RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Humanities Quadrangle, 203.432.0828
http://religiousstudies.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
Frank Griffel

Director of Graduate Studies
Linn Tonstad (Divinity)

Acting Director of Graduate Studies
Nancy Levene [F]

Professors Joel Baden (Divinity), Stephen Davis, Carlos Eire, Steven Fraade, Paul Franks (Philosophy), Bruce Gordon (Divinity), Frank Griffel, John Hare (Divinity), Christine Hayes, Jennifer Herdt (Divinity), Noel Lenski (Classics), Nancy Levene, Kathryn Lofton, Ivan Marcus, Andrew McGowan (Divinity), Laura Nasrallah, Sally Promey (American Studies), Chloé Starr (Divinity), Gregory Sterling (Divinity), Kathyn Tanner (Divinity), Shawkat Toorawa (Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations), Miroslav Volf (Divinity)

Associate Professors Eric Greene, Zareena Grewal (American Studies), Willie Jennings (Divinity), Noreen Khawaja, Hwansoo Kim, Elli Stern, Tisa Wenger (Divinity), Travis Zadeh

Assistant Professors Maria Doerfler, Supriya Gandhi, Nicole Turner

Lecturers Jimmy Daccache, Felicity Harley-McGowan (Divinity)

FIELDS OF STUDY

Students must enroll in one of the following fields of study: American Religious History, Asian Religions, Early Mediterranean and West Asian Religions, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Islamic Studies, Medieval and Modern Judaism, Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Modernity, Religious Ethics, and Theology.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Students are required to take a minimum of twelve term courses that meet the Graduate School Honors requirement, including RLST 510, Method and Theory, normally taken in a student’s first year. Proficiency in two modern scholarly languages, normally French and German, must be shown, one before the end of the first year, the other before the beginning of the third; this may be done by passing an examination administered by the department, by accreditation from a Yale Summer School course designed for this purpose, or by a grade of A or B in one of Yale’s intermediate language courses. In the field of American Religious History, students must demonstrate proficiency in two skilled areas. Typically students study two foreign languages, but occasionally students study one foreign language and one technical knowledge area directly related to their proposed dissertation, such as musicology, financial accounting, or a performance art. Mastery of the languages needed in one’s chosen field (e.g.,
Chinese, Hebrew, Greek, Japanese) is also required in certain fields of study. A set of four qualifying examinations is designed for each student, following guidelines and criteria set by each field of study; these are normally completed in the third year. The dissertation prospectus must be approved by a colloquium, and the completed dissertation by a committee of readers and the departmental faculty. Upon completion of all pre-dissertation requirements, including the prospectus, students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. This is expected before the seventh term in American Religious History, Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Modernity, Religious Ethics, and Theology; before the eighth term in other fields. Students begin writing their dissertation in the fourth year and normally will have finished by the end of the sixth. There is no oral examination on the dissertation.

In the Department of Religious Studies, the faculty considers learning to teach to be an important and integral component of the professional training of its graduate students. Students are therefore required to teach as teaching fellows for three terms as an academic requirement and one term as a financial requirement during their graduate programs. Such teaching normally takes place during their third and fourth years, unless other arrangements are approved by the director of graduate studies.

A combined Ph.D. degree is available with African American Studies. Consult department for details.

MASTER’S DEGREES

M.Phil. and M.A. (both en route to the Ph.D.) See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations. Students in Religious Studies must take seven courses to be eligible for the M.A. degree.

Program materials are available online at http://religiousstudies.yale.edu.

COURSES

RLST 510a, Method and Theory  Kathryn Lofoon
Required seminar for doctoral students in Religious Studies. Others admitted with instructor’s permission.

RLST 536a and RLST 537b, Readings in Indo-Islamic Texts  Supriya Gandhi
Close readings from a wide range of Urdu texts produced in South Asia. The selection of texts accommodates the research interests of enrolled students.

RLST 541a, Dreams, Demons, and You  Sonam Kachru
This course invites students to think philosophically about the fragility of persons and varieties of conscious experience in a global way. Beginning with the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu’s Twenty Verses and the conviction that the waking experience of healthy (male) humans does not exhaust ways in which we have experiences as of a world, students will supplement Vasubandhu’s examples alternate regions of experience (like dreams and other cosmological realities) with examples drawn from work on philosophy of lucid dreaming, depression, madness, transformation (in feminist philosophy of narrative) and the lives of animals; the course invites students to create and explore a discipline (karmic anthropology), and to use it to respond to the variety of Amerindian perspectivalism as reconstructed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.
RLST 574b, Chinese Buddhist Texts  Eric Greene
Close reading of selected Chinese Buddhist texts in the original.

RLST 592a / HIST 888a, Society and Religion on the Silk Road  Eric Greene and Valerie Hansen
An introduction to artifacts and documents pertaining to social history and religion from the most important sites on the Northern and Southern Silk Roads in China, including Niya, Kizil, Turfan, and Dunhuang. Assigned readings are in English. Readers of Chinese also participate in a separate section reading documents in classical Chinese from Turfan and Dunhuang.

RLST 608b / HIST 568b / NELC 619b, Approaches to the Study of Christianity in Late Antiquity  Maria Doerfler
This proseminar addresses key methodological and historiographical issues in the periodization and commodification of late antiquity as a field of inquiry, focusing especially on Christianity from the rise of Constantine (313) to the Council of Chalcedon (451). Part One of the course focuses on theories and methods that have marked the study of late ancient Christianity in recent decades, including the analysis of discourse, sexuality and gender, bodies and ritual practice, and hybridity and ethnic identities. Part Two focuses on a series of case studies, including the rise of Constantine, North African ecclesiastical resistance, the role of bishops and councils, barbarians and Roman borders, monasticism, pilgrimage, and the cult of the saints. The course concludes with a consideration of early Christian archaeology. The course is designed for EMWAR students with a primary or secondary area of concentration in Early Christianity, Late Ancient Christianity, Christianity and Judaism in the Hellenistic East, and West Asian Religions of the Sasanian and Early Islamic Eras. The course also provides important historical context for students concentrating in New Testament and in Scriptures and their Interpretation in Antiquity. Students interested in completing a seminar-based exam in connection with the course are encouraged to speak with the instructor. Prerequisites: EMWAR area of concentration designations: EarXty, LateXty, XtyJudEast, WAR.

RLST 616b / HIST 603b / JDST 806b / MDVL 603b, Jews and Christians in the Formation of Europe, 500–1500  Ivan Marcus
This seminar explores how medieval Jews and Christians interacted as religious societies between 500 and 1500.

RLST 618a, Readings in Islamic Social History  Travis Zadeh
This graduate seminar surveys topics in Islamic social history through readings in classical Arabic prosopography, geography, and historiography.

RLST 622a, Law and Religion: Comparative and Historical Perspectives  James Whitman and Maria Doerfler
How easily can we distinguish "law" from "religion"? In many traditions, past and present, no such distinction has been made. Historically, the realms of religion and law have intersected with one another, frequently to the point of mutual identification. Nor did the Enlightenment era, the drafting of the American Constitution, or the advent of the twenty-first century sever their ties, even as the boundaries between the two have shifted over time. Drawing on the disciplines of legal historiography and religious studies, and centering on the realm of family and household, this seminar aims to ask big questions concerning the relationship between religion and law and...
the practices of interpretation and ritual by which they constitute themselves. Paper required. Enrollment limited.

**RLST 623a, Foundations of the Human Sciences**  Noreen Khawaja
Doctoral seminar exploring the ritual and conceptual histories of the human as they entwine with the work of the university— as research institution and as myth. From romanticism to the present. Focus on the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey, Mircea Eliade, Sylvia Wynter, among others.

**RLST 653a / EGYP 514a, Gnostic Texts in Coptic**  Ramona Teepe
The course reads selected portions of important texts from the Nag Hammadi collection, including the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, Thunder, the Treatise on Resurrection, the Tripartite Tractate, as well as other noncanonical texts preserved in Coptic, including the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas. Prerequisite: EGYP 510 or equivalent.

**RLST 658b / EGYP 512b, Egyptian Monastic Literature in Coptic**  Stephen Davis
Readings in the early Egyptian classics of Christian ascetism in Sahidic Coptic, including the Desert Fathers and Shenoute. Prerequisite: EGYP 510b or equivalent.

**RLST 672b / ANTH 514b / ARCG 515b / CLSS 878b / CPLT 671b / HIST 515b / JDST 657b / NELC 570b, Corrupting Seas: Premodern Maritime Ecologies (Archaia Seminar)**  Noel Lenski and Hussein Fancy
Uses the theoretical framework of "corrupting seas" developed by Horden and Purcell as a hermeneutic to investigate the cultural, economic, political, and religious environments of the archaic, ancient and medieval Mediterranean, and similar maritime ecologies. Landscape and natural ecologies play an important but not exclusive role in mapping how diversity and connectivity combined to constitute complex and dynamic environments in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, Caribbean, and South China Sea. The course is connected with Archaia's Ancient Societies Workshop, which runs its own series of events through the academic year. Students must attend the ASW events in the spring (fall events are optional).

**RLST 677b / EMST 678b / HIST 578b, The Catholic Reformation**  Carlos Eire
Reading and discussion of scholarship on the Catholic Reformation and of key primary texts written between 1500 and 1600.

**RLST 690a / SAST 556a, 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 Pāli texts are read in their original, an overview of Pāli literature is provided through select secondary sources. One year of Sanskrit (i.e., SKRT 120/520 or equivalent) is required for enrolling in this course.

**RLST 691a / EMST 660a / HIST 560a, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Europe**  Carlos Eire
Readings in primary texts from the period 1500–1700 that focus on definitions of the relationship between the natural and supernatural realms, both Catholic and Protestant.
Among the topics covered: mystical ecstasy, visions, apparitions, miracles, and demonic possession. All assigned readings in English translation.

RLST 692a / HIST 595a / JDST 844a, Introduction to Modern European Jewish History  David Sorkin
This course introduces students to European Jewish history since approximately 1648. It teaches the major historiographical traditions as well as the major themes of European Jewish history. Its audience is students specializing in Jewish history but also other historians who wish to add an understanding of Jewish history to their understanding of Europe.

RLST 699a / AMST 805a / HSAR 720a / WGSS 779a, Sensational Materialities: Sensory Cultures in History, Theory, and Method  Sally Promey
This interdisciplinary seminar explores the sensory and material histories of (often religious) images, objects, buildings, and performances as well as the potential for the senses to spark contention in material practice. With a focus on American things and religions, the course also considers broader geographical and categorical parameters so as to invite intellectual engagement with the most challenging and decisive developments in relevant fields, including recent literatures on material agencies. The goal is to investigate possibilities for scholarly examination of a robust human sensorium of sound, taste, touch, scent, and sight—and even “sixth senses”—the points where the senses meet material things (and vice versa) in life and practice. Topics include the cultural construction of the senses and sensory hierarchies; investigation of the sensory capacities of things; and specific episodes of sensory contention in and among various religious traditions. In addition, the course invites thinking beyond the “Western” five senses to other locations and historical possibilities for identifying the dynamics of sensing human bodies in religious practices, experience, and ideas. The Sensory Cultures of Religion Research Group meets approximately once per month at 7 p.m. on Tuesdays; class participants are strongly encouraged, but not required, to attend. Enrollment is by permission of the instructor; qualified undergraduates are not only welcome but encouraged to join us. There are no set prerequisites, but, assuming available seats, permission will be granted on the basis of response to three questions: Why do you wish to take this course? What relevant educational or professional background/experience do you bring to the course? How does the course help you to meet your own intellectual, artistic, or career aspirations?

RLST 705a / AMST 705a / HIST 582a, Readings in Religion in American Society, 1600–2022  Tisa Wenger
This seminar explores intersections of religion and society in American history from the colonial period to the present as well as methodological problems important to their study. It is designed to give graduate students a working knowledge of the field, ranging from major recent studies to bibliographical tools. In short, the seminar is a broad readings course surveying religion in American history from colonization to the present. It is not a specialized research seminar, but it does require a basic understanding of historiography.

RLST 711b, Al-Ghazali and Maimonides  Frank Griffel
Close study of the lives and the thought of two of the most influential theologians and philosophers in Islam and Judaism. Comparison of their lives and writings, focusing on their integration of Aristotelian philosophy into the theology of Islam and Judaism.
RLST 717a, Islamic Theology and Philosophy  Frank Griffel
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.

RLST 732a, Mind Body Problem in Islamic Thought  Frank Griffel
How does the data we receive from the sense perception in our bodily organs make it
into the concepts that we process in our minds? How do the mind and soul relate to the
human body? Do they exist before our birth and do they continue to live after the death
of our bodies? These are some of the various philosophical problems that belong to
the complex of the mind-body relationship. In this seminar we study several solutions
that were offered to these and other mind-body problems in Islamic thought. While
not neglecting teachings that were developed in Islamic religious literature (kalam),
we focus on philosophical teachings developed by al-Farabi (d. 950) and Avicenna (d.
1037) and their reception in the post-classical period by such authors as Abu l-Barakat
al-Baghdadi (d. c. 1165), al-Suhrawardi (d. c. 1192), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), and
others. Permission of the instructor required.

RLST 773a / HIST 596a / JDST 761a / MDVL 596a, 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.

RLST 777b / HIST 590b / JDST 764b / MDVL 590b, Jews in Muslim Lands from the
Seventh through the Sixteenth Century  Ivan Marcus
Introduction to Jewish culture and society in Muslim lands from the Prophet
Muhammad to 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.

RLST 788b / AMST 692b / HSAR 730b / JDST 799b, Religion and the Performance
of Space  Sally Promey and Margaret Olin
This interdisciplinary seminar explores categories, interpretations, and strategic
articulations of space in a range of religious traditions. In conversation with the work
of major theorists of space, this seminar examines spatial practices of religion in the
United States during the modern era, including the conception, construction, and
enactment of religious spaces. It is structured around theoretical issues, including
historical deployments of secularity as a framing mechanism, ideas about space and
place, geography and gender, and relations between property and spirituality. Examples
of case studies treated in class include the enactment of rituals within museums, the
marking of religious boundaries such as the Jewish “eruv,” and the assignment of
“spiritual” ownership in Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park. Prerequisite: permission of
the instructors; qualified undergraduates are welcome.

RLST 835a / SMTC 545a, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions: Aramaic  Jimmy Daccache
This two-term course is designed to familiarize students with Aramaic epigraphy
from the first millennium BCE. The Aramaic grammar is illustrated through early
monumental inscriptions on stones from Anatolia and the abundant papyri of the Persian period from Egypt.

RLST 838a / SMTC 513a, Elementary Syriac I  Jimmy Daccache
Syriac was an Aramaic dialect that developed its own written tradition in the northern Levantine city of Edessa in classical antiquity. It became (and remains to this day) the liturgical language of Eastern Christianity in its various manifestations. This course provides students with a basic working knowledge of the language, namely, the three principal scripts (Estrangela, Ser#o, and “Nestorian”), verbal morphology, and the fundamental rules of syntax. Extracts of several Syriac texts are studied for purposes of application. At the end of the course, students are able to read, translate, and analyze simple texts.

RLST 839b / SMTC 514b, Elementary Syriac II  Jimmy Daccache
Syriac was an Aramaic dialect that developed its own written tradition in the northern Levantine city of Edessa in classical antiquity. This course provides students with a basic working knowledge of the language, namely, the three principal scripts (Estrangela, Ser#o, and “Nestorian”), verbal morphology, and the fundamental rules of syntax. The course completes the introduction to the Syriac language. Extracts of several Syriac texts are studied for purposes of application. At the end of the course, students are able to read, translate, and analyze simple texts. Prerequisite: RLST 838/SMTC 513.

RLST 840a / SMTC 520a, Introductory Ugaritic I  Jimmy Daccache
The Ugaritic texts from the Bronze Age found at Ras Shamra-Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria provide the earliest well-attested example of the use of alphabet writing. The Ugaritic corpus comprises more than 2,000 texts of several genres (myths, rituals, incantations, “scientific” manuals, letters, administrative documents, and others), written in a “cuneiform” script. This course prepares students to read and analyze Ugaritic texts, seeking also to foster a basic appreciation of the nature and diversity of Ugaritic literature.

RLST 841b / SMTC 521b, Introductory Ugaritic II  Jimmy Daccache
The Ugaritic texts from the Bronze Age found at Ras Shamra-Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria provide the earliest well-attested example of the use of alphabet writing. The Ugaritic corpus comprises more than 2,000 texts of several genres (myths, rituals, incantations, “scientific” manuals, letters, administrative documents, and others), written in a “cuneiform” script. This course completes the introduction to Ugaritic language. Students have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of Ugaritic literature by reading and analyzing texts in the major genres of Ugaritic literature, with special emphasis on mythological texts. Prerequisite: RLST 840/SMTC 520.

RLST 861b, Archaeology of the Roman Empire for the Study of New Testament and Early Christianity  Laura Nasrallah
The first portion of the course introduces students to working with archaeological data from the Greco-Roman world (inscriptions, architecture, sculpture, coins). The second consists of seminars in Greece and Turkey during May, including some meetings with archaeologists and other scholars abroad. The course is designed for EMWAR students with a primary or secondary area of concentration in New Testament, Early Christianity, Late Ancient Christianity, and Christianity and Judaism in the Hellenistic
East. The course also provides important historical context for students concentrating in Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism and in Rabbinic Judaism. The course can also be applied to secondary areas of concentration focused on archaeology and material culture. Prerequisites: some level of reading ability in Greek, Latin, or Arabic; some level of reading ability in German, French, or modern Greek; and previous course work in early Christianity, New Testament, or Classics/Roman history. EMWAR area of concentration designations: NT, EarXty, LateXty, XtyJudEast.

**RLST 862a, Grief and Emotions: Ancient Philosophy and Theology, Modern Conversations**  Laura Nasrallah

This course focuses on grief and theories of the emotions in the ancient Mediterranean world, touching as well upon contemporary conversations about grief among scholars in black studies, as well as queer, feminist, and affect theories. Course materials include New Testament texts, Roman-period consolation letters and literature, philosophical writings, tragedies, and scholarly hypotheses regarding lifespan. Special attention is paid to political and economic issues (including slavery), as well as to instructions to women on how to mourn. The course is punctuated by contemporary conversations by scholars such as Saidiya Hartmann, Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Claudia Rankine, and Eve Sedgwick. EMWAR area of concentration designations: NT, XtyJudEast. The course also provides important historical context for students in all EMWAR areas of concentration. The course can also be applied to secondary areas of concentration focused on philosophy, religion, and literature.

**RLST 905a, Theology Doctoral Seminar**  Linn Tonstad

Required seminar for theology doctoral students. The course explores suffering, theological language and its limits, mysticism, and the doctrine of God, using contemporary and historical readings and with particular attention to the difference questions of sexuality and race make to how theologians might approach these themes. Open to other doctoral students by permission.

**RLST 955b / EALL 753b / MDVL 975b, Proseminar for Jobseekers in Premodern Fields**  Lucas Bender

This course is intended for doctoral students studying premodern cultures, who have advanced to candidacy and plan to seek employment within the academy, broadly construed. Over the course of the semester, students work with peers as well as faculty convener to build the skills they need to present their research to others in a clear, compelling way. Topics covered include genres of academic writing; modes of publication; CV building; preparing standard application materials; and interviewing. Weekly sessions generally include workshop time as well as presentations by the convener and visitors. Students work toward at least one end product relevant to their plans, e.g., a fully drafted application for a dissertation completion fellowship, job, or postdoc. This proseminar is particularly directed toward students affiliated with ARCHAIA and Medieval Studies but welcomes all those with research interests in the premodern world. The broad range of primary specialties represented provides students with experience engaging with scholars outside their field, which is increasingly essential for premodernists in the modern academic world.

**RLST 961a or b, Directed Readings: American Religious History**  Staff

**RLST 962a or b, Directed Readings: EMWAR**  Staff

Directed readings in Early Mediterranean and West Asian Religions.
RLST 963a or b, Directed Readings: Asian Religions Staff
RLST 964a or b, Directed Readings: Ethics Staff
RLST 965a or b, Directed Readings: Judaic Studies Staff
RLST 966a or b, Directed Readings: Islamic Studies Staff
RLST 968a or b, Directed Readings: Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Staff
RLST 969a or b, Directed Readings: Philosophy of Religion Staff
RLST 970a or b, Directed Readings: Religion and Modernity Staff
RLST 971a or b, Directed Readings: Theology Staff