RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RLST)

* RLST 022a / ENGL 031a, Religion and Science Fiction  Maria Doerfler
Survey of contemporary science fiction with attention to its use and presentation of religious thought and practice. Focus on the ways in which different religious frameworks inform the literary imagination of this genre, and how science fiction in turn creates religious systems in both literature and society. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  WR, HU  

* RLST 102b / EAST 390b, Atheism and Buddhism  Hwansoo Kim
A critical examination of atheism and religions (Buddhism), with a focus on intellectual, religious, philosophical, and scientific debates about God, the origin of the universe, morality, evolution, neuroscience, happiness, enlightenment, the afterlife, and karma. Readings selected from philosophical, scientific, and religious writings. Authors include some of the following: Charles Darwin, Bertrand Russell, Christopher Hitchins, Richard Dawkins, Deepak Chopra, Sam Harris, Owen Flanagan, Stephen Batchelor, and the Dalai Lama.  HU  

RLST 115b / AMST 116b, How to Build an American Religion  Kathryn Lofton
How communities can be organized through code, charisma, ritual, and cosmology. Topics include strategies for concretizing utopia and establishing communal principles, expanding audiences, and specifying creed. This course serves as an introduction to religion through theoretical readings and specific examples drawn from the transnational American scene, past and present. Discussion of particular leaders, sects, practices, and media will offer insights into how ideas organize societies and individuals establish themselves as icons. Students adapt strategies taught in the course in order to practice their own capacity to foster social movements, develop and critique brands, and consider the relationship between religion, politics, and economy.  HU  

* RLST 121b / EALL 296b / EAST 391b, Religion and Culture in Korea  Hwansoo Kim
Introduction to Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and new religions in Korea from ancient times to the present. Examination of religious traditions in close relationships with social, economic, political, and cultural environments in Korean society. Examination of religious tensions, philosophical arguments, and ethical issues that indigenous and foreign religions in Korea have engaged throughout history to maximize their influence in Korean society.  HU  

RLST 127a / PHIL 118a / SAST 261a, Buddhist Thought: The Foundations  Eric Greene
This class introduces the fundamentals of Buddhist thought, focusing on the foundational doctrinal, philosophical, and ethical ideas that have animated the Buddhist tradition from its earliest days in India 2500 years ago down to the present, in places such as Tibet, China, and Japan. Though there will be occasional discussion of the social and practical contexts of the Buddhist religion, the primary focus of this course lies on how traditional Buddhist thinkers conceptualize the universe, think about the nature of human beings, and propose that people should live their lives. Our main objects of inquiry are therefore the foundational Buddhist ideas, and the classic texts in which those ideas are put forth and defended, that are broadly speaking shared by
all traditions of Buddhism. In the later part of the course, we take up some of these issues in the context of specific, regional forms of Buddhism, and watch some films that provide glimpses of Buddhist religious life on the ground.  

**RLST 148a / ER&M 219a / HIST 219a / JDST 200a / MMES 149a, Jews and the World: From the Bible through 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.  

**RLST 160a / HIST 280a / ITAL 315a, The Catholic Intellectual Tradition**  
Staff  
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.  

**RLST 175a / EAST 431a, North Korea and Religion**  
Hwansoo Kim  
Ever since the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948 and the Korean War (1950–1953), North Korea has been depicted by the media as a reclusive, oppressive, and military country, its leaders as the worst dictators, and its people as brainwashed, tortured, and starving to death. The still ongoing Cold War discourse, intensified by the North Korea’s recent secret nuclear weapons program, furthers these negative images, and outsiders have passively internalized these images. However, these simplistic characterizations prevent one from gaining a balanced understanding of and insight into North Korea and its people on the ground. Topics other than political, military, and security issues are rarely given attention. On the whole, even though North Korea’s land area is larger than South Korea and its population of 25 million accounts for a third of all Koreans, North Korea has been neglected in the scholarly discussion of Korean culture. This class tries to make sense of North Korea in a more comprehensive way by integrating the political and economic with social, cultural, and religious dimensions. In order to accomplish this objective, students examine leadership, religious (especially cultic) aspects of the North Korean Juche ideology, the daily lives of its citizens, religious traditions, the Korean War, nuclear development and missiles, North Korean defectors and refugees, human rights, Christian missionary organizations, and unification, among others. Throughout, the course places North Korean issues in the East Asian and global context. The course draws upon recent scholarly books, articles, journals, interviews with North Korean defectors, travelogues, media publications, and visual materials.  

**RLST 180b / HIST 342b / SAST 280b, Mughal India, 1500–1800**  
Supriya Gandhi  
Exploration of religion and the state in Mughal India, focusing on the period between 1500–1800. Topics include sacred sovereignty, orthodoxy, Sufism, vernacular literary and religious cultures, and the early colonial encounter.
RLST 183a / SAST 366a, The Gita: Humanities at World’s End  Sonam Kachru
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 186b / CGSC 186b / PHIL 113b / SAST 270b, Fear, Suffering, Anger, Love: Buddhist Philosophy of Mind  Sonam Kachru
This course introduces students to classical Indian Buddhist philosophy of mind and the reasons why Buddhists pursued it—"the reinvention of ourselves," or the pursuit of the transformation of persons from unhealthy to healthy ways of being minded. Class materials are drawn from categories and concerns found in theoretical and practical manuals from roughly the first to the fifth centuries C.E., but the topics are salient, including: What is the difference between mind and consciousness? Is there an unconscious? How does one model mental actions, such as attention or categorization? Are our minds structured by primal fear? Or anger? Do we ever have reason to be angry? What is cognitive control? Why do minds wander? Should mental dynamics be merely observed or attenuated or sculpted in some other way? What, if anything, is peace of mind?   
HU

RLST 201a / HIST 232Ja / HUMS 443a / JDST 270a / MMES 342a, Medieval Jews, Christians, and Muslims In Conversation  Ivan Marcus
How members of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities thought of and interacted with members of the other two cultures during the Middle Ages. Cultural grids and expectations each imposed on the other; the rhetoric of otherness—humans or devils, purity or impurity, and animal imagery; and models of religious community and power in dealing with the other when confronted with cultural differences. Counts toward either European or Middle Eastern distributional credit within the History major, upon application to the director of undergraduate studies.   
WR, HU RP

RLST 202b / HIST 345b / JDST 265b / MMES 148b, Jews in Muslim Lands from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries  Ivan Marcus
Jewish culture and society in Muslim lands from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to that of 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.   
HU

RLST 230a / SAST 358a, Yoga in South Asia and Beyond  Supriya Gandhi
The history of yoga practice and thought from the earliest textual discussions of yoga until the present day. Topics include the body, cosmology, cross-cultural interactions, colonialism, and orientalism. This course is not open to students previously enrolled in RLST 018 or SAST 058.   
HU

RLST 231b / HIST 226Jb / JDST 370b, How the West Became Antisemitic: Jews and the Formation of Europe 800-1500  Ivan Marcus
Students study how Jews and Christians interacted on a daily basis as medieval Europe became more restrictive and antisemitic, a contributing factor to the Holocaust. In this writing seminar, students discuss a variety of primary sources in class#laws, stories, chronicles, images#while researching and writing their own seminar paper structured by sessions on topics, bibliographies, and outlines.   
WR, HU
RLST 234a, History of the Supernatural from Antiquity to Modernity  Carlos Eire
This survey course aims to provide an introduction to ancient, medieval, and early modern Western beliefs in supernatural forces, as manifested in saints, mystics, demoniacs, ghosts, witches, relics, miracles, magic, charms, folk traditions, fantastic creatures and sacred places. Using a wide range of primary sources and various historical methodologies, our aim is to better understand how beliefs and worldviews develop and change and the ways in which they shape and determine human behavior. This course is not open to students previously enrolled in HIST 299.  HU

* RLST 249a / GMAN 254a / JDST 335a / PHIL 274a, Jewish Philosophy  Paul Franks
Introduction to Jewish philosophy, including classical rationalism of Maimonides, classical kabbalah, and Franz Rosenzweig’s inheritance of both traditions. Critical examination of concepts arising in and from Jewish life and experience, in a way that illuminates universal problems of leading a meaningful human life in a multicultural and increasingly globalized world. No previous knowledge of Judaism is required.  WR, HU

* RLST 277a / PHIL 202a, Existentialism  Noreen Khawaja
Introduction to key problems in European existentialism. Existentialism considered not as a unified movement, but as a tradition of interlocking ideas about human freedom woven through the philosophy, religious thought, art, and political theory of late modern Europe. Readings from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heti, Lukács, Gide, Heidegger, Fanon, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Cesaire.  HU

RLST 290a / MMES 290a / PLSC 435a, Islam Today: Modern Islamic Thought  Frank Griffel
Introduction to Islamic thought after 1800, including some historical background. The development of Islamic modernism in the 19th century and of Islamic fundamentalism in the 20th. Islam as a reactive force to Western colonialism; the ideals of Shari’a, Islam as a political ideology, and the emergence of Jihad movements. Different kinds of Salafism, Islamic liberalism, and feminism as well as the revival of Islam’s intellectual heritage.  HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 324a / HIST 268Ja / JDST 351a / PLSC 466a, The Global Right: From the French Revolution to the American Insurrection  Eli Stern
This seminar explores the history of right-wing political thought from the late eighteenth century to the present, with an emphasis on the role played by religious and pagan traditions. This course seeks to answer the question, what constitutes the right? What are the central philosophical, religious, and pagan, principles of those groups associated with this designation? How have the core ideas of the right changed over time? We do this by examining primary tracts written by theologians, political philosophers, and social theorists as well as secondary literature written by scholars interrogating movements associated with the right in America, Europe, Middle East and Asia. Though touching on specific national political parties, institutions, and think tanks, its focus is on mapping the intellectual overlap and differences between various right-wing ideologies. While the course is limited to the modern period, it adopts a global perspective to better understand the full scope of right-wing politics.  HU, SO
RLST 342b / AMST 234b / ER&M 243b / HIST 188b, Spiritual But Not Religious
Staff
Study of the historical and contemporary “unchurching” trends in American religious
life in a comparative perspective and across different scales of analysis in order to think
about the relationship between spirituality, formal religion, secular psychology and the
self-help industry. HU, SO o Course cr

RLST 347a / HIST 240a / SOCY 331a / WGSS 291a, Sexual Minorities from Plato to
the Enlightenment  Staff
This interdisciplinary course surveys the history of homosexuality from a cross-
cultural, comparative perspective. Students study contexts where homosexuality and
sodomy were categorized, regulated, and persecuted and examine ancient and medieval
constructions of same-sex desire in light of post-modern developments, challenging
ideas around what is considered normal and/or natural. Ultimately, we ask: what has
changed, and what has remained the same, in the history of homosexuality? What do
gays and lesbians today have in common with pre-modern sodomites? Can this history
help us ground or rethink our sexual selves and identities? Primary and secondary
historical sources, some legal and religious sources, and texts in intellectual history
are studied. Among the case studies for the course are ancient attitudes among Jews,
early Christians, and Greeks; Christian theologians of the Middle Ages; Renaissance
Florence; the Inquisition in Iberia; colonial Latin America; and the Enlightenment’s
condemnation of sodomy by Montesquieu and Voltaire, and its defense by Bentham. HU o Course cr

* RLST 420b / HIST 333b, Introduction to Syriac Christianity  Maria Doerfler
This seminar aims to introduce students to the literary, historical, and theological
tradition of Syriac Christianity and the developing field of Syriac Christian studies. In
this vein, students encounter a number of the tradition’s key authors; learn to locate its
development in the context of different imperial cultures and religious interlocutors,
including Judaism and Islam; and explore topics at the vanguard of current scholarship,
including distinctive approaches to asceticism, ritual, and historiography. In addition
to weekly meetings, the seminar further requires attendance for three special sessions:
a visit to the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscripts Library and its considerable Syriac
manuscript holdings; a visit to the Yale University Art Gallery and its collection of
relevant artefacts and coins; and an introduction to the use of digital humanities in
Syriac Studies through the Yale Digital Dura-Europos Archive (YDEA). Permission of
Instructor is required. HU

* RLST 428a / HUMS 397a / PHIL 493a, Neighbors and Others  Nancy Levene
This course is an interdisciplinary investigation of concepts and stories of family,
community, borders, ethics, love, and antagonism. Otherwise put, it concerns the
struggles of life with others – the logic, art, and psychology of those struggles. The
starting point is a complex of ideas at the center of religions, which are given to
differentiating "us" from "them" while also identifying values such as the love of the
neighbor that are to override all differences. But religion is only one avenue into the
motif of the neighbor, a fraught term of both proximity and distance, a contested term
and practice trailing in its wake lovers, enemies, kin, gods, and strangers. Who is my
neighbor? What is this to ask and what does the question ask of us? Course material
includes philosophy, literature, psychology, and film. WR, HU
* RLST 430b / PHIL 429b / SAST 470b, Indian Philosophy in Sanskrit Literature
   Aleksandar Uskokov
In this course we focus on issues of philosophical significance in Sanskrit literature of “non-standard” philosophical genres, i.e., other than the treatise and the commentary. Specifically we read from canonical Hindu texts such as the Upaniṣads, Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Bhagavad-gītā, and Yogavāsiṣṭha; the classical genres of drama and praise poetry; and hagiographical literature, all in English translation. Attention is paid not only to substance but also form. The selection of philosophical problems includes philosophy of mind and personal identity; allegory; the ethics of non-violence; philosophy, politics, and religious pluralism; the highest good; theodicy; philosophical debate; etc.  

* RLST 431a / HSAR 350a / HUMS 425a / LITR 399a, Reality and the Realistic
   Noreen Khawaja and Joanna Fiduccia
A multidisciplinary exploration of the concept of reality in Euro-American culture. What do we mean when we say something is "real" or "realistic?" From what is it being differentiated—the imaginary, the surreal, the speculative? Can we approach a meaningful concept of the unreal? This course wagers that representational norms do not simply reflect existing notions of reality; they also shape our idea of reality itself. We study the dynamics of realism and its counterparts across a range of examples from modern art, literature, philosophy, and religion. Readings may include: Aimé Cesaire, Mircea Eliade, Karen Barad, Gustave Flaubert, Sigmund Freud, Renee Gladman, Saidiya Hartman, Arthur Schopenhauer. Our goal is to understand how practices of representation reveal something about our understanding of reality, shedding light on the ways we use this most basic, yet most elusive concept.  

* 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, Religion and Society  
   Maria Doerfler
Seminar on religion and society. Topics covered vary by year, but may include one or more of the following: ritual and its social functions, different concepts of social life, the operation of violence in social relationships, religion as both champion and critic of society, and theoretical models of religion and society.  

* RLST 491a and RLST 492b, The Senior Essay  
   Staff
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.