RELIGIOUS STUDIES

451 College Street, 203.432.0828
http://religiousstudies.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
Kathryn Lofton

Acting Chair (2018–2019)
Harry Stout

Director of Graduate Studies
Christine Hayes

Professors Harold Attridge (Divinity), Joel Baden (Divinity), Gerhard Böwering, John J. Collins (Divinity), Stephen Davis, Carlos Eire, Steven Fraade, Paul Franks (Philosophy), Bruce Gordon (Divinity), Philip Gorski (Sociology), Phyllis Granoff, Frank Griffel, John Hare (Divinity), Christine Hayes, Jennifer Herdt (Divinity), Noel Lenski (Classics), Kathryn Lofton, Ivan Marcus, Andrew McGowan (Divinity), Sally Promey (American Studies), Gregory Sterling (Divinity), Harry Stout, Kathryn Tanner (Divinity), Shawkat Toorawa (Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations), Miroslav Volf (Divinity), Robert Wilson

Associate Professors Zareena Grewal (American Studies), Willie Jennings (Divinity), Noreen Khawaja, Hwansoo Kim, Nancy Levene, Chloé Starr (Divinity), Eliyahu Stern, Tisa Wenger (Divinity), Travis Zadeh

Assistant Professors Maria Doerfler, Eric Greene

Senior Lecturers Supriya Gandhi, John Grim (Forestry & Environmental Studies), Margaret Olin, Mary Evelyn Tucker (Forestry & Environmental Studies)

Lecturers Jimmy Daccache, Felicity Harley-McGowan (Divinity)

FIELDS OF STUDY


SPECIAL ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

The department requires the scores of the GRE General Test; previous study in areas relevant to the chosen field of study, including ancient languages where applicable; and a writing sample of 20–30 pages, which will be evaluated for both content and style. Prospective students must apply in one of the ten fields of study, and when requesting information they should specify their particular field of interest.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Students are required to take twelve term courses that meet the Graduate School Honors requirement, including RLST 510, Method and Theory, normally taken in a student’s first year. Proficiency in two modern scholarly languages, normally French and German, must be shown, one before the end of the first year, the other before the beginning of the third; this may be done by passing an examination administered by the department, by accreditation from a Yale Summer School course designed for this purpose, or by a grade of A or B in one of Yale’s intermediate language courses. Mastery of the languages needed in one’s chosen field (e.g., Chinese, Hebrew, Greek, Japanese) is also required in certain fields of study. A set of four qualifying examinations is designed for each student, following guidelines and criteria set by each field of study; these are normally completed in the third year. The dissertation prospectus must be approved by a colloquium, and the completed dissertation by a committee of readers and the departmental faculty. Upon completion of all predissertation requirements, including the prospectus, students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. This is expected before the seventh term in American Religious History, Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Modernity, Religious Ethics, and Theology; before the eighth term in other fields. Students begin writing their dissertation in the fourth year and normally will have finished by the end of the sixth. There is no oral examination on the dissertation.

In the Department of Religious Studies, the faculty considers learning to teach to be an important and integral component of the professional training of its graduate students. Students are therefore required to teach as teaching fellows for at least two years during their graduate programs. Such teaching normally takes place during their third and fourth years, unless other arrangements are approved by the director of graduate studies.

A combined Ph.D. degree is available with African American Studies. Consult department for details.
MASTER’S DEGREES

M.Phil. and M.A. (both en route to the Ph.D.) See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations. Students in Religious Studies must take seven courses to be eligible for the M.A. degree.

Program materials are available online at http://religiousstudies.yale.edu.

COURSES

RLST 510a, Method and Theory  Travis Zadeh
Required seminar for doctoral students in Religious Studies. Others admitted with instructor’s permission.

RLST 522b, Early Modern Spain  Carlos Eire
Reading and discussion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish texts (all available in English translation) and also in recent scholarship on early modern Spain.

RLST 567a / SAST 562a, Readings in Pali Texts  Phyllis Granoff
In this course we read a selection of ritual texts from India’s three classical religions, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Prerequisite: a knowledge of Sanskrit.

RLST 592b / HIST 888b, Society and Religion on the Silk Road  Eric Greene and Staff
An introduction to artifacts and documents pertaining to social history and religion from the most important sites on the Northern and Southern Silk Roads in China, including Niya, Kizil, Turfan, and Dunhuang. Assigned readings are in English. Readers of Chinese also participate in a separate section reading documents in classical Chinese from Turfan and Dunhuang.

RLST 594a / EALL 700a, The Three Teachings in Medieval China  Lucas Bender and Eric Greene
This course explores intersections between the Three Teachings—Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism—in late medieval China, focusing on the seventh through the ninth century. Too often studied in isolation from one another, these religious and intellectual teachings were deeply intertwined throughout this period, and scholars aiming to understand the religious, intellectual, and literary history of the Tang need to be able to read broadly across their boundaries. All primary readings are in classical/literary Chinese. Open to undergraduates with sufficient language skills. Prerequisite: reading ability in classical/literary Chinese.

RLST 595a, Readings in Indian Philosophy  Phyllis Granoff
In this course we read selections from a variety of sanskrit texts, the samkyatvatvakaumudi, madhyamika karika, brahmasutra bhasya, and pramananayatattvalokalankaara.

RLST 598b / EAST 511b, Modern Korean Buddhism in the Global Context  Hwansoo Kim
This course situates modern Korean Buddhism in the global context of the late nineteenth century to the present. Through critical examination of the dynamic relationship between Korean Buddhism and the Buddhisms of key East Asian cities—Shanghai, Tokyo, Taipei, and Lhasa—the course seeks to understand modern East Asian Buddhism in a transnational light. Discussion includes analyzing the impact of Christian missionaries, pan-Asian and global ideologies, colonialism, Communism, capitalism, war, science, hypermodernity, and atheism.

RLST 613a / CLSS 877a / CPLT 556a, Rhetorics of the Ancient World  Michal Beth Dinkler and Irene Peirano
This interdisciplinary course takes as its starting point Greco-Roman rhetoric as a codified system and explores its relevance for contemporary interpretation of ancient texts. Moving back and forth between rhetoric as a set of norms and rhetoric as a condition of discourse, we engage with contemporary rhetorical studies in Classics and Biblical studies. Topics include rhetoric and narrative, exemplarity and imitation across the literary and spiritual realms, “anti-rhetoricism,” embedded rhetorical performances (e.g., speeches, oratory, etc.), and nonverbal forms of persuasion (e.g., visual, emotional, etc.).

RLST 649a, Jesus to Muhammad: Ancient Christianity to the Rise of Islam  Stephen Davis
The history of Christianity and the development of Western culture from Jesus to the early Middle Ages. The creation of orthodoxy and heresy; Christian religious practice; philosophy and theology; politics and society; gender; Christian literature in its various forms, up to and including the early Islamic period.

RLST 653a, Gnostic Texts in Coptic  Harold Attridge
The course reads selected portions of important texts from the Nag Hammadi collection, including the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, Thunder, the Treatise on Resurrection, the Tripartite Tractate, as well as other noncanonical texts preserved in Coptic, including the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas. Prerequisite: EGYP 510 or equivalent.

RLST 658b / EGYP 512b, Egyptian Monastic Literature in Coptic  Stephen Davis
Readings in the early Egyptian classics of Christian ascetism in Sahidic Coptic, including the Desert Fathers and Shenoute. Prerequisite: EGYP 510b or equivalent.

RLST 691a, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Europe  Carlos Eire
Readings in primary texts from the period 1500–1700 that focus on definitions of the relationship between the natural and supernatural realms, both Catholic and Protestant. Among the topics to be covered: mystical ecstasy, visions, apparitions, miracles, and demonic possession. All assigned readings in English translation.
RLST 703a, Interrogating the Crisis of Islam  Zareena Grewal
In official and unofficial discourses in the United States, diagnoses of Islam’s various “crises” are ubiquitous, and Muslim “hearts and minds” are viewed as the “other” front in the War on Terror. Since 9/11, the U.S. State Department has made the reform of Islam an explicit national interest, pouring billions of dollars into USAID projects in Muslim-majority countries, initiating curriculum development programs for madrasas in South Asia, and establishing the Arabic Radio Sawa and the satellite TV station Al-Hurra to propagate the U.S. administration’s political views as well as what it terms a “liberal” strain of Islam. Muslims Americans are also consumed by debates about the “crisis” of Islam, a crisis of religious authority in which the nature and rapidity of change in the measures of authority are felt to be too difficult to assimilate. This course maps out the various and deeply politically charged contemporary debates about the “crisis of Islam” and the question of Islamic reform through an examination of official U.S. policy, transnational pulp Islamic literature, fatwas and essays authored by internationally renowned Muslim jurists and scholars, and historical and ethnographic works that take up the category of crisis as an interpretive device.

RLST 705b / AMST 705b / HIST 582b, Readings in Religion in American Society, 1600–2018  Tisa Wenger
This seminar explores intersections of religion and society in American history from the colonial period to the present as well as methodological problems important to their study. It is designed to give graduate students a working knowledge of the field, ranging from major recent studies to bibliographical tools. In short, the seminar is a broad readings course surveying religion in American history from colonization to the present. It is not a specialized research seminar, but it does require a basic understanding of historiography.

RLST 715a, The Theology and Philosophy of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi  Frank Griffel
Recent research has shown that Fakhr al-Din al-Razi was the most influential Muslim theologian in the so-called postclassical period in Islam after 1100. In his works, Islamic theology and philosophy reached a mature state that brings together several intellectual traditions, among them that of classical Ashʿarism, of Aristotelian philosophy (falsafa), of al-Ghazali’s critique of falsafa, and of Sufism. The kind of synthesis that Fakhr al-Din al-Razi created dominated the education of Sunni theologians up to the mid-eighteenth century, when the confrontation with modernity created new priorities. This seminar takes a close look at this understudied thinker. The goal is to understand the most widespread kind of Islamic theology of the centuries between 1200 and 1750, a time that is not yet covered in textbooks on Islamic intellectual history. We read selections of Fakhr al-Din’s work in the Arabic original. Prerequisites: a firm grounding in classical Arabic and permission of the instructor.

RLST 716a, Theology and Philosophy  Frank Griffel
Survey of current major trends in Islamic theology and philosophy, from teachings of the Qur’an to contemporary Muslim thought. The systematic character of Muslim thought and of the arguments given by thinkers; reason vs. revelation; the emergence of Sunnism in the tenth through eleventh centuries; the reaction of Muslim theology (from 1800) to the challenges of the West; and contemporary Muslim thought.

RLST 720b, The Qur’an and Its Interpretation  Gerhard Böwering
Intensive study of the Qur’an with special emphasis on its biblical roots. Readings in Arabic commentaries on the Qur’an. Prerequisites: advanced knowledge of Arabic and permission of the instructor.

RLST 731a, Islam, Conquest, and Conversion  Travis Zadeh
Through examination of conquest and religious conversion in the formative periods of Islamic history, this course interrogates the idea that Islam was spread by violent domination. Case studies are drawn from the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, Iberia, and West Africa.

RLST 732a, Seminar on Sufism  Gerhard Böwering
A study of Islamic asceticism and mysticism with emphasis on the early development of Sufism. Readings in Arabic Sufi sources of the ninth to eleventh century. Prerequisites: reading knowledge of classical Arabic and permission of the instructor.

RLST 730b, Jonathan Edwards and American Puritanism  Harry Stout and Kenneth Minkema
This course offers students an opportunity for intensive reading in and reflections upon the significance of early America’s premier philosophical theologian through an examination of the writings of the Puritans, through engagement with Edwards’s own writings, and through selected recent studies of Euro-Indian contact. Through primary and secondary literature, the course familiarizes students with the life and times of Edwards and encourages reading and discussion about his background, historical and intellectual contexts, and legacy.

RLST 746a / JDST 736a / NELC 701a, Midrash Seminar: The Revelation at Sinai  Steven Fraade
The giving of the Torah to Israel as seen through rabbinic eyes. Close readings of midrashic texts. Views of revelation, tradition, interpretation, law, and commandment in their literary and historical contexts. Interpretations and interpretive strategies compared and contrasted with those of other ancient biblical exegetes (Jewish and non-Jewish). Prerequisite: reading fluency in ancient Hebrew.

RLST 751b, Introduction to Judaism in the Ancient World: From Temple to Talmud  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 rabbi; the synagogue; faith in reason; Sabbath and festivals; history and its redemption.
RLST 752a / JDST 727a / NELC 702a, Mishnah Seminar: Tractate Ta’anit on Fasting  Steven Fraade
Close study of a section of the Mishnah, the earliest digest of Jewish law, treating procedures for public fasts in response to drought and other forms of collective adversity. Particular attention to the textual practices of rabbinic legal discourse in relation to its social function, and to the interplay of law and narrative. Prerequisite: reading fluency in ancient Hebrew.

RLST 763a / JDST 701a, The Bible  Christine Hayes
This course introduces students to the writings common to both Jewish and Christian scripture (the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh found in all Bibles) and examines these writings as diverse and often conflicting expressions of the religious life and thought of ancient Israel as well as a foundational element of Western civilization. Special emphasis on the writings’ cultural and historical setting in the ancient Near East; close reading of selected passages; the interpretive history of selected passages influential in Western culture. Students are also introduced to a wide range of critical and literary approaches to biblical studies, including source criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and contemporary literary criticism. Students view course lectures, which survey the entire Bible, online; class time focuses on comparative materials, close readings, and the interpretation of specific biblical passages in Jewish and Christian culture.

RLST 774b, History of Jewish Culture, 1500 to the Present  Staff
A broad introduction to the history of Jewish culture from the late Middle Ages until the present. Emphasis on the changing interaction of Jews with the larger society as well as the transformation of Judaism in its encounter with modernity.

RLST 775a / CPLT 688a / JDST 842a, Political Theology  Hannan Hever
This course investigates the theological aspects of modern political ideologies. Subjects include sovereignty, universalism, law, election, commandment, and messianism. Primary readings include Carl Schmitt, Martin Buber, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Daniel Boyarin, and Giorgio Agamben.

RLST 776a / HIST 601a / JDST 790a, Jewish History, Thought, and Narratives in Medieval Societies  Ivan Marcus
Research seminar that focuses on the two medieval Jewish subcultures of Ashkenaz (northern Christian Europe) and Sefarad (mainly Muslim and Christian Spain).

RLST 782a / JDST 654a, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Judaism  John Collins
This course explores various forms of early biblical interpretation in the Second Temple period, including Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and implicit interpretations in biblical paraphrases. Prerequisites: Hebrew and Greek.

RLST 797a / HIST 597a / JDST 861a, Twentieth-Century Jewish Politics: Holocaust, Israel, and American History  David Sorkin
This course explores the changing nature of Jewish politics in relationship to three of the twentieth century’s major events. First we examine Jewish political behavior during the Holocaust, especially the notion of “resistance” vis-à-vis the so-called Jewish councils and the controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt’s book Eichmann in Jerusalem. Second, we probe the continuities and discontinuities in the establishment of the State of Israel, focusing on the politics of the “Yishuv” (Jewish settlement in Mandatory Palestine) and its relationship to British imperialism. Third, we analyze shifts in the domestic and foreign policies of the organized American Jewish community during the era of the civil rights movement (1946–64).

RLST 800a, Hebrew Bible Seminar: Problems in the History of Israelite Religion  Robert Wilson
An intensive study of important features of ancient Israelite religion, including the origins of monotheism, the priesthood, worship, prophecy, and apocalyptic.

RLST 803b / ANTH 531b / ARCG 531b / CLSS 813b / EALL 773b / HIST 502b / HSAR 564b / JDST 653b / NELC 533b, Sensory Experiences in Ancient Ritual  Carolyn Laferriere and Andrew Turner
A comparative exploration of the role the senses played in the performance of ancient and premodern ritual, drawing from a range of ancient traditions including those of Greece, Rome, and Egypt, and from cultural traditions of the Near East, India, China, and the New World. Placing particular emphasis on the relationship between art and ritual, we discuss the methods available for reconstructing ancient sensory experience, how the ancient cultures conceived of the senses and perception, and how worshipers’ sensory experiences, whether visual, sonic, olfactory, gustatory, or haptic, were integral aspects in their engagement with the divine within religious ritual. This seminar incorporates material in the Yale Art Gallery.

RLST 832a / ARCG 611a / CLSS 811a / NELC 611a, The Ancient Egyptian Temple as Cosmos: Correlation of Architecture and Decoration Program  Christina Geisen
The course focuses on the correlation of archaeology, iconography, and philology by analyzing ancient Egyptian temples under the specific consideration of the interplay of architecture and decoration program. The different types of temples and their developments over time are discussed. The main focus is on the function of each temple type, which can only be understood by analyzing the architecture of the monument, its decoration program, related texts (such as rituals, myths, and festival description, but also historical texts), and its place in the cultic landscape of the specific location. The class also provides an overview of rituals performed and festivals celebrated in the temples, as well as of the administrative sphere of the temple. Optional field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to see the Temple of Dendur. No previous knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture or languages is necessary; all texts are read in translation.

RLST 890a or b, Advanced Topics in Religion and Modernity  Staff
Advanced seminar for doctoral students working at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and politics in the modern period. Readings and topics change from year to year.
RLST 892b / ENGL 959b, Interdisciplinary Philosophy  Noreen Khawaja
Seminar for humanities doctoral students who have theoretical interests and who are seeking to explore and strengthen the philosophical dimension of their work. Part I of the course is reading and discussion, including philosophical works and works of recent scholarship across disciplines which have something to teach scholars in literary studies, cultural studies, religious studies, and science studies about how to link, for example, the ethnographic and ontological, history and theory of mind, close reading and phenomenology, affect and aesthetics. Part II centers on students’ own research projects. Collaborative development, discussion, critique.

RLST 905a, Theology Doctoral Seminar  Linn Tonstad
Spurred by contemporary criticisms of systematic theology, this course considers the various literary forms that theological writing takes, their theological presuppositions and theological effects, with attention to the influence of differences in historical and cultural contexts. Required of Ph.D. students in Theology.