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 reevaluate 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 first-year 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 (DUS) 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 DUS. 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; or 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
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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 online bulletin.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites None

Number of courses 12 term courses (incl senior req)

Specific course required RLST 490 (one of the core courses)

Distribution of courses Both programs — 5 remaining core courses to include: 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 seminar as specified; Program II — 4 non-introductory courses in another subject linked with senior essay, one of which is seminar, 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, Paul Franks, Bruce Gordon, Philip Gorski, Phyllis Granoff, Frank Griffel, John Hare, Christine Hayes, Noel Lenski, Nancy Levene, Kathryn Lofton (Chair), Ivan Marcus, Laura Nasrallah, Sally Promey, Harry Stout, Shawkat Toorawa, Robert Wilson

Associate Professors Zareena Grewal, Noreen Khawaja, Hwansoo Kim, Eliyahu Stern, Travis Zadeh

Assistant Professors Maria Doerfler, Eric Greene

Senior Lecturers John Grim, Margaret Olin, Mary Evelyn Tucker

Lecturers Jimmy Daccache, Supriya Gandhi, Stephen Latham, Christian Mauder

First-Year Seminars

* RLST 007a, What Didn’t Make It into the Bible  Maria Doerfler

Over two billion people alive today consider the New Testament to be sacred scripture. But how did the books that made it into the bible get there in the first place? Who decided what was to be part of the bible and what wasn’t? How did these decisions affect the structure of nascent Christian communities, their relationship to surrounding Greco-Roman and Jewish society, and the subsequent development of Christian churches? How would the history of the world’s largest organized religion look differently if a given book didn’t make the final cut and another one did? Hundreds of ancient Christian texts are not included in the New Testament. This course focuses on these excluded writings and uses them to help reconstruct the earliest Christian communities. We explore Gnostic gospels, hear of a five-year-old Jesus throwing temper tantrums while killing (and later resurrecting) his classmates, peruse ancient Christian romance novels, tour heaven and hell, read the garden of Eden story told from the perspective of the snake, and learn how the world will end. In critically examining these ancient narratives and the communities that wrote them, you will learn about the diversity of formative Christianity, understand the historical context of the early church, examine the earliest social forms of Christianity, and explore the politics behind what did and did not make it into the bible. WR, HU

* 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 first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. HU

* RLST 018a / SAST 058a, 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 first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. HU
General, Comparative, and Thematic Courses (Group A)

**RLST 100a / MMES 191a, Introduction to World Religions** Gerhard Bowering
Introduction to the literature, ideals, concepts, practices, rituals, and institutions of four major world religions as they have appeared in history: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. A historical survey combined with a phenomenological treatment of principal topics. 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 105b, Animals in Indian Religions** Phyllis Granoff
Examination of divergent beliefs about the place of animals in the hierarchy of living beings. Study of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain texts dealing with animals, with readings of the Buddha’s births as an animal, the Ramayana on the monkey god Hanuman, and Jain rebirth narratives. Philosophical readings on animal sacrifice culminate in a consideration of recent debates against sacrifice in the Indian supreme court. HU

* **RLST 107a / PHIL 192a, Metaphysics and Modernity** Nancy Levene
This course surveys concepts and controversies in and among select works of philosophy, theology, and literature. The focus is twofold: on reading works in view of their own principles, thus on questions of truth and interpretation, and on histories of the ideas, thus on questions of origin, change, and story. What and when is metaphysics? What and when is modernity? HU

**RLST 115a / AMST 116a, 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 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

Surveys of Religious Traditions (Group B)

**RLST 155b / HIST 351b / MMES 195b, The Golden Age of Islam** Gerhard Bowering
The development of Islamic civilization in the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, Iran, and India from Muhammad through the Mongol invasions to the rise of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires (600–1500 C.E.). Emphasis on the intellectual and religious history of Islam in the age of the caliphs and during the rule of regional dynasties. 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

Topics in Religious Studies (Group C)

* **RLST 112b / 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 166b / PHIL 135b, Classical Arabic Philosophy** Frank Griffel
Close reading of primary texts from the Arabic philosophical tradition c. 750–1300, with attention to the major arguments and underlying assumptions of each author. The translation movement via al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazali, Maimonides, and others; the philosophical textbooks of Muslim madrasa education. HU
RLST 188a / HSAR 143a / SAST 260a, 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 197a, Introduction to Jain Prakrit   Phyllis Granoff
This course allows students to gain familiarity with the wealth of narrative literature preserved by Jains in commentaries to canonical sutras, medieval Treasuries of Stories, and monastic biographies. Where appropriate students also read and discuss corresponding Buddhist narratives. All reading is in the primary languages. One year of Sanskrit required.  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 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 245a / ARCG 244a / NELC 109a, The Age of Akhenaton   John Darnell
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

* RLST 251a / AFST 128a / ARCG 128a / EGYP 128a, Magic and Ritual in Ancient Egypt   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.  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 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 277a / PHIL 202a, Existentialism   Noreen Khavaja
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, Hetti, Lukács, Gide, Heidegger, Fanon, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Cesaire.  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 303b / PHIL 311b, 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 306a / HUMS 258, Ethics of Forgiveness   Andrew Forsyth
What does it mean to forgive? Is forgiveness a cross-cultural phenomenon—a human universal? Or are forgiveness’s assumptions and practices reliant on particular cultural, religious, or philosophical underpinnings? This seminar proceeds historically and thematically. We move from Ancient Greece and Rome, through early Judaism and Christianity and the thought world of medieval Europe, to early-modern, modern, and post-modern philosophical, theological, and literary terrains. And we ask questions such as: Who can forgive? Which reasons (if any) are needed to forgive? How does divine forgiveness relate to human forgiveness? Can states or nations forgive? And is forgiving a virtue, a duty, or just a moral option?  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 368b / EVST 368b / HIST 491Jb / HSHM 479b, The History of the Earth from Noah to Darwin  Ivano Dal Prete
Young earth creationism and flood geology have long been among the most divisive features of American culture and politics. Yet a basic postulate is shared across the spectrum: for better or worse, the old age of the Earth is regarded as the recent product of a secular science, consistently rejected by traditional Christianity. This seminar challenges this long-established narrative, by uncovering the surprising boldness, complexity, and societal diffusion of pre-modern debates on the history of the Earth, and of humankind itself. Students have opportunity to explore the nature, assumptions, and methods of Earth sciences before the advent of modern geology, to question ingrained assumptions about their relation to religion and society, and to place outstanding issues into historical perspective. How have the great monotheistic religions dealt with the possibility of an ancient Earth? Was a young creation always important in traditional Christianity? If not, what led to the emergence of young Earth creationism as a force to be reckoned with? What are the intellectual roots of American prescienceism, which claims that the black and white races were created at different times and do not descend from the same ancestor? These and other questions are addressed not only through scholarly literature in the field, but also with the analysis of literary, visual, and material sources available on campus.  WR, HU

* RLST 390a / RUSS 228a, Russian Religious Culture in Thought and Practice  Harvey Goldblatt
Examination of the Russian Religious Culture through the centuries, from the origins of an Old Rus' spiritual civilization in the 11th century to the emergence of post-Soviet literature and art forms in the late-20th and early-21st centuries. Representative works in literature and the visual arts, which deal with both elite and popular culture as well as religious and secular modes of discourse, are chosen from both old Russian bookish culture to the new Russian cultural trends that have their origins in the seventeenth century. All works are examined against a broad comparative background to illustrate the variant and invariants in the long history of Russian religious culture. Special attention is devoted to (1) diverse interpretive approaches and methodological perspectives, (2) traditional and innovative theories of literary and artistic expression, and (3) the connections between cultural activity and ideological trends. All readings and discussions are in English.  HU

Advanced Topics in Religious Studies (Group D)

* RLST 400a / JDST 296a / MMES 236a / NELC 232a, The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Damascus Document  Steven Fraade
Study of the Damascus Document, one of the most important of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Attention to the document's place in the history of biblical interpretation and ancient Jewish law; the nature and rhetorical function of its textual practices, both narrative and legal; and its relation to the central sectarian writings of the Qumran community. Prerequisite: reading proficiency in ancient Hebrew.  L5, HU

* RLST 407a / JDST 391a / NELC 381a, Midrash Seminar: Sifre Shoftim  Steven Fraade
Close study of the earliest rabbinic commentary to the Book of Deuteronomy, focusing on its interpretations of laws dealing with the responsibilities of courts and public figures: judges, kings, priests, and prophets. Particular attention is paid to the interrelation of rabbinic legal rhetoric and the hermeneutics of scriptural commentary, with comparisons to other corpora of ancient Jewish and non-Jewish laws. Prerequisite: reading fluency in ancient Hebrew.  L5, HU

* RLST 408b / JDST 400b, Interpreting the Bible in Antiquity: Case Studies  Christine Hayes
Examines 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.  HU

* 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, poetry, and film.  HU

Other Courses

* RLST 490b, 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  Eliyahu Stern
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.