REligious studies

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

Chair
Frank Griffel

Director of Graduate Studies
Christine Hayes [F]
Noreen Khawaja [Sp]

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

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

Assistant Professors Maria Doerfler, Supriya Gandhi, Eric Greene, Nicole Turner

Senior Lecturers John Grim (School of the Environment), Margaret Olin, Mary Evelyn Tucker (School of the Environment)

Lecturers Jimmy Daccache, Felicity Harley-McGowan (Divinity)

fields of study

Students must enroll in one of the following fields of study: American Religious History, Asian Religions, Early Mediterranean and West Asian Religions, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Islamic Studies, Medieval and Modern Judaism, Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Modernity, Religious Ethics, and Theology.

special requirements for the Ph.D. degree

Students are required to take a minimum of 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. In the field of American Religious History, students must demonstrate proficiency in two skilled areas. Typically students study two foreign languages, but occasionally students study one foreign language and one technical knowledge area directly related to their proposed dissertation, such as musicology, financial accounting, or a performance art. 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 three terms as an academic requirement and one term as a financial requirement 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 510b, Method and Theory  Hwansoo Kim
Required seminar for doctoral students in Religious Studies. Others admitted with instructor's permission.

RLST 520a, Seminar on the Qur'ān and Its Interpretation  Gerhard Bowering
Each seminar session includes two sections: (1) general topics of the Qur'ān in textual and historical analysis, presented by the instructor, and (2) exegetical study of Qur'ānic passages, selected week by week, with emphasis on topics that imply Jewish or Christian background materials. Sessions are adjusted to online teaching. Prerequisite: basic reading knowledge of Arabic.

RLST 536a and RLST 537b, Readings in Indo-Islamic Texts  Supriya Gandhi
Close readings from a wide range of Urdu texts produced in South Asia. The selection of texts accommodates the research interests of enrolled students.

RLST 616a / HIST 603a / JDST 806a / MDVL 603a, Jews and Christians in the Formation of Europe, 500–1500  Ivan Marcus
This seminar explores how medieval Jews and Christians interacted as religious societies between 500 and 1500.

RLST 619b / CLSS 872b / MDVL 513b / NELC 683b, Law and History, Law in History: Premodern Civilizations through the Lens of Legal Historiography  Maria Doerfler and Travis Zadeh
This seminar invites students into a comparative exploration of the intersection of law, history, and historiography in the ancient and premodern world. Sessions explore these links across a variety of linguistic and geographic settings, including those of ancient and medieval India, China, Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as in different political, religious, literary, and archaeological contexts. The seminar constructs the category of law expansively to encompass civic, religious, and hybrid forms of legislation. In the process, we seek to explore, inter alia, questions of the relevance of history for the study of law, history's deployment in the context of legal writings, and law's concomitant relevance for historiography; the use of theoretical models, including those forged in modern and postmodern contexts, for the study of law and legal historiography; and the implications of discourses about law and history in premodernity for contemporary, post-secular societies.

RLST 626b / AFAM 626b / HIST 721b, African American Religious History  Nicole Turner
African American religions have been central to the African American experience since Africans arrived in North America. An amalgam of traditional African religions, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and African American ingenuity, African American religions are dynamic and multifaceted. Although they are often depicted as sources of black resilience and emblems of black resistance, they have also been critiqued for marginalizing and racializing black people, as well as encoding archaic gender paradigms and reinforcing class divisions. This course explores the ways histories of African American religions have produced these various interpretive frames. Questions that animate the course include: What role have African American religions played in African American life? How have scholars studied the history of African American religions and ultimately shaped the discourse about African American religious life, and by extension African American history? The course engages foundational works, such as Albert Raboteau's Slave Religion and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's Righteous Discontent, as well as newer works like Judith Weisenfeld's New World A-Coming and Matthew Harper's The End of Days.

RLST 635a, Philosophical Fragments  Nancy Levene
The point of departure for this course is Kierkegaard's 1844 work, *Philosophical Fragments, or A Fragment of Philosophy*. We read the book together with some of the works it refers to and presupposes, as well as works with which it can be freely associated. Concepts taken up include truth, history, interpretation, god, person, paradox, dialectic, irony, and creativity.

RLST 636a / EAST 502a / MUSI 589a, Popular Music and Christianity in Korea  Bo kyung Im
How do Korean popular musicians who identify as Christian position themselves in relation to the sonic worlds they inhabit? In what ways do their stylistic choices signal belonging to and/or disavowal of various social formations in the transpacific cultural imaginary? In this interdisciplinary graduate seminar, we interrogate the relationship between Christianity, popular music, and race through examination of case studies drawn primarily from early twenty-first-century Korea. Musical repertoires are analyzed within a framework that highlights transnational U.S.-Korean routes of religious and musical circulation. First, we address key theoretical and thematic foundations for the course. We then listen closely to important strands in Korean "church music," including Western classical singing, contemporary worship, and gospel. Finally, we focus on connections between Christianity and R&B/soul, ballad, hip-hop, and "K-pop"—genres traditionally defined as "secular." This survey of Korean popular music provides students the opportunity to consider the roles that "sacred" and "secular" constructs, race and ethnicity, imperialism, commerce, and aesthetics play in power-inflected processes of cultural globalization. Yale College juniors and seniors are welcome.

RLST 653a / EGYP 514a, Gnostic Texts in Coptic  Daniel Bohac
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 asceticism in Sahidic Coptic, including the Desert Fathers and Shenoute. Prerequisite: EGYP 510b or equivalent.
RLST 663a, Magic and Science in Islamic Thought  Travis Zadeh
This seminar explores authoritative discourses on magic, marvels, and science with readings drawn from the repertoire of classical Islamic writings.

RLST 679a / HIST 579a, Popular Religion in Europe, 1300–1700  Carlos Eire
Readings and discussion in recent scholarship on the history of religion in the Christian West in the late medieval and early modern periods.

RLST 705a / AMST 705a / HIST 582a, Readings in Religion in American Society, 1600–2018  Harry Stout and Kenneth Minkema
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 715b, 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 716b, Theories and Methods in Islamic Studies  Travis Zadeh

RLST 717a, Islamic Theology and Philosophy  Frank Griffel
Historical survey of major themes in Muslim 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 722a, Al-Ghazali’s Impact on Islamic Thought  Frank Griffel
Al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) critique of Aristotelian philosophy is one of the most important events in the intellectual history of Islam. This course looks into al-Ghazali’s project and sees how it changed the course of Islamic theology and Arabic philosophy. We study works of al-Ghazali as well as theological and philosophical literature after al-Ghazali that reacted to his critique. Reading is in Arabic.

RLST 739b / HIST 575b, 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 741b / JDST 721b / NELC 702b, 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 752b / NELC 702b, Mishnah Seminar: Tractate Megillah  Steven Fraade
Study of rabbinc texts treating rules for the public recitation and translation of the Scroll of Esther on the holiday of Purim and of other sacred scriptures and translations throughout the year, with special attention to the relation between law and ritual and the narrativity of both. EMWAR area of concentration designations: STHJ, RabJud, ScrInterp. 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 772a / JDST 760a, Rabbinics Research Seminar  Christine Hayes
An in-depth survey of research debates and of methods and resources employed in the study of classical (pre-Geonic) rabbinic literature of all genres. Required of graduate students in ancient Judaism. Prerequisites: knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, ability to read academic Hebrew, and permission of the instructor.

RLST 773a / HIST 596a / JDST 761a / MDVL 596a, 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.

RLST 775a / CPLT 688a / JDST 842a, What is Political Theology?  Hannan Hever
This course investigates the theological aspects of modern political ideologies. It takes its title from the controversial work of the German political thinker Carl Schmitt, who argued that theological assumptions stood behind the veneer of secular politics. Concepts such as sovereignty, citizenship, universalism, law, and the state of exception have been said to have their provenance in Jewish and Christian concepts of God, election, Messiah, the commandment, and antinomianism. In recent years the study of the theological origins of political concepts has become important for both those seeking to critique the neutrality of certain western-democratic institutions as well as those hoping to better understand the relationship between religion and politics. Subjects covered in the course include sovereignty, universalism, law, election, commandment, messianism, and nationalism. Readings focus on the work of modern political thinkers such as Benedict Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, and Bruno Bauer, whose normative works assumed a direct relationship between the political and the theological, as well as those who have theorized the very idea of political-theology, such as Martin Buber, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, Daniel Boyarin, and Giorgio Agamben.

RLST 777b / HIST 590b / JDST 764b / MDVL 590b, Jews in Muslim Lands from the Seventh through the Sixteenth Century  Ivan Marcus
Introduction to Jewish culture and society in Muslim lands from the Prophet Muhammad to Suleiman the Magnificent. Topics include Islam and Judaism; Jerusalem as a holy site; rabbinic leadership and literature in Baghdad; Jewish courtiers, poets, and philosophers in Muslim Spain; and the Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

RLST 797b / HIST 597b / JDST 861b, Twentieth-Century Jewish Politics  David Sorkin
This seminar explores major aspects of twentieth-century Jewish politics with an emphasis on new forms of political practice.

RLST 798a / HSAR 731a / JDST 692a, Witnessing, Remembrance, Commemoration  Margaret Olin
Memory and its expressions structure and inform many aspects of contemporary visual culture. Beginning with Albert Camus’s novel The Plague, this seminar pursues readings about memory and witnessing chosen from among the works of such writers as Sigmund Freud, Frances Yates, Maurice Halbwachs, and the authors of the book of Genesis, as well as writings about commemoration by James Young and Pierre Nora, among others. Discussions apply these readings to the study of witnessing and memorializing as artistic practices and examine visual realizations of such works, including some monuments and memorials near campus— but with a nonexclusive emphasis on Jewish examples, such as videos in the Fortunoff archive. Student projects center on theory or on special cases of witnessing or commemoration, ritual, memorial practice, and monuments, whether built, written, aural, electronic, or played out on the streets. Qualified undergraduates welcome.

RLST 832a, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions: Phoenician Epigraphy  Jimmy Daccache
This course is designed to lay the groundwork for the study of the Phoenician grammar, illustrated through a selection of a wide variety of inscriptions (monumental, cursive, numismatic, seal inscriptions). The chronological span stretches from the early centuries of the first millennium BCE to the Hellenistic period. The study of inscriptions—examined from photographs and drawings—follows a geographical and chronological order beginning with the inscriptions from “Phoenicia” itself (Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre), Anatoia, Cyprus, Greece, and Malta. At the end of the term, students have an overview of Phoenician inscriptions and are able to transcribe, translate, and analyze inscriptions from different periods.

RLST 834b / SMTC 546b, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions: Phoenician and Punic Epigraphy  Jimmy Daccache
This course completes the introduction of Phoenician epigraphy. It is designed to study the Phoenician and Punic inscriptions found in the western Mediterranean basin. The chronological span stretches from the eighth century BCE to the Roman period. The study of inscriptions—examined from photographs and drawings—follows a chronological order: Phoenician inscriptions from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (Italy, Iberian Peninsula); Punic and Late Punic inscriptions between the sixth century BCE and the first century CE (Italy, Iberian Peninsula, North Africa [Carthage, Maktar, etc.]). At the end of the term, students have a firm grasp of the Phoenician language and script and its evolution toward Punic and Late Punic. Prerequisite: RLST 832.

RLST 838a / SMTC 513a, Elementary Syriac I  Jimmy Daccache
Syriac was an Aramaic dialect that developed its own written tradition in the northern Levantine city of Edessa in classical antiquity. It became (and remains to this day) the liturgical language of Eastern Christianity in its various manifestations. This course provides students with a basic working knowledge of the language, namely, the three principal scripts (Estrangela, Ser#o, and “Nestorian”), verbal morphology, and the fundamental rules of syntax. Extracts of several Syriac texts are studied for purposes of application. At the end of the course, students are able to read, translate, and analyze simple texts.
RLST 840a / SMTC 520a, Introductory Ugaritic I  Jimmy Daccache
The Ugaritic texts from the Bronze Age found at Ras Shamra-Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria provide the earliest well-attested example of the use of alphabet writing. The Ugaritic corpus comprises more than 2,000 texts of several genres (myths, rituals, incantations, “scientific” manuals, letters, administrative documents, and others), written in a “cuneiform” script. This course prepares students to read and analyze Ugaritic texts, seeking also to foster a basic appreciation of the nature and diversity of Ugaritic literature.

RLST 841b / SMTC 521b, Introductory Ugaritic II  Jimmy Daccache
The Ugaritic texts from the Bronze Age found at Ras Shamra-Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria provide the earliest well-attested example of the use of alphabet writing. The Ugaritic corpus comprises more than 2,000 texts of several genres (myths, rituals, incantations, “scientific” manuals, letters, administrative documents, and others), written in a “cuneiform” script. This course completes the introduction to Ugaritic language. Students have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of Ugaritic literature by reading and analyzing texts in the major genres of Ugaritic literature, with special emphasis on mythological texts. Prerequisite: RLST 840/SMTC 520.

RLST 859a / AMST 816a / HSAR 834a, Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism  Sally Promey and Orgu Dalgic
This interdisciplinary seminar explores the subjects of pilgrimage and religious tourism. With few exceptions, case studies in class sessions focus on the United States and/or Christianities across time. Students are encouraged to select presentation topics across a broad range of religions, times, and spaces. Theoretical and methodological reading assignments reflect this larger content.

RLST 890b, Religion and Modernity  Noreen Khawaja
Seminar for students working at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and politics in modernity. Readings and topics change from year to year.

RLST 897a, EMWAR Seminar I  Maria Doerfler
Required seminar for doctoral students in the EMWAR program, which also welcomes students who are interested in the religions of antiquity (including those students continuing in the tracks of New Testament, Ancient Christianity, Ancient Judaism). This term consists of 3–4 meetings, arranged so that the maximum number of students and faculty in the program can attend. Events include presentation of written works in progress, delivery of paper drafts for upcoming conferences, and a seminar for professionalization. ½ Course cr

RLST 898b, EMWAR Seminar II  Maria Doerfler
Part II of the EMWAR seminar consists of every-other-week sessions, which include such events as discussion of works in progress, key professionalization topics, and meetings with invited scholars in the field. ½ Course cr

RLST 905a, Theology Doctoral Seminar  Miroslav Volf
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.

RLST 961a or b, Directed Readings: American Religious History  Staff
RLST 962a or b, Directed Readings: EMWAR  Staff
Directed readings in Early Mediterranean and West Asian Religions.

RLST 963a or b, Directed Readings: Asian Religions  Staff
RLST 964a or b, Directed Readings: Ethics  Staff
RLST 965a or b, Directed Readings: Judaic Studies  Staff
RLST 966a or b, Directed Readings: Islamic Studies  Staff
RLST 968a or b, Directed Readings: Old Testament/Hebrew Bible  Staff
RLST 969a or b, Directed Readings: Philosophy of Religion  Staff
RLST 970a or b, Directed Readings: Religion and Modernity  Staff
RLST 971a or b, Directed Readings: Theology  Staff