RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RLST)

* RLST 012a / HUMS 092a, Divine Law in Historical Perspective  Christine Hayes
Exploration of the divergent notions of divine law in Greco-Roman antiquity and biblical Israel; the cognitive dissonance their historical
counter engaged and attempts by Jewish, Christian, and contemporary secular thinkers to negotiate competing claims. Topics
include: debates over the attributes and nature of divine law versus human law; the grounds of divine law's authority; law as a religious
expression versus law as debasement of the divine-human relationship; the impact of divine law debates on secular legal theory.
Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  HU

* RLST 113b, The Prophetic Tradition and Democracy  Alex Ozar
This course explores and evaluates the viability, and perhaps necessity, of prophetic political action in the context of liberal democracy in
general and contemporary America in particular. Prophecy offends the canons of liberal reason and reasonableness: Where liberal theory's
ideal citizen engages their fellows through respectfully deliberative, rational dialogue on the basis of presumed equal standing and by
appeal to shared premises, the prophet seems to arrogate to themselves an authority they do not take their audience to possess, uncivilly
condemning their detractors while demanding societal transformation in light of a truth to which they purport to enjoy privileged access.
Our question is whether the offense of prophecy can find a legitimate home in liberal democracy and whether liberal democracy can be
safe for the oppressed without it.  HU

* RLST 114b, What's the Matter (with Religion?)  Stephen Davis and Camille Angelo
We (and everything around us) matter and are made of matter. When it comes to common cultural conceptions, however, religion is all
too often conceived of as a purely spiritual, transcendent, and supernatural domain. This course challenges those assumptions by drawing
on recent approaches that emphasize and also interrogate the power and agency of things, whether human or non-human, organic or
inorganic, tangible or intangible. Part one of the course equips students with key theoretical frameworks, including thing theory, vital
materialism, animacies, entanglements, symmetrical archaeology, and affect and emotion. Part two consists of deep dives into selected
case studies, organized under the following thematic headings: aniconism and the immaterial, materializations of ritual practice (oracles,
magic, and fetishes), apparitions and hauntings, movements and migrations, consumption and consumerism, illness and contagion, and
ecology and the environment. As we traverse these topics, we encounter materialities ranging from ancient Greek rock art, Roman oracle
shrines, and recipes for magical spells and visions of saints in Egypt, to devotional items confiscated from undocumented immigrants, the
marketing of religion by Goldman Sachs and Kanye West, viral epidemics, and "natural" disasters. Students come away from this seminar
better able to recognize and act upon what matters in the world.  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 116b / WGSS 319b, The Animal and Religion  Wendy Mallette
This interdisciplinary seminar analyzes key texts formulating the question of the (non)human and animal by examining the recent
proliferation of work on animality, not only in religious studies, but also in Black studies, gender studies, philosophy, and anthropology.
The course critically examines key accounts of religion and the animal in relation to colonialism, capitalism, race, gender, sexuality, and
class. Questions explored include: What does animal religion or religious animality look like? How is the category of religion understood
with respect to the nonhuman or less-than-human? What is the relationship of conceptions of the (non)human in modernity to the
slave trade and colonialism? How do notions of personhood, spirituality, dominion, evolution, empathy, and cosmology relate to the
(non)human and animal?  HU

* RLST 121a / EALL 296a / EAST 391a, 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 128a / ANTH 128a / CLCV 307a, Emotion and Identity in Antiquity  Daniel Eastman
“You are what you feel.” But how much control do we have over how we feel? Does—or can—everyone experience the world through the
same categories of feeling, or “emotions”? To what extent are people’s emotional options constrained or scripted by aspects of identity
such as religion, gender, class, and language? This seminar explores the connections between emotions and identity in the context of the ancient
Mediterranean world, with reference to modern theories of emotion along the way. Topics covered include: (1) ancient theories of
what emotions are and how they relate to the “self”; (2) norms concerning which emotions are “proper” and for whom (including
humans, animals, and gods; women and men; and “pagans,” Jews, and Christians); and (3) practical methods used to cultivate certain
emotions over others.  HU
RLST 141b / AFST 112b / ARCG 222b / NELC 112b, Egyptian Religion through the Ages  John Darnell
Diachronic approach to topics in Egyptian religion. Religious architecture, evidence for protodynastic cults, foreigners in Egyptian
religious celebrations, music and vocal expression in Egyptian religion, Re and Osiris, the Amarna interlude and the Ramesside solar
religion, and the goddess of the eye of the sun. Readings in translation.  HU

RLST 145a / HUMS 133a / JDST 110a, The Bible  Christine Hayes
The writings common to both Jewish and Christian scripture examined as diverse and often conflicting expressions of the religious life
and thought of ancient Israel. The works' cultural and historical setting in the ancient Near East; the interpretive history of selected
passages influential in Western culture. Introduction to a wide range of critical and literary approaches to biblical studies. Students view
course lectures, which survey the entire Bible, on line; class time focuses on specific biblical passages and their subsequent interpretation
in Jewish and Christian culture.  HU

RLST 148a / ERKM 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 160a / HIST 280a / ITAL 315a, The Catholic Intellectual Tradition  Carlos Eire
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 171b / EALL 219b / EAST 229b / HUMS 214b / PHIL 119b, Introduction to Chinese Philosophy  Eric Greene and Lucas Bender
This course represents an introduction to the most important philosophical thinkers and texts in Chinese history, ranging from roughly
500 BC–1500 AD. Topics include ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, and ontology. We discuss the basic works of Confucian
and Daoist philosophers during the Warring States and early imperial eras, the continuation of these traditions in early medieval “dark
learning,” Buddhist philosophy (in its original Indian context, the early period of its spread to China, and in mature Chinese Buddhist
schools such as Chan/Zen), and Neo-Confucian philosophy. The course emphasizes readings in the original texts of the thinkers and
traditions in question (all in English translation). No knowledge of Chinese or previous contact with Chinese philosophy required.  HU

* RLST 175b / EAST 431b, 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.  SO

* RLST 192b / JDST 297b, Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in American Jewish History  Elli Stern
An exploration of how Jews in American 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. Each term prospective junior History majors should apply for seminars for the following term using the
online junior seminar preregistration site. Preregistration begins after midterm in the fall for seminars offered in the spring term, and
after spring recess for seminars offered in the subsequent fall term. In September and in January, application for admission should be
made directly to the instructors of the seminars, who will admit students to remaining vacancies in their seminars. Priority is given to
applications from juniors, then seniors, majoring in History, but applications are also accepted from qualified sophomores and from
students majoring in other disciplines or programs.  HU

* RLST 210a / PHIL 206a, Nietzsche, Religion, History  Nancy Levene
An exploration of Nietzsche's concepts of religion and history and of his thinking in a broad historical arc up to the present. Course
material includes texts by Nietzsche and selections from philosophies, theologies, and works of art that invite dialogue with his ideas.  HU

* RLST 214a / HIST 248Ja / JDST 293a, Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought  Elli Stern
An overview of Jewish philosophical trends, movements, and thinkers from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first. Topics include
enlightenment, historicism, socialism, secularism, religious radicalism, and Zionism.  HU
* RLST 215a / AMST 356a, Celebrity, Politics, Power  Kathryn Lofton
This course uses celebrity to think about American political power. Informed by American studies, gender studies, and religious studies, the course considers celebrity a way to talk about how popularity is an embodied and spiritualized appraisal. The bibliography on celebrity and politics is not a robust one, despite the fact that winning elections requires popularity and in the last twenty years of American politics some conscientiousness of the skill sets celebrities mastered seems a precondition for electoral success. The course assembles a range of scholarly and archival resources to think about what it means to achieve celebrity, and how it is a political form of public life. Of particular interest is how to think about the construction of magic and charisma, and how those very idioms often contribute to accusations of mesmerism and manipulation. Written assignments focus students on developing celebrity as an applied knowledge for social media development and political progress.  HU

* RLST 232a / EAST 506a / RLST 628a, Paradise in Buddhism: Pure Land Traditions  James Dobbins
Pure Land Buddhism is a tradition with roots in India that developed most extensively in East Asia. Unlike other forms of Buddhism, it centers on a paradise motif and is largely devotional in character. It arises from scriptural stories about a transcendent Buddha named Amida who vows to bring all living beings to enlightenment via an other-worldly realm known as the Pure Land. The seminar examines this tradition historically against the backdrop of Buddhism in general, focusing on the Pure Land sutras and the unfolding of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Among the goals of the course is to develop familiarity with the structure of the sutras and with classical Buddhology, the core concepts and strategies of Buddhist doctrine and story-making. It also explores the teachings of several celebrated Japanese Buddhists, the portrayal of women in texts and religious practices, and the demythologization of Pure Land and Amida in the modern period.  HU

* RLST 231a / HIST 226Ja / JDST 370a, Jews and Christians in the Formation of Europe, 500-1500  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, RP

* RLST 232a / ENGL 346a / HUMS 253a, Poetry and Faith  Christian Wiman
Issues of faith examined through poetry, with a focus on modern poems from 1850 to the present. Poems from various faith traditions studied, as well as secular and antireligious poetry.  HU

* RLST 256a / FILM 336a / MMES 311a, Social Change in Middle East Cinemas  Staff
This course invites students to explore how modern aesthetic forms such as cinemas from the Middle East and North Africa critique rigid social realities and imagine modern social experiences, thereby pushing boundaries towards social change. By chronologically examining Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, and Persian films in different historical periods, we will explore how film as art reveals the nature of social myth and the role public intellectuals play in perpetuating or challenging that myth. In addition to weekly film screenings (with English subtitles), course material includes short readings on the modern history of the region, history of film production, and analysis of films as art. By the end of this course, students will learn about the history of filmmaking in the MENA region, the different questions (religion, class, language, gender, ethnicity, race, nationalism and colonialism) influencing the production and reception of film, the challenges facing the filmmaker as an artist and producer and more importantly how these challenges impact the imagination of social change on the screen.

RLST 262a / ARCH 272a / HSAR 150a, Introduction to the History of Art: Art and Architecture of the Sacred  Jacqueline Jung
A wide-ranging, cross-temporal exploration of religious images, objects, and architecture in diverse cultures, from ancient Mesopotamia to modern Manhattan. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and various polytheistic traditions are represented. Thematic threads include the human body; transformations of nature; death, memory, and afterlife; sacred kingship and other forms of political engagement; practices of concealment and revelation; images as embodiments of the divine; the framing and staging of ritual through architecture.  HU

RLST 290a / MMES 290a / PLSC 435a, Islam Today: Jihad and Fundamentalism  Frank Griffel
Introduction to modern Islam, including some historical background. Case studies of important countries in the contemporary Muslim world, such as Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Islam as a reactive force to Western colonialism; the ideals of Shari’a and jihad; violence and self-sacrifice; and Islam as a political ideology.  HU

* RLST 324a / HIST 268Ja / JDST 351a / PLSC 466a, The Global Right: From the French Revolution to the American Insurrection  Elli 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
This course investigates law in East Asia from ancient times to 1800 from the perspective of belief. We debate treatises, codes, cases, and cultural products from across East Asia’s legal traditions, tracing the lives they took on. We work to understand firsthand law in its diverse contexts. More fundamentally, we consider the many ways in which people formed beliefs about what “law” might be or do. We examine the philosophical and faith traditions—and the hopes and fears—through which law was articulated, justified, realized, and then immediately contested. Throughout, we ask: What does it mean to invest law with one’s faith? How much of one’s belief is law? How much does law depend on one’s belief? What gave people pause about this over time? You develop your own answers, with an eye toward how all of this has been understood, misunderstood, and appropriated across cultures and time. So the next time you hear an analyst or government official explain something in East Asia as rooted in “a Confucian disdain for law,” or “Japanese ‘Justice,’” (feat. in NYT) you will be equipped to strike up a conversation about just how they arrived at that belief.

* RLST 408b / JDST 400b, Interpreting the Bible in Antiquity: Case Studies  Christine Hayes
Examine the rich and polyphonic tradition of interpretation of two biblical narratives that were classical loci of Jewish-Christian polemic. Beginning with inner-bible exegesis, and continuing with ancient translations, Second Temple and Hellenistic period literature, early Christian sources, and finally classical rabbinic texts, this course explores the interpretative techniques and rhetorical strategies of ancient readers (especially midrash and allegory) and considers the way sacred texts have been employed to stake out competing intellectual and cultural claims. Prerequisite: reading proficiency in Hebrew.

* RLST 420a, 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.

* RLST 428b / ANTH 428b / PHIL 493b, 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, ethnography, 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, anthropology, psychology, fiction, and film.

* RLST 429b, Phenomenology  Noreen Khawaja
In-depth introduction to phenomenology as a theory of what is and as a method for studying it. Key figures in the history of phenomenology, emphasizing connections to social theory, aesthetics, and religion. Readings from Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Fanon, Husserl, Ahmed, Barad, and others.

* RLST 430a / PHIL 439a / SAST 470a, 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 435a / AFAM 402a, Black Religions in Slavery and Freedom  Nicole Turner
This course explores how enslaved and free black people created and sustained religious communities in the United States during the eras of slavery and freedom. It explores the resonances of African traditions, the role of conjure, Islam and Christianity in sustaining Black people through slavery and the transformations that developed after emancipation. The course challenges the paradigm of black religion as always pointing toward freedom while exploring how the transition in status from enslaved to free was reflected in and influenced by black religious practices and communities. This course explores the religious communities of the “slave quarters,” underground railroad, independent black churches on the political landscape of freedom through the end of the 19th century. This course aims to provide participants with a deeper exploration of the developments within the period from the 19th century through 1915 and the advent of Jim Crow and U.S. imperialism.

* RLST 437b / HIST 428b / HSHM 477b / HUMS 463b, Critical Theories of Science and Religion  Noreen Khawaja and Joanna Radin
This course is an introduction to new thinking about the relationship of science and religion in global modernities. Drawing from work in feminist and indigenous studies, critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and multispecies thought, we explore systematic questions at the intersection of metaphysics, history of science, and politics. How can attending to the role of practice alter our understanding of how knowledge is produced across scientific and religious worlds? What is a world, and who gets to define it? How might a new contract
between science and religion reveal fresh possibilities for an ethical response to late capitalism: addressing historic exclusions, structural
inequalities, and human-nonhuman relations? Readings may include: Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Kim TallBear, Anna Tsing, Isabell
Stengers, Cathy Gere, Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Karen Barad, Robert Bellah, Gabriel Marcel, Elizabeth Povinelli, Nadia Abu El-Haj, Aicha
Beliso-De Jesus, Marilyn Strathern, Catherine Keller, Abou Farman, Webb Keane. 

* RLST 445a / MMES 490a / NELC 490a, Introduction to Arabic and Islamic Studies  Frank Griffel
Comprehensive survey of subjects treated in Arabic and Islamic studies, with representative readings from each. Methods and techniques
of scholarship in the field; emphasis on acquiring familiarity with bibliographical and other research tools. Enrollment limited to senior
majors in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, except by permission of instructor.

* RLST 485a, African American Religious History  Nicole Turner
A seminar focused on the history of African American religions. African American religions are dynamic and multifaceted. Oft depicted
as sources of black resilience and emblems of black resistance, African American religions have also been criticized 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? This
course resolves these questions through an examination and production of historical writing. Intended for advanced students pursuing
specific senior-level research. 

* RLST 486a / EALL 221a, Introduction to Chinese Buddhist Literature  Eric Greene
This class is an introduction to Chinese Buddhist literature. Although written in classical Chinese, Buddhist texts in China were written
in a particular idiom that was much influenced by the Indian languages and which can be difficult to understand without special training.
This class introduces students who already have some reading ability in literary Chinese to this idiom and the tools and background
knowledge needed to read and understand Chinese Buddhist literature. We read a series of selections of some of the most influential
Chinese Buddhist texts from various genres including canonical scriptures, apocryphal scriptures, monastic law, doctrinal treatises,
and hagiography. Secondary readings introduce the basic ideas of Indian and Chinese Buddhist thought to the extent necessary for
understanding our readings. Prerequisite: CHNS 171 (Literary Chinese II) or equivalent, or permission of the instructor. Students of
Japanese or Korean literature who can read basic kambun or gugyeol are also welcome to enroll; no knowledge of modern, spoken Chinese
is required.

* RLST 488a, 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 490a, Religion and Society  Eric Greene
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  Travis Zadeh
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.