RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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The Religious Studies curriculum approaches the history of human thought and practice while focusing on specific geographical, cultural, and philosophical areas of scholarly interest. Courses explore when, how, and why communities forge systems of value. Faculty guide students to examine institutions, practices, texts, and ideas simultaneously: to see how texts influence institutions, how institutions prescribe habits, and how human beings resist and reiterate the given institutions and practices of their specific geographic and historical contexts. The Religious Studies department is particularly known for its promotion of scholarly research by undergraduates. Undergraduate majors acquire the linguistic, philosophical, and historical acumen necessary for an in-depth research project during their senior year.

COURSE NUMBERING

Religious Studies course offerings, other than freshman seminars, are arranged in four categories. Group A features general and comparative courses that engage more than one tradition, concept, or text. Group B includes survey courses that provide a broad introduction to a particular religious tradition or scripture in historical context. Group C includes courses on specialized topics in religious studies, both introductory and intermediate. Group D offers advanced courses on specialized topics which typically have specific prerequisites or require the permission of the instructor. Students who want a broad introduction to the study of religions can choose courses listed under Groups A or B, though courses listed under Group C are also open without prerequisite. Religious Studies majors develop specialized concentrations as they plan a major program in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies and other members of the faculty.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

The department offers two programs for students majoring in Religious Studies: the standard major and a major in which religious studies is combined with another subject closely related to the senior essay. Both programs require a core of six courses, a seminar, and a two-term senior essay.

Core requirement A core of six courses in Religious Studies is required of all majors and should be selected in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies. Students select one core course from Group A that involves the comparative study of religions and three core courses from Groups B and C that concentrate on the historical or textual study of three different religious traditions or regions. Students are encouraged to select religions and regions as widely divergent as possible in order to balance in-depth study with global diversity and connection. One core course must focus on systematic thought (ethics, philosophy, or theology). The final core course is RLST 490, Religion and Society, the junior seminar on the academic study of religion; this course is required for all majors.

Seminar requirement Before the end of the junior year, students must complete a seminar (in addition to the junior seminar) that requires a major research paper. In Program I, this seminar must be an elective in Religious Studies. In Program II, it may be a course in Religious Studies, or it may constitute one of the four term courses outside the department.

Program I. The standard major Program I consists of twelve term courses in Religious Studies, including the core of six required courses, the two-term senior essay, and four electives. The electives are usually selected from Groups C and D and form a coherent unit to help the student prepare for the senior essay. Certain cognate courses in other departments that are integral to the student’s area of concentration may count toward the major with permission of the DUS. Normally the maximum number of cognate courses that may be applied is two. Two terms of an ancient language related to the study of religion may, with permission of the DUS, be counted.

Program II. Religious studies with another subject Program II consists of eight term courses in Religious Studies (the core of six required courses and the two-term senior essay) and four term courses outside the department, one of which may fulfill the seminar requirement outlined above. The four courses outside the department need not directly concern religion, but they must form a coherent, focused unit of concentration. Through them students can develop expertise in a methodological approach, cultural area, historical period, or body of literature contributing to the senior essay. Examples of successful combinations might be: four courses in Chinese history, language, and literature with a senior essay topic on Chinese Buddhism; four courses in early American history and literature with a topic on colonial American religion; four courses in a specific area of biology and medical science with a topic on biomedical ethics; four courses in globalization and international relations with a topic on religion and globalization. Each student’s petition to take this program will be judged on its contribution to the student’s senior essay. Normally, introductory courses in other departments may not count among the outside courses; appropriate language courses at a higher level may. Students electing Program II must, at the end of the junior year and in no case later than the beginning of the senior year, obtain approval for their proposed program from the DUS. Students who think they may elect this program should consult the DUS as early as possible in their studies to begin suitable selection of courses.

SENIOR REQUIREMENT

Students in both programs must write a senior essay under the supervision of a faculty adviser in the student’s area of concentration. In selecting a senior essay topic, students normally choose a subject on which they have completed course work before commencing the senior year. The essay counts as two term courses toward the major and is taken in both terms of the senior year. The student should begin choosing a senior essay topic during the second term of the junior year, and early in the first term of the senior year must submit
a Statement of Intention approved by a faculty adviser and the DUS. The senior essay course, RLST 491 and 492, includes research and writing assignments as well as colloquia in which seniors present and discuss their research. The student must submit at least ten pages of the essay to the DUS by the last day of classes in the first term in order to receive a grade of "satisfactory" for that term.

ADVISING

Students majoring in Religious Studies who plan to do graduate work in the subject are strongly encouraged to study the languages that they will need for their graduate programs.

Courses in the Divinity School Some Divinity School courses may count toward the major, with permission of the DUS. Divinity School faculty are eligible to advise senior essays. Information about courses and faculty may be found in the Divinity School bulletin.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites  None
Number of courses  12 term courses (incl senior req)
Specific course required  RLST 490
Distribution of courses  Both programs – 1 course in comparative religions; 3 courses in historical or textual study of religious traditions, as specified; 1 course in systematic thought, as specified; Program I – 4 electives, one of which is sem as specified; Program II – 4 nonintro courses in another subject linked with senior essay, one of which is sem, approved by DUS
Substitution permitted  Both programs – Divinity School courses, with DUS permission; Program I – 2 related courses in other depts, with DUS permission
Senior requirement  Senior essay (RLST 491, 492)

FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Professors  Gerhard Böwering, Stephen Davis, Carlos Eire, Steven Fraade, Bruce Gordon, Philip Gorski, Phyllis Granoff, Frank Griffel, John Hare, Christine Hayes, Kathryn Lofton (Chair), Ivan Marcus, Sally Promey, Harry Stout, Robert Wilson
Associate Professors  Zareena Grewal, Noreen Khawaja, Nancy Levene, Andrew Quintman, Eliyahu Stern
Assistant Professors  Maria Doerfler, Eric Greene, Travis Zadeh
Senior Lecturers  John Grim, Margaret Olin, Mary Evelyn Tucker
Lecturers  Jimmy Daccache, Supriya Gandhi, Daniel Jennings

Freshman Seminars

* RLST 015a / SAST 057a, Gods and Heroes in Indian Religions  Phyllis Granoff
The basic doctrines and practices of India's three classical religions, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, explored through close reading of texts in translation. Lives of the founders, great monks, nuns, and lay followers of Buddhism and Jainism; myths of the major Hindu gods; heroines and goddesses in the three traditions. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

* RLST 018b / SAST 058, 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. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

* RLST 022a, 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 freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

* RLST 026a / JDST 026a / PLSC 026a, Political Theology  Eliyahu Stern
Investigation of the theological aspects of modern political ideologies. Topics include sovereignty, universalism, law, election, commandment, and messianism. Primary readings include selections from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, Carl Schmidt, Mikhail Bakunin, Karl Marx, Jacob Taubes, Martin Buber, and Alain Badiou. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

* RLST 030b / HIST 082b / NELC 025b, Christians and Muslims in the Arab World  Stephen Davis
Investigation into the history of Christianity in the Arabic-speaking world, with focus on interactions between Christians and Muslims. Topics include: the history of Christianity among the Arabs prior to the rise of Islam and during the early Islamic period; the cultural contributions of medieval Christian Arabs in theology, science, philosophy, and ethics; and the role of religion and politics
among Christians and Muslims in the modern Middle East. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  

* RLST 082a / MMES 082a, Representing Muhammad  Travis Zadeh  
Interpretations of Muhammad’s life, including traditional and modern representations of Muhammad by pious Muslims, as well as an array of portrayals produced by non-Muslim polemics and admirers, alike. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  

WR, HU

General, Comparative, and Thematic Courses (Group A)

RLST 118b / PLSC 242b, Biblical and Constitutional Interpretation in Dialogue  Maria Doerfler  
How people read important books. Study of the strategies used throughout history to interpret two of the most authoritative texts: the bible and the U.S. Constitution. Different exegetes and exegetical communities continue to disagree on ways to read these books, and on how these readings should shape thought, practice, and national policy. Case studies include discussion of proper relations between civic and religious communities; the issue of slavery; and the topic of same-sex marriage.  

WR, HU

RLST 119a, Ritual and Theater  Staff  
Consideration of theories in ritual studies to explore the meaning and significance of certain South and East Asian performances, dramas, and theatrical traditions; study of the relationship between ritual and theater. Students gain the analytical skills to employ the categories of ritual studies in other academic fields.  

HU

RLST 180a / HIST 342 / SAST 280, Mughal India, 1500–1800  Staff  
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.  

HU

Surveys of Religious Traditions (Group B)

* RLST 123a, Religion and Grief  Laura Carlson  
Critical and comparative examination of how death, loss, and grief are encountered within a range of religious traditions; how varieties of loss and grief shape contemporary religious and spiritual thought; and how the spiritual claims of ancient and modern literature are challenged and transformed by grief.  

HU

RLST 125a / SAST 267a, Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice  Eric Greene  
Significant aspects of Buddhism as practiced mainly in India and South Asia, including philosophy and ethics, monastic and ascetic life, meditation and ritual practices, and the material culture of Buddhist societies. The Mahayana tradition that emerged in the first century B.C.E.; later forms of esoteric Buddhism known as tantra; the development of modern Buddhism in Asia and its manifestation in the West. Readings from Buddhist texts in translation.  

HU

* RLST 127a / SAST 467a, 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.  

HU

* RLST 147b / JDST 235b / MMES 235b / NELC 231b, Introduction to Judaism in the Ancient World  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. No prior background in Jewish history assumed.  

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 150a, The New Testament in History and Culture  Staff  
Introduction to the New Testament and the cultural, religious, and political contexts of Jesus and his early followers. Consideration of the Jesus movement as an emerging sect of ancient Judaism within the Roman Empire, tracing its developments through the first and second century CE. Includes trips to the Yale University Art Gallery and attention to material culture.  

HU

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 170a / MMES 192a, The Religion of Islam  Gerhard Böwering
The rise of Islam in Arabia; Muhammad and the Qur’an; Muslim tradition and religious law; crucial issues of Islamic philosophy and theology; basic beliefs and practices of the Muslim community; Sufism and Shi’ism; religious institutions and modern trends; fundamentalism and violence; freedom and democracy.  HU

Topics in Religious Studies (Group C)

* RLST 182b / SAST 459b, Buddhist Traditions of Mind and Meditation  Andrew Quintman
Buddhist meditation practices examined in the context of traditional theories of mind, perception, and cognition. Readings both from Buddhist canonical works and from secondary scholarship on cognitive science and ritual practice. Recommended preparation: a course in Asian religions.  HU

* RLST 184a / SAST 368a, The Mahabharata  Hugh Flick
Examination of the religious and cultural significance of the world’s longest epic poem within the Hindu bhakti religious tradition. Emphasis on the core narrative, the embedded narratives, and the internal philosophical discourses, including the Bhagavad Gita.  HU TR

RLST 188b / HSAR 143b / SAST 260b, Introduction to the History of Art: Buddhist Art and Architecture, 900 to 1600  Mimi Yiengpruksawan
Buddhist art and architecture of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Tibet from the tenth century to the early modern period. Emphasis on cross-regional engagements including the impact of Islam.  HU

RLST 193a / HIST 216a / JDST 322a / MMES 197a, Zionism  Eliyahu Stern
Introduction to the core ideas of the Zionist movement from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Focus on internal Jewish debates and criticism of the movement by European and Middle Eastern intellectuals. Social, political, cultural, and messianic ideological strands within the movement and their interpretations of various historical experiences and ideas located in the Jewish tradition.  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 RP

* RLST 203b / JDST 339b / LITR 418b / MMES 418b, Politics of Modern Hebrew Literature  Hannan Hever
Overview of the Poetics, Culture, History and Political dynamics of Modern Hebrew Literature as a national literature over the last 300 years. The course will trace the literary development of its diasporic condition in Europe through the Hebrew Literature that is created in the Israeli Jewish sovereignty. Readings in translation. No background in Jewish literature, Hebrew literature, or Jewish culture is required.  HU

* RLST 206b, Secularism from the Enlightenment to the Present  Eliyahu Stern
The historical construction of secularism from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. Attention to recent scholarship on the formation of secular ideologies and their effect on conceptions of time, space, and knowledge. Readings include works by Jose Casanova, Reinhart Koselleck, Charles Taylor, and Talal Asad.  HU

RLST 214b / HIST 248b / JDST 293b, Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought  Eliyahu 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 233a / ENGL 346a / HUMS 253a, Poetry and Faith  Christian Wiman
Issues of faith examined through poetry, with a focus on modern Christian poems from 1850 to the present. Some attention to poems from other faith traditions, as well as to secular and antireligious poetry.  HU

* RLST 260a / AMST 451a / HIST 174Ja, Religion, War, and the Meaning of America  Harry Stout
The relationship between religion and war in American history from colonial beginnings through Vietnam. The religious meanings of Americans at war; the mutually reinforcing influences of nationalism and religion; war as the norm of American national life; the concept of civil religion; biblical and messianic contexts of key U.S. conflicts.  HU

RLST 273a / PHIL 334a / PLSC 281a, Ethical 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.  SO
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 Shi’i’a and jihad; violence and self-sacrifice; and Islam as a political ideology.  HU

* RLST 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 318a, Religion and Politics Since 9/11  Daniel Steinmetz Jenkins
The role of religion and its influence of the major ideologies that have shaped U.S. and Western European political and economic thought since 9/11. Topics include: neoliberalism, neoconservatism, populism, traditionalism, human rights, French secularism, and the politics of religious freedom.  HU
History: Preindustrial

* RLST 321b, 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 335b / ITAL 317b / LITR 180b / WGSS 317b, Women in the Middle Ages  Christiana Purdy Moudarres
Medieval understandings of womanhood examined through analysis of writings by and/or about women, from antiquity through the Middle Ages. Introduction to the premodern Western canon and assessment of the role that women played in its construction.  TR

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

Advanced Topics in Religious Studies (Group D)

RLST 402a / PHIL 326a, 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

* RLST 408a / JDST 400a, Midrash Seminar: Case Studies in Biblical Interpretation  Christine Hayes
Rich and polyphonic tradition of interpretation of two biblical narratives beginning in the Bible itself, continuing in ancient translations and Second Temple period Jewish literature, and culminating in classical rabbinic sources. Examination of interpretative techniques and rhetorical strategies of *midrash* and consideration of the way sacred texts have been employed to stake out diverse intellectual and cultural claims. Prerequisite: reading proficiency in Hebrew.  15, HU

* RLST 427a / MMES 139a, 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 South East Asia, the Indian Ocean, Iberia, and West Africa.  HU

* RLST 444b / HIST 298J / WGSS 404b, Persecution and Deviance in the West  Staff
Investigation into the dark side of medieval and early modern Europe through study of the historical persecution of four specific groups: Jews; sodomites; the disabled such as lepers and the mentally ill; and those accused of witchcraft. Identifying the persecutors and their ideology, as well as those being persecuted.  HU

Other Courses

* 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 490a, Religion and Society  Kathryn Lofton
Seminar on religion in its social formations. Issues include different concepts of social life, the operation of violence in social relationships, and religion as both champion and critic of society.

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