, including the impact of the Tractarian and Liturgical Movements. The later part of the course includes the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and its supplementary materials, as well as the history of prayer book revision across the Anglican Communion in the twentieth century and to the present. Area II and Area III. Prerequisite: REL 682.  3 Course cr

DENOMINATIONAL COURSES

Note: Denominational colloquia are listed near the end of this chapter under Courses without Area Designations.

REL 609a, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions  William G. Rusch
Through lectures, assigned readings, and class discussion, this course examines the Book of Concord of 1580 and certain other documents that served as sources for the Book of Concord. The objectives of the course are twofold: to develop a knowledge and understanding of the Lutheran Confessions in their original context and to gain an appreciation of the contemporary importance and influence of these Confessions for Christianity in the twenty-first century. Given the nature of Lutheranism, what resources does it have in this century to proclaim the Christian faith and provide guidance for the Christian life? Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 618a, Anglican Theology and History I: Great Britain  Staff
A survey of the major developments in British Anglican theology, church history, and ecclesiology from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. This course is a companion to Anglican History and Theology II: ECUSA and the Anglican Communion (REL 619), making a two-term study of the historical evolution and theological traditions of Anglicanism. The two courses may be taken in any order, although there is some advantage to beginning here. The primary aim of the course is to analyze and make a constructive theological assessment of classical Anglican tradition and its modern forms, both as an examination of the enduring nature of Anglicanism and as a pastoral and spiritual resource for Christian life and ministry. Area II and Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 619a, Anglican Theology and History II: ECUSA and the Anglican Communion  Cathy George and Ian Douglas
This course explores the origins and development of the Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion. The class considers the development of the Episcopal Church from colonial origins to a multinational and increasingly multicultural church, with attention to various theological voices and to present polity. The vocation, identity, and history of the Episcopal Church are considered within a missiological framework for the church in America. The Anglican Communion is explored as an emerging postcolonial network of provinces, subject to contests over the character and identity of Anglicanism that continue to the present. A prevailing question is the relationship between unity and diversity within the Body of Christ. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 691a, Ecclesiology, Ministry, and Polity  Staff
Lectures on comparative ecclesiology, doctrines of the ministry, and patterns of church polity in Western Christianity. Sections are arranged to enable students to study the history, doctrine, worship, and polity of their own denominations. Sections on Baptist, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, A.M.E. Zion, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist polities are offered, most in alternate years. Area II.  3 Course cr