RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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The Religious Studies curriculum approaches the history of human thought and practice while focusing on specific geographical, cultural, and philosophical areas of scholarly interest. Courses explore when, how, and why communities forge systems of value. Faculty guide students to examine institutions, practices, texts, and ideas simultaneously: to see how texts influence institutions, how institutions prescribe habits, and how human beings resist and reiterate the given institutions and practices of their specific geographic and historical contexts. The Religious Studies department is particularly known for its promotion of scholarly research by undergraduates. Undergraduate majors acquire the linguistic, philosophical, and historical acumen necessary for an in-depth research project during their senior year.

Religious Studies course offerings, other than freshman seminars, are arranged in four categories. Group A features general and comparative courses that engage more than one tradition, concept, or text. Group B includes survey courses that provide a broad introduction to a particular religious tradition or scripture in historical context. Group C includes courses on specialized topics in religious studies, both introductory and intermediate. Group D offers advanced courses on specialized topics and typically have specific prerequisites or require the permission of the instructor. Students who want a broad introduction to the study of religions can choose courses listed under Groups A or B, though courses listed under Group C are also open without prerequisite. Religious Studies majors develop specialized concentrations as they plan a major program in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies and other members of the faculty.

The major The department offers two programs for students majoring in Religious Studies: the standard major and a major in which religious studies is combined with another subject closely related to the senior essay. Both programs require a core of courses, a seminar, and a two-term senior essay.

Core requirement A core of six courses in Religious Studies is required of all majors and should be selected in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies. One core course, normally from Group A, involves the comparative study of religions. Three core courses, normally from Groups B and C, concentrate on the historical or textual study of three different religious traditions or regions. Students are encouraged to select religions and regions as widely divergent as possible in order to balance in-depth study with global diversity and connection. One core course focuses on systematic thought (ethics, philosophy of religion, or theology). The final core course is RLST 490, the junior seminar on the academic study of religion.

Seminar requirement Before the end of the junior year, students must complete a seminar (in addition to the junior seminar) that requires a major research paper. In Program I, this seminar must be an elective in Religious Studies. In Program II, it may be a course in Religious Studies, or it may constitute one of the four term courses outside the department.

Program I. The standard major Program I consists of twelve term courses in Religious Studies, including the core of six required courses, the two-semester senior essay, and four electives. The electives are usually selected from Groups C and D and form a coherent unit to help the student prepare for the senior essay. Certain cognate courses in other departments that are integral to the student’s area of concentration may count toward the major with permission of the director of undergraduate studies. Normally the maximum number of cognate courses that may be applied is two. Two terms of an ancient language related to the study of religion may, with permission of the director of undergraduate studies, be counted.

Program II. Religious studies with another subject Program II consists of eight term courses in Religious Studies (the core of six required courses and the two-semester senior essay) and four term courses outside the department, one of which may fulfill the seminar requirement outlined above. The four courses outside the department need not directly concern religion, but they must form a coherent, focused unit of concentration. Through them students can develop expertise in a methodological approach, cultural area, historical period, or body of literature contributing to the senior essay. Examples of successful combinations might be: four courses in Chinese history, language, and literature with a senior essay topic on Chinese Buddhism; four courses in early American history and literature with a topic on colonial American religion; four courses in a specific area of biology and medical science with a topic on biomedical ethics; four courses in globalization and international relations with a topic on religion and globalization. Each student’s petition to take this program will be judged on its contribution to the student’s senior essay. Normally, introductory courses in other departments may not...
count among the outside courses; appropriate language courses at a higher level may. Students electing Program II must, at the end of the junior year and in no case later than the beginning of the senior year, obtain approval for their proposed program from the director of undergraduate studies. Students who think they may elect this program should consult the director of undergraduate studies as early as possible in their studies to begin suitable selection of courses.

**Senior requirement** Students in both programs must write a senior essay under the supervision of a faculty adviser in the student’s area of concentration. In selecting a senior essay topic, students normally choose a subject on which they have completed course work before commencing the senior year. The essay counts as two term courses toward the major and is taken in both terms of the senior year. The student should begin choosing a senior essay topic during the second term of the junior year, and early in the first term of the senior year must submit a Statement of Intention approved by a faculty adviser and the director of undergraduate studies. The senior essay course, RLST 491 and 492, includes research and writing assignments as well as colloquia in which seniors present and discuss their research. The student must submit at least ten pages of the essay to the director of undergraduate studies by the last day of classes in the first term in order to receive a grade of "satisfactory" for that term.

**Courses in the Divinity School** Students in Yale College may take certain courses in the Divinity School, and Divinity School faculty are eligible to advise senior essays. Information about courses and faculty may be found in the Divinity School bulletin (http://www.yale.edu/printer/bulletin/htmlfiles/div). Some Divinity School courses may count toward the major, with permission of the director of undergraduate studies.

Students majoring in Religious Studies who plan to do graduate work in the subject are strongly encouraged to study languages of which a reading knowledge will be needed for their graduate program.

**REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR**

**Prerequisites** None

**Number of courses** 12 term courses (incl senior req)

**Specific course required** RLST 490

**Distribution of courses** Both programs – 1 course in comparative religions; 3 courses in historical or textual study of religious traditions, as specified; 1 course in systematic thought, as specified; 1 sem other than junior sem, as specified; Program I – 4 electives; Program II – 4 nonintro courses in another subject linked with senior essay, approved by DUS

**Substitution permitted** Both programs – Divinity School courses, with DUS permission; Program I – 2 related courses in other depts, with DUS permission

**Senior requirement** Senior essay (RLST 491, 492)

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**Freshman Seminar**

* RLST 017a, Authenticity  Noreen Khawaja
The origins of personal authenticity in Western thought and the impact of this idea on modern notions of truth, sincerity, and identity. The "true" self as a historical idea and as a social performance. Readings in philosophy, literature, and religious thought from antiquity to the present. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  

**General, Comparative, and Thematic Courses (Group A)**

RLST 111b / AMST 111b / WGSS 111b, Sexuality and Religion  Kathryn Lofton
The relationship between ideas about sex and ideas about religion; the interrelations of sexual and religious practices. Case studies from religious cultures in the United States. Examination of presumptive norms about sexuality, religion, and American culture.  

* RLST 122b / MUSI 355b / SAST 373b, Music and Hinduism  Eben Graves
The variety of ways in which music and sound are incorporated into Hindu traditions. The music and sound of Hindu traditions. How concepts of sacred sound, Sanskrit aesthetics, religious praxis and theology, musical virtuosity, nationalism, and issues of gender are central to understanding relationships between music and Hinduism. Hindu musical performance and discourse in the context of South Asian history, politics, and culture.

**Surveys of Religious Traditions (Group B)**

RLST 134a, Buddhism in China and Japan  Eric Greene
Introduction to Buddhism in East Asia through a close reading of original sources in translation. Focus on the lives and teachings of several leading monks. Topics include meditation, faith, rebirth, and secret rituals.

* RLST 147b / JDST 235b / MMES 235b, Introduction to Judaism in the Ancient World  Steven Fraade
The emergence of classical Judaism in its historical setting. Jews and Hellenization; varieties of early Judaism; apocalyptic and postapocalyptic responses to suffering and catastrophe; worship and atonement without sacrificial cult; interpretations of scriptures; law and life; the rabbis; the synagogue; faith in reason; Sabbath and festivals; history and its redemption. No prior background in Jewish history assumed.
**RLST 148a / ER&M 219a / HIST 219a / JDST 200a / MMES 149a, Jewish History and Thought to Early Modern Times**  Ivan Marcus
A broad introduction to the history of the Jews from biblical beginnings until the European Reformation and the Ottoman Empire. Focus on the formative period of classical rabbinic Judaism and on the symbiotic relationships among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Jewish society and culture in its biblical, rabbinic, and medieval settings. Counts toward either European or non-Western distributional credit within the History major, upon application to the director of undergraduate studies. HU RP

**RLST 155b / MMES 193b, The Golden Age of Islam**  Gerhard Böwering
The development of Islamic civilization in the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, Iran, and India from Muhammad through the Mongol invasions to the rise of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires (600–1500 C.E.). Emphasis on the intellectual and religious history of Islam in the age of the caliphates and during the rule of regional dynasties. HU

**RLST 156b, Sex in the Bible**  Dale Martin
A survey of the Bible from Genesis through Revelation, with a focus on depictions of sexuality, sexual behavior, gender, and household. Issues of culture, ethics, and ideology in the construction of sexuality and gender. HU

**RLST 160a / HIST 280a / ITAL 315a, The Catholic Intellectual Tradition**  Carlos Eire and Giuseppe Mazzotta
Introductory survey of the interaction between Catholicism and Western culture from the first century to the present, with a focus on pivotal moments and crucial developments that defined both traditions. Key beliefs, rites, and customs of the Roman Catholic Church, and the ways in which they have found expression; interaction between Catholics and the institution of the Church; Catholicism in its cultural and sociopolitical matrices. Close reading of primary sources. HU

**RLST 170a / MMES 192a, The Religion of Islam**  Gerhard Böwering
The rise of Islam in Arabia; Muhammad and the Qur’an; Muslim tradition and religious law; crucial issues of Islamic philosophy and theology; basic beliefs and practices of the Muslim community; Sufism and Shi’ism; religious institutions and modern trends; fundamentalism and violence; freedom and democracy. HU

**Topics in Religious Studies (Group C)**

* **RLST 183b / SAST 366b, The Bhagavad Gita**  Hugh Flick
An examination of the Bhagavad Gita in its historical and religious context. Exploration of the major interpretations of this important religious text. All readings in translation. HU TR

* **RLST 185a / SAST 368a, The Mahabharata**  Hugh Flick
Examination of the religious and cultural significance of the world’s longest epic poem within the Hindu bhakti religious tradition. Emphasis on the core narrative, the embedded narratives, and the internal philosophical discourses, including the Bhagavad Gita. HU TR

**RLST 187a / HSAR 142a / SAST 265a, Introduction to the History of Art: The Classical Buddhist World**  Youn-mi Kim
Buddhist art and architecture of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and central Asia from earliest beginnings to the tenth century, and including Greco-Roman, Persian, and Islamic contact. HU

* **RLST 189a, Introduction to Indian Philosophy**  Phyllis Granoff
Introduction to Indian philosophy through the study of selected texts in translation. Topics include the existence and nature of the soul. HU

**RLST 193a / HIST 216a / JDST 332a / MMES 197a, Zionism**  Shaun Halper
Introduction to the core ideas of the Zionist movement from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Focus on internal Jewish debates and criticism of the movement by European and Middle Eastern intellectuals. Social, political, cultural, and messianic ideological strands within the movement and their interpretations of various historical experiences and ideas located in the Jewish tradition. HU

* **RLST 202a / JDST 339a / LITR 418a / MMES 418a, Sovereignty, Diaspora, and Nationality in Modern Hebrew Literature**  Hannan Hever
Overview of the Poetics, Culture, History and Political dynamics of Modern Hebrew Literature as a national literature over the last 300 years. The course will trace the literary development of its diasporic condition in Europe through the Hebrew Literature that is created in the Israeli Jewish sovereignty. Readings in translation. No background in Jewish literature, Hebrew literature, or Jewish culture is required. HU

* **RLST 204b / HIST 261Jb, Enlightenment and Religion**  David Sorkin
The relationship between the Enlightenment and religion, with a focus on Western and Central Europe across confessional boundaries (Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism). How Enlightenment thinkers viewed religion; uses made of the Enlightenment by theologians and clergy. WR, HU

* **RLST 231a / MMES 231a, Reason and Revelation in Islam**  Lambertus van Lit
Exploration of the many dimensions of Islamic discussions on reason and revelation, mostly through primary sources. How modern science and Enlightenment have been received in the Muslim world. The fundamental building blocks of classical Islam concerning reason and revelation. How some of the greatest minds of Islam (c. 800–1300 C.E.) have used these building blocks. WR, HU
Issues of faith examined through poetry, with a focus on modern Christian poems from 1850 to the present. Some attention to poems from other faith traditions, as well as to secular and antireligious poetry.  HU

Introduction to the study of Jesus in canonical and noncanonical sources. History of the quest for the historical Jesus, methods for reconstructing a historical account of Jesus, and versions of Jesus as offered by the early Gospels. No background in New Testament assumed.  WR, HU RP

Study of the period of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned 1353–1336 B.C.E.), often termed the Amarna Revolution, from historical, literary, religious, artistic, and archaeological perspectives. Consideration of the wider Egyptian, ancient Near Eastern, African, and Mediterranean contexts. Examination of the international diplomacy, solar theology, and artistic developments of the period. Reading of primary source material in translation.  HU

Readings of Greek works produced in late antiquity by early Christian writers. Genres include epistles, martyr narratives, biblical commentaries, hymns, theological treatises, sermons, and monastic sayings. Prerequisite: reading knowledge of ancient Greek.  HU

An intellectual history of the international human right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and of the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment guarantee of religious free exercise. Application to recent controversies over the balance of religious liberties and anti-discrimination principles, children’s and women’s rights, and labor interests.  WR, HU

An exploration of four styles of atheistic rejection of classical Christian theism: those of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Derrida. Consideration of whether there are rational means for settling the question of the existence of the classical Christian God.  HU

Examination of a series of religious revolutions in Europe between 1450 and 1650. The causes and nature of the reformations that changed the religious, political, social, and economic landscapes of early modern Europe and shaped the course of Western civilization as a whole.  HU

Study of the oldest sources available for the study of ancient Iranian religion, with attention to the historical and cultural backgrounds of extant texts. Focus on a close reading of the Songs of Zarathustra, whose religious and philosophical views shaped the future history of Iran. All readings in translation.  HU RP

The development of regimes of government in Muslim countries since the nineteenth century. Early constitutional movements, the rise of political Islam, the management of religion in various twentieth-century states, the Iranian revolution, and the growth of Salafi ideas, culminating in the ISIS “caliphate.”  SO

Exploration of the end, or aim, of metaphysics in light of the supposition that it is at an end. Readings from classics and critics in the history of philosophy and religion.  WR, HU

Foundations of political thought, including ideas such as modern sovereignty, social contract, international law, toleration, and republicanism, were laid at a peculiarly religious period in European history. From 1460 through 1670, writings on political theory and theoretical texts by Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes, and Spinoza coincided with Europe’s Wars of Religion, laying groundwork for contemporary theological and political questions.  HU

Christianity as a window into the intellectual history of the late modern West. How the old debates about faith and reason give way to the more plastic oppositions between critique and apologetics, ideas and ideology. Readings from Luther, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Barth, Marion, Tanner, Zizek.  HU

Study of the importance of rituals to all religions and cultures and the difficulty articulating the meaning of “ritual” and how ritual action is distinguished from other forms of behavior. Topics include: why people perform rituals; why rituals are important; symbolic content; relationship between ritual and doctrine; social or psychological origins; and practical effects of ritual. Review writings of key thinkers in religious studies, anthropology, and philosophy.  HU

Introduction to performance practices that have emerged through encounters between Islam and South Asian cultures. The diverse meanings, pleasures, and experiences such practices have offered practitioners and publics over time and space. Case studies of Islamic performance traditions examined alongside instances of creative reinventions in contemporary South Asia and its diasporas.  HU
Advanced Topics in Religious Studies (Group D)

* RLST 400a / JDST 256a, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Legal Polemic and Identity Formation in Ancient Judaism  Steven Fraade
  Study of one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Miqts.at Manaseh Torah (4QMMT), which polemically defines the author’s community by distinguishing its religious practices and history from those of its opponents. The text’s elucidation of debates between ancient Jewish groups, as reported in second temple and early rabbinic literatures. Legal discourse and its narrative accompaniments as they rhetorically contribute to the socioreligious self-understanding of the Qumran covenantal community. Prerequisite: reading proficiency in ancient Hebrew. L5, HU

* RLST 407a / JDST 391a, Midrash Seminar: The Song of Moses  Staff
  Close reading of the earliest running commentary to Moses’ farewell song in Deuteronomy 32, as found in the collection Sifre Haazinu. The rhetoric and early rabbinic methods of scriptural interpretation; the commentary's place in the history of interpretation and its contributions to the historical study of ancient Jewish society and culture. Prerequisite: reading fluency in ancient Hebrew. L5, HU

* RLST 440b / GMAN 317b / PHIL 414b, Martin Heidegger  Noreen Khawaja
  A comprehensive introduction to the oeuvre of Martin Heidegger. Key texts from Being and Time to the essay on technology, including the 'Rectoral Address' of 1933 and writings on poetry, art, and theology. Consideration of Heidegger’s work in systematic and historical terms. Focus on his attempt to use philosophy to incite an "essential transformation in the history of Western spirit" along with its stakes, limitations, and consequences. HU

Other Courses

* RLST 488a and RLST 489b, Individual Tutorial  Staff
  For students who wish, under faculty supervision, to investigate an area in religious studies not covered by regular departmental offerings. The course may be used for research or for directed reading. A long essay or several short ones are required. To apply, students should present a prospectus with bibliography of work they propose to undertake to the director of undergraduate studies together with a letter of support from the faculty member who will direct the work.

* RLST 490b, Seminar in the Study of Religion  Nancy Levene
  Seminar on elements of the study of religion. Topic and readings vary from year to year. Required for all junior majors; open to others with permission of the instructor.

* RLST 491a and RLST 492b, The Senior Essay  Harry Stout
  Students writing their senior essays meet periodically in the fall and weekly in the spring for a colloquium directed by the director of undergraduate studies. The essay, written under the supervision of a member of the department, should be a substantial paper between 12,500 and 15,000 words.