Religious Studies

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

Chair
Kathryn Lofton

Director of Graduate Studies
Christine Hayes [F]
Travis Zadeh [Sp]

Professors
Harold Attridge (Divinity), Joel Baden (Divinity), Christopher Beeley (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 Grif fel, John Hare (Divinity), Christine Hayes, Jennifer Herdt (Divinity), Kathryn Lofton, Ivan Marcus, Andrew McGowan (Divinity), Sally Promey (American Studies), Carolyn Sharp (Divinity), Gregory Sterling (Divinity), Harry Stout, Kathryn Tanner (Divinity), Miroslav Volf (Divinity), Robert Wilson

Associate Professors
Zareena Grewal (American Studies), Willie Jennings (Divinity), Noreen Khawaja, Nancy Levene, Andrew Quintman, Eliyahu Stern

Assistant Professors
Maria Doerfler, Eric Greene, Travis Zadeh

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

Lecturers
Jimmy Daccache, Supriya Gandhi, Felicity Harley-McGowan (Divinity), Daniel Jennings

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.
COURSES

RLST 510a, Method and Theory  Kathryn Lofton
Required seminar for doctoral students in Religious Studies. Others admitted with instructor's permission.

RLST 514b / CLSS 807b / HIST 51b, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews  Joseph Manning and John Collins
This seminar examines two incidents in the Hellenistic world that can be construed as persecution of the Jews. The first was in the years 167–164 B.C.E., when the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes tried to suppress the traditional Jewish cult in Jerusalem. The second was in Alexandria in 38 C.E., when the Jewish community came under attack from its Gentile neighbors and the Roman authorities. The seminar examines these incidents in the context of Seleucid and Roman policies toward subject peoples.

RLST 539b, Sensing the Sacred in India: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions  Finnian Moore Gerety
This seminar explores South Asian religions through the body, the senses, and aesthetics. Drawing on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, and concentrating on embodied practices such as meditation, chanting, eating, sex, asceticism, ritual, possession, and performance, we examine experiences of the sacred in India, past and present. How has sensory culture—the sound of mantras, the smell of incense, the touch of a guru’s embrace—shaped lives, practices, and doctrines? What place does the gratification (or denial) of the senses have in South Asian traditions? The course draws on premodern texts as various as law codes, erotic handbooks, and medical treatises, and integrates a range of new media from ethnographic films to graphic novels.

RLST 540b, Buddhist Thought Medieval China  Andrew Quintman and Chloe Starr
Course cr

RLST 542a, Early Chan/Zen Buddhism  Eric Greene
Exploration of the literature of early Chan/Zen Buddhism (seventh–eighth century). Selected readings in genres such as hagiographies, lineage texts, ritual manuals, and doctrinal treatises. Introduction of tools and methods for studying Buddhist texts in Chinese.

RLST 544b, Animals in Indian Religions  Phyllis Granoff
Students read Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain texts dealing with animals. We examine divergent beliefs about the place of animals in the hierarchy of living beings. Readings include stories of the Buddha’s births as an animal, the Ramayana on the monkey god Hanuman, and Jain rebirth narratives. Philosophical readings on animal sacrifice culminate in a consideration of recent debates against sacrifice in the Indian supreme court.

RLST 546a, Tibetan Historical Texts  Andrew Quintman
This seminar focuses on a variety of Tibetan sources on Buddhist religious history. Prerequisite: reading knowledge of Classical Tibetan.

RLST 547b, Classical Tibetan Literature  Andrew Quintman
This seminar focuses on a variety of Tibetan sources on Buddhist religious history. Prerequisite: reading knowledge of Classical Tibetan.

RLST 551b, Readings in Indian Texts  Phyllis Granoff
This is a course for students who read Sanskrit/Prakrit/Pali and would like to study a particular text in depth. The choice of text is determined after discussion with interested students.

RLST 557a, Medieval Indian Texts  Phyllis Granoff
An advanced reading course in Sanskrit texts. Depending on student interest we read literature or philosophy. Prerequisite: two years of Sanskrit.

RLST 583a / SAST 567a, Visual Worlds of Himalayan Buddhism  Andrew Quintman
The role of images and imagining in the religious traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. How Tibetan Buddhist cultures produce religious images; ways of visualizing those images to invest them with meaning. Topics include specific modes of visual representation, relationships between text and image, social lives of images, and processes of reading and interpretation.

RLST 589a, Readings in Urdu Texts  Supriya Gandhi
Readings from a range of Urdu texts, with a focus on works produced in the nineteenth century. Topics include Hindu reform, Islamic revival, colonialism, and interreligious polemic. The selection of texts takes into account the research interests of enrolled students.

Required of doctoral students in New Testament studies and ancient Christianity. The topic and instructor change yearly. The topic for spring 2018 is the ways in which current literary theory can illuminate a range of ancient Christian literary genres.

RLST 608b, Christianity in Late Antiquity  Maria Doerfler
Required of doctoral students in ancient Christianity. Topics include the relation of church and state after Constantine; theological controversies and church councils; interfaith relations; pieties and practices; and material culture.

RLST 654a, Biblical Interpretation in Early Christianity  Maria Doerfler
Scripture was both the primary focus of early Christians’ literary attentions and the most significant resource for resolving questions of theological, ethical, or practical concern in their communities. Yet Scripture frequently did not speak with sufficient clarity and
univocality; it required mediation—in homily, hymn, commentary, and treatise—and, in the process, interpretation and exposition. This course introduces students to a survey of ancient Christian writers’ exegetical efforts from the very beginnings of Christian interpretive activity through the flowering of exegesis across the Roman and Sassanid Empires in the fourth through sixth century.

RLST 665a, Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries Stephen Davis
Philological problems in the study of the second century and its aftermath. Required of doctoral students in New Testament studies and ancient Christianity. Open to other doctoral students with permission of the instructor.

RLST 668b, Epigraphy & Papyrology Stephen Davis
An advanced course designed for Ph.D. students. Prerequisites: reading command of Arabic, preferably Classical Arabic, and permission of the instructor.

RLST 683a, Christians in Early Jewish Sources Michal Bar-Asher Siegal
The course explores Jewish and Christian texts from the first centuries (1–6th) C.E. Christian writers are at the center of class readings: writings of Church fathers, east and west, and church canons of laws. The focus is on comparing texts produced by Jewish and Christian writers in various geographical areas and communities. We discuss the contacts and interactions between the two religious communities as they appear in these texts: the way they saw each other, and the world in which they both lived. All these serve to demonstrate the complex picture of Jewish-Christian interactions in this early period.

RLST 686b, Religion in the American West Tisa Wenger
This course investigates the histories of religious encounter and the formation of diverse religious identities in the American West, placing them in broader contexts of Atlantic world, Pacific world, hemispheric, and national histories. The West has played multiple roles in the nation’s imagination: a place to be conquered and controlled, a place for new beginnings (religious or otherwise), a place of perils and of opportunities. Over the course of the term we ponder the religious dimensions of each of these constructed meanings and examine their very real impact on the people and landscapes of the West.

RLST 692b / HIST 595b / JDST 844b, Introduction to Modern European Jewish History David Sorkin
This course introduces students to European Jewish history since approximately 1648. It teaches the major historiographical traditions as well as the major themes of European Jewish history. Its audience is students specializing in Jewish history but also other historians who wish to add an understanding of Jewish history to their understanding of Europe.

RLST 711b, Al-Ghazali and Maimonides Frank Griffel
Close study of the lives and the thought of two of the most influential theologians and philosophers in Islam and Judaism. Comparison of their lives and writings, focusing on their integration of Aristotelian philosophy into the theology of Islam and Judaism.

RLST 715b / NELC 706b, Problems in Early Islamic History Travis Zadeh
An examination of questions and problems in the origins and development of Islamic history as explored by modern scholarship. Particular focus is placed on early source material.

RLST 720a, 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 722a, Al-Ghazali’s Impact on Islamic Thought Frank Griffel
An advanced course designed for Ph.D. students. Prerequisites: reading command of Arabic, preferably Classical Arabic, and permission of the instructor.

RLST 724a, 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 730b, Life and Thought of Jonathan Edwards Harry Stout
This course offers students a comprehensive view into the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards.

RLST 750b, Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in American Jewish History Eliyahu Stern
An exploration of how Jews in America negotiated, and renegotiated, religion and ethnicity to forge a hyphenated American identity. Topics include the impact of Protestant domination, immigrant experiences and legacies, the role of discrimination, and self-presentation and representation by others.

RLST 751b / JDST 722b / NELC 705b, 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 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, 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 775b / CPLT 688 / JDST 842b, 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 Zizek, and Giorgio Agamben.

RLST 776b / HIST 601b / JDST 790b, 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 777b / HIST 590b / JDST 764b, 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 790b / HIST 587b / JDST 793b, Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought  Elyahu Stern
An overview of Jewish philosophical trends, movements, and thinkers from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. Topics include enlightenment, historicism, socialism, secularism, religious radicalism, and Zionism.

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 801b, Hebrew Bible Seminar: Problems in the Book of Isaiah  Robert Wilson
A close reading of selected chapters of the Hebrew text of Isaiah in order to test recent theories of the book’s compositional history.

RLST 803b / ANTH 531b / ARCQ 531b / CLSS 815b / CPLT 547b / HIST 502b / JDST 653b, Slavery, Dependency, and Genocide in the Ancient and Premodern World  Noel Lenski and Benedict Kiernan
Covers the subject of class and ethnic repression from the third millennium B.C.E. to the mid-second millennium C.E. Analyzes textual, epigraphic, and iconographic sources for slavery, dependency, and genocide in Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Han, Germanic, Angkorian, Vietnamese, Burmese, Malay, Mayan, and Aztec cultures.

RLST 813a / HIST 574a, Apocalypticism: Ancient and Modern  Abbas Amanat and John Collins
This seminar reviews the origins of apocalyptic thought in the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and also considers the modern adaptations of apocalypticism in each tradition.

RLST 826a / SMTC 532a, Intermediate Syriac I  Jimmy Daccache
This two-term course is a continuation of SMTC 521. Reading and analysis of Syriac texts from various genres and time periods. Prerequisite: SMTC 521 or knowledge of Syriac.

RLST 827b / SMTC 534b, Intermediate Syriac II  Jimmy Daccache
This two-term course is a continuation of SMTC 521. Reading and analysis of Syriac texts from various genres and time periods. Prerequisite: SMTC 521 or knowledge of Syriac.

RLST 835a / SMTC 545a, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions: Aramaic  Jimmy Daccache
This course is designed to familiarize students with Aramaic epigraphy from the first millennium B.C.E. The Aramaic grammar is illustrated through early monumental inscriptions on stone from Anatolia and the abundant papyri of the Persian period from Egypt.

RLST 836b / SMTC 836b, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions: Hebrew and Moabite  Jimmy Daccache
The aim of this course is to provide students with an overview of the Hebrew epigraphy from the first millennium B.C.E., including inscriptions on stone, jars, and ostraca. The second part of the term is devoted to the study of Moabite monumental inscriptions and seal inscriptions.

RLST 840b / SMTC 520b, Intermediate Ugaritic: Mythological Texts  Jimmy Daccache
The Ugaritic alphabet was used in Ras Shamra-Ugarit in the thirteenth century B.C.E. on the Syrian coast. This course is an initiation into the linguistic system of the Ugaritic language, written in a cuneiform script, and into the Ugaritic civilization.

RLST 888a, Ancient Greek Festivals  Jessica Lamont and Carolyn Laferriere
One of the most prominent expressions of ancient Greek piety was the festival, in which poetry was sung, athletic and artistic contests were held, animals sacrificed, and group identities negotiated and reaffirmed. In the Archaic and Classical periods, festivals could be minor, local, single-day undertakings, or weeklong, multi-city affairs; yet in each instance, they were an expression of communal identity, competition, and devotion to the gods. Poetry and sculpture served to commemorate these events long after the festival itself had passed, and early literary genres and artistic styles took root within and developed alongside the festivals, gods, and individuals whom they were intended to commemorate. Bringing together literary, archaeological, art historical, and anthropological evidence, this interdisciplinary seminar considers Archaic and Classical Greek festivals within their social, historical, and religious contexts. We pay particular attention to the literary and historical texts (hymns, the "recension" of Homeric epic in festival contexts, Attic tragedy and comedy, epinician, etc.)
and the visual representations that commemorate and describe the major festivals in Greece, as well as to the particular ways that festivals exploited visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile, or gustatory reactions in their worshippers to provoke specific interactions with the divine.

3 Course cr

RLST 859b, Christian Social Ethics  Sally Promey and Örgü Dalgıc

RLST 865a, Moral, Religious, and Social Issues in Bioethics  Stephen Latham
A selective survey of issues in biomedical ethics. Comparison of different points of view about biomedical issues, including religious vs. secular and liberal vs. conservative. Special attention to issues in research and at the beginning and end of life.

RLST 905a, Theology Doctoral Seminar  Kathryn Tanner and Chloe Starr
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: Ancient Christianity  Staff
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 967a or b, Directed Readings: New Testament  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