RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RLST)

* 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 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  Staff
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.  HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 133b / EAST 335b, Zen Buddhism  Eric Greene
Survey of the history and teachings of Zen Buddhism in China and Japan. Emphasis on reading and interpretation of primary Zen texts in their historical and religious context, along with investigation of modern interpretations and appropriations of Zen in the West.  HU

* RLST 136b, The History and Contemporary (Ab)uses of the New Testament  Laura Nasrallah
The course introduces students to the historical context of New Testament texts, to the processes of its becoming scripture, and to a variety of approaches for its interpretation (evangelical, feminist, historical critical, queer, African American, etc.). We’ll discuss how the New Testament is used today in politics and culture—by political candidates, in debates about sexuality, in arguments about the environment.  HU

RLST 145b / HUMS 133b / JDST 110b, 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 / ER&M 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 149b / HIST 220b / JDST 201b, Introduction to Modern Jewish History  David Sorkin
A broad introduction to the history of Jewish culture from the late Middle Ages until the present. Emphasis on the changing interaction of Jews with the larger society as well as the transformation of Judaism in its encounter with modernity.  HU

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.  HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 174b, Gender and Religion since the 19th Century  Amanda Griffin
How did emotion, homemaking, and spirituality come to be associated with femininity? What relationship do these terms have to religion and politics? How are categories of race and class mobilized to answer these questions? Christian thought has been integral to the formulation of such questions, and to their proposed answers. Yet, that religious grammar remains underappreciated. This course offers a critical approach to the constitutive links between modern conceptions of gender and a particular Christian imagination through the study of sentimentality. Sentimentality is a nineteenth-century literary and cultural genre with ongoing significance for queer, feminist, racial, trans, and U.S. national politics today, as well as for histories of Christian thought and material culture in the U.S. and Britain. Topics include struggles over definitions of womanhood and family, especially as these relate to racialized, classed, queer, and trans
(dis)identifications; the role of capitalism in political representation and reproductive politics; conceptualizations of the human in Black studies; fantasies of U.S. national belonging and empire; and the relationship between affect and politics, especially the potential and limits of sympathy and compassion for solidarity across difference. HU

* RLST 177a, Reason and Religion  Jack Hanson
This course examines the relationship between reason and religion in the modern West. With readings in philosophy, social theory, literature, and film, from the eighteenth century to the present, we see how these two terms, though often considered in opposition to one another, have been inextricably linked in a variety of ways. HU

* RLST 195a / HSHM 410a / WGSS 195a, Meanings of Life  Evan Goldstein
What are the meanings of life? That is, what are we talking about when we talk about life, and how did we come to talk about it in this way? Is life religious or secular? What does Christianity (still) have to do with the politics of life and death? This course takes up these questions, among others. We trace the history of life as a concept in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on the afterlife of the Christian tradition in secular modernity. Beginning with the theories of biopolitics developed by Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, we explore the implications of life's centrality for modern formations of race, sexuality, and death. This course is not a survey of how different religious traditions define life; rather, by engaging with thinkers from Religious Studies, Black Studies, queer theory, science and technology studies, among other fields, we explore the theological and political dimension of life in modern Western societies. After spending several weeks covering some of the canonical theorists of biopolitics, we take on a series of more recent case studies and thinkers who have addressed some of the urgent issues of our time through a critical scrutiny of the meanings of life. Topics include secularization and sovereignty, the biopolitics of race and sexuality, the precarious status of life in pandemic times, and death. Readings are primarily composed of twentieth-century theorists, including Giorgio Agamben, Donna Haraway, Lauren Berlant, and Talal Asad, as well as relevant historical precursors and examples. No prior experience is presumed, and all texts will be read in translation. 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

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 203a / JDST 339a / LITR 418a / MMES 418a, The Classics of Modern Hebrew Literature  Hannan Hever
Overview of the Poetics, Culture, History, and Political dynamics of Modern Hebrew Literature as national literature over the last 300 years. The course traces the literary development of its diasporic condition in Europe through the Hebrew Literature that is created in the Israeli Jewish sovereignty. The course is taught in Hebrew and the readings of literary texts are also in Hebrew. No background in Jewish literature, Hebrew literature, or Jewish culture is required. HU

* RLST 214b / HIST 248bJ / JDST 293b, 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 219b, Disability and Religion  Calli Micale
This interdisciplinary course considers the category of disability through interlocking discourses of religion, race, and gender. With a particular focus on Jewish and Christian traditions, we examine how religious images and motifs shape perceptions of disability. Exploring how disability challenges and informs religious narratives, we ask questions like: Does attending to the relationship between race and access to care complicate ideas about the spiritual benefits of suffering? How has religion/irreligion provided frameworks for narrating experiences of depression? Is there a connection between strategies of disabled activists and religious sensibilities regarding future hope? Course materials range in genre, including critical theory, theology, memoir, and activist-literature. Readings may include: Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Fanon, Donna Haraway, Eli Clare, Jasbir Puar, Martha Nussbaum, Nancy Eiesland, Julia Watts Belser, Monica Coleman, Alison Kafer, Laura Levitt, Sharon Betcher, Teri Alyce Pickens, Stephanie Hunt Kennedy, Jeremy Schipper. HU

* RLST 220a / JDST 127a, Christians in Early Jewish Sources  Staff
Exploration of Jewish and Christian texts from the first centuries (1-6th) C.E. Comparison of texts produced by Jewish and Christian writers in various geographical areas and communities; how the two religious communities saw each other and the world in which they both lived. Further understanding of the complexity of Jewish-Christian interactions in this early period. HU

* RLST 231b / HIST 226bJ / JDST 370b, 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
* RLST 232b / JDST 128b, Jews in Early Christian Sources  Staff
Exploration of Jewish and Christian texts from the first centuries (1-6th) CE. 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 the comparative angle of the texts, and the importance of incorporating various geographical areas and various communities, in different times and historical circumstances. Students 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 which is the Jewish-Christian interactions in this early period. HU

* RLST 233a / 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 to secular and antireligious poetry. HU

* RLST 242a, Language and Religion  Naila Razzaq
This seminar invites students to consider how narratives about language, group identity, and religion have been negotiated, augmented, manipulated, and erased from antiquity to the present. What role has language–real or imagined–played in theological discourses and how has it been defined? How have myths about language origin, purity, and superiority influenced notions of religious authority, authenticity, competition, and access to knowledge production or geographic autonomy? What are the implications of kinship, maternal and/or militaristic metaphors used to describe language in various contexts? What new critical insights might we gain by centering and problematizing the question of language in discussions of “identity” broadly, and “religious identity” in particular? We focus on new theoretical frameworks drawn from scholarship in religious studies, postcolonial theory, socio-linguistics, and philosophy, among other fields, and four modules, organized chronologically. The course primarily centers on the Mediterranean region as it has often been discussed as the birthplace of language and religion, the “cradle of civilization”, though we also look at other contexts. We think about ancient and medieval texts, look at art pieces, read bilingual inscriptions, poetry and (ancient) graffiti, watch documentaries and films, and think critically about how the relations between linguistic and religious identities have been presented in the media, in university curricula, and by scholars. HU

RLST 245a / ARCG 244a / NELC 109a, The Age of Akhenaton  Staff
Study of the period of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton (reigned 1353–1336 B.C.E.), often termed the Amarna Revolution, from historical, literary, religious, artistic, and archaeological perspectives. Consideration of the wider Egyptian, ancient Near Eastern, African, and Mediterranean contexts. Examination of the international diplomacy, solar theology, and artistic developments of the period. Reading of primary source material in translation. HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 251b / AFST 128b / ARCG 128b / EGYP 128b / NELC 129b, Magic and Ritual in Ancient Egypt and the Near East  John Darnell
Introduction to ancient Egyptian magic and rituals with an overview on the use of magic and discussion of the different rituals and festivals attested in Ancient Egypt and the Near East. HU

* RLST 265a / HUMS 211a / LITR 386a, Fate and Chance in Art and Experience  Noreen Khawaja
This seminar is co-taught with Sheila Heti. It discusses shifts in how the unchosen is conceived and how it is valued, across a range of contemporary fields and historical models—from Greek tragedy to contemporary performance art, from Protestant aesthetics of fate and grace to the I Jing and its interpreters, from mathematical and physical approaches to chance to the rise of astrology. Students consider when and where we ourselves operate with a belief in something like fate. The goal to explore whether and how a contemporary concept of fate may come into focus. HU

RLST 268b / HIST 281b, Christian Mysticism, 1200–1700  Carlos Eire
An introductory survey of the mystical literature of the Christian West, focusing on the late medieval and early modern periods. Close reading of primary texts, analyzed in their historical context. HU

* RLST 272b, Mapping Black Christianity  Nicole Turner
This course merges research in African American religious history with the creation of an interpretive archive using digital mapping and deep mapping practices. We explore the politics of mapping, geography, and race before delving into a place-based exploration of black religious communities during the late 19th century. The course aims to investigate the extant archives of black Christian communities of the post-emancipation South: newspapers, convention and church minutes, encyclopedias and autobiographies and narratives, while applying strategies of historical analysis to explore the nature of the formation and transformation of African American religious community. The course also examines concepts of race, place, and power and how religion reflects these conceptions. The main project is to create a contribution to the mapping of black religion by exploring a single primary source in depth and then developing both summary text, curating supporting archival images, reports and other digital material culture, and a map. Emphasis on method: archival research, digital humanities, spatial analysis and politics of space and place.

RLST 287a / MMES 391a, Islamic Theology and Philosophy  Staff
Historical survey of major themes in Muslim theology and philosophy, from teachings of the Qur’an up to the end of the per-modern period around 1800. The systematic character of Muslim thought and of the arguments given by thinkers; reason vs. revelation; the emergence of Sunnism and Shi’ism; falsafa, Sufism and Illuminationism as well as post-classical thought. HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 295b / JDST 272b / PHIL 264b / PHIL 295b, Al-Ghazali and Maimonides  Frank Griffel
The lives and thought of the philosopher theologians Al-Ghazali and Maimonides. Comparison of their lives and writings, focusing on their integration of Aristotelian philosophy into the theology of Islam and Judaism. HU
* RLST 303a / PHIL 311a, The End of Metaphysics  Nancy Levene
Exploration of metaphysics in light of the supposition that it is at an end. Readings from classics and critics in philosophy, religion, and literature.  WR, HU

* RLST 321a / SAST 362a, Hindus and Muslims in South Asia  Supriya Gandhi
Study of engagements between Hindu and Muslim traditions in South Asia from medieval to modern times. Exploration of historical case studies of Hindu-Muslim relations and the formation of religious identities, as well as how memories of the past intersect with modern discourses on religion and politics.  HU

* RLST 324b / HIST 268jb / JDST 351b / PLSC 466b, 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

* RLST 342b / AMST 234b / ER&M 243b / HIST 188b, Spiritual But Not Religious  Zareena Grewal
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

* 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, C Course cr

* RLST 358b / HUMS 390 / JDST 245b, Humor and Play in Rabbinic Literature  Christine Hayes
This course examines the role of humor and play in ancient Jewish and rabbinic literature as compared with the role of humor and play in classical Greek and Roman culture and as illuminated by contemporary theories of humor, play, and performance. The course challenges anachronistic assertions of the incompatibility of humor and the sacred and explores the way ancient Jews, and the talmudic rabbis in particular, used humor and play to articulate a countercultural ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics.  HU

* RLST 366b / EAST 400b, Religion and Politics in China, Xinjiang, and Tibet  Staff
This course explores the religious and political interactions among the Chinese, Tibetans, Mongolians, and Muslims living in today’s northwest China from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Focusing on parallel spatial arrangements and historical narratives of these ethnoculturally diverse peoples, the first part of this course investigates the evolving political systems, religious institutions, and social structures in China, Xinjiang, and Tibet. Shifting from the center-periphery perspective to the bottom-up perspective, the second part examines major issues associated with interethnic relations. We critically read both primary and secondary sources. Key themes include Chinese imperial and colonialism, Tibetan Buddhist expansion, Mongolian conquest, Islamization and Muslim resettlement, transregional trade, frontier militarization, ethnic violence, and inter-ethnocultural accommodation.  HU

* RLST 373a / SAST 363a, Introduction to Pali Language and Literature  Aleksandar Uskokov
The purpose of this course is to introduce Pāli, the canonical language of Theravāda Buddhism practiced across South and Southeast Asia, and to provide an overview of Pāli Buddhist literature. The course is focused on readings from Pāli in several genres. In terms of language instruction, it proceeds primarily by way of tracking phonetic changes from Sanskrit, providing grammar overview in comparison to Sanskrit, and introducing the characteristically Buddhist jargon. While all Pali texts are read in their original, an overview of Pāli literature is provided through select secondary sources. Prerequisite: One year of Sanskrit (i.e., SKRT 120/530 or equivalent).

* RLST 374a / GMAN 391a / HUMS 391a / JDST 280a / LITR 125a, The Bible in German-Jewish Modernist Literature  Staff
Biblical references in modernist literary works illustrate literature’s potential to transform ancient forms and conceptions into driving forces of renewal. This renewal concerns both literature and the Bible. Their encounter in modernist texts rarely occurs in a straightforward fashion. While the modernist literary reception of Biblical material occasionally does appear as pious affirmation or outright rejection, more characteristically, it alters, displaces, or distorts the original Scriptures. Not only do these transformations enact modernism’s basic injunction to “make it new,” but they also illuminate its complex relationship to tradition as such. The course explores this dynamic in the work of major German-Jewish modernists such as Franz Kafka, Else Lasker-Schüler and Paul Celan.  HU
* RLST 380b / ENGL 289b / HUMS 388b / LITR 389b / PHIL 385b, Philosophies of Life  Nancy Levene
Study of works that challenge and provoke philosophies of life—how to live, what to live for, what life is. The point of departure is a selection of writings from the Hebrew Bible and moves from there to modern philosophical and literary re-imaginings and alternate realities. What are questions to which a philosophy of life is the reply? Insofar as a philosophy of life is itself a question, what is the repertoire of replies offered in our texts? What is your reply? Readings from the Bible (Genesis, Job), Shakespeare, Spinoza, Diderot, Kierkegaard, Woolf, Camus, Baldwin, Marilyne Robinson, and Achille Mbembe.  WR, HU

* RLST 387a / HIST 353Ja / SLAV 230a, The Slavic World Between Christendom East and West  John Mikitish
The Orthodox Church figures large in both Western and Russian accounts of Putin's Russia; church politics and inter-Christian conflicts play a major role in the politics of contemporary Ukraine. In many ways, these are just the latest chapters in an ongoing process of religious encounter, conflict, and exchange on the Slavic borderlands of Eastern and Western Christendom. Drawing on the disciplinary tools and conclusions of literary studies, history, and religious studies, this course proposes to explore this continuing story through texts, images, and other media.  WR, HU

RLST 402b / PHIL 326b, The Philosophy of Religion  John Pittard
The relation between religion and ethics, traditional arguments for the existence of God, religious experience, the problem of evil, miracles, immortality, science and religion, and faith and reason.  HU 0 Course cr

* RLST 422b / EGYP 147b, Egyptian Monastic Literature in Coptic  Stephen Davis
Readings in the early Egyptian classics of Christian asceticism in Sahidic Coptic, including the desert Fathers and Shenute. Prerequisite: EGYP 127 or equivalent. Counts as L4 if taken after EGYP 137 or equivalent.  L3

* RLST 423a / EGYP 137a, Gnostic Texts in Coptic  Ramona Teepe
Reading, translation, and analysis of Gnostic and Valentinian literature from Nag Hammadi, in several dialects of Coptic. Prerequisite: EGYP 127 or equivalent. Counts as L4 if taken after EGYP 147 or equivalent.  L3

* RLST 435b / AFAM 402b, 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 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.