RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RLST)

* RLST 035a / HIST 023a / HUMS 036a / JDST 035a, JERUSALEM: Judaism, Christianity, Islam  Sarit Kattan Gribetz
The Old City of Jerusalem is just 0.35 square miles large, about half the size of Yale’s campus. Have you ever wondered what makes this tiny city so beloved to — and the object of continual strife for — Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Through engagement with a wide range of sources — including biblical lamentations, archeological excavations, qur’anic passages, exegetical materials, medieval pilgrim itineraries, legal documents, maps, poetry, art, architecture, and international political resolutions — students develop the historiographical tools and theoretical frameworks to study the history of one of the world’s most enduringly important and bitterly contested cities.
Students encounter persistent themes central to the identity of Jerusalem: geography and topography; exile, diaspora, and return; destruction and trauma; religious violence and war; practices of pilgrimage; social diversity; missionizing; the rise of nationalism; peace efforts; the ethics of storytelling; and the stakes of studying the past.  HU  RP

* RLST 102a / EAST 390a, 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 107b / PHIL 192b, 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 108a / HSHM 451a / HUMS 108a, Introduction to the Occult Sciences  Travis Zadeh
This course provides a comparative history of the occult sciences from antiquity to the present. From Galen’s occult properties to Newton’s pursuit of alchemy, the notion that there are hidden forces in nature has played an immeasurable role in the development of religious thought, scientific reasoning, and literary endeavor. The modern impulse to separate religion from science and science from magic can obscure the centrality of an array of practices and beliefs across time and place. Far from a disenchanted present, magic and the occult are woven through the fabric of modernity. From healing crystals to the personalized astrology of Co-Star, tarot cards to New-Age inflected conspiracy theories, fortune tellers to countless films, we are surrounded by appeals to occult powers. Building on case studies from classical antiquity and Jewish, Christian, and Islamic letters, this course traces the development of the occult sciences through an array of historical periods, social contexts, and discursive materials. Topics include: origins of writing, astrology, alchemy, medicine, natural philosophy, divination, automata, talismans, natural magic, letterism, hermeticism, kabbalah, Neoplatonism,
recipes for summoning demons and angels, persecution, orientalism, colonialism, mesmerism, spiritualism, disenchantment, modernity, capitalism, consumption, and fantasy. Materials are drawn from an array of sources, including: philosophical dialogues, scientific manuals, illuminated manuscripts, encyclopedias, cosmographies, handbooks of practical magic, collections of stories, and movies. In addition to a panoply of primary sources and contemporary scholarship on theory and method, students are introduced to a variety of archival materials in the Yale collections. HU

RLST 148a / ER&M 219a / HIST 219a / JDST 200a / MMES 149a, Jews and the World: From the Bible through 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 0 Course cr

RLST 158a / CLCV 129a / HIST 159a / HUMS 129a / NELC 158a, Jesus to Muhammad: Ancient Christianity to the Rise of Islam Staff
The history of Christianity and the development of Western culture from Jesus to the early Middle Ages. The creation of orthodoxy and heresy; Christian religious practice; philosophy and theology; politics and society; gender; Christian literature in its various forms, up to and including the early Islamic period. HU 0 Course cr

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 175a / EAST 431a, North Korea and Religion Hwansoo Kim
Ever since the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948 and the Korean War (1950–1953), North Korea has been depicted by the media as a reclusive, oppressive, and military country, its leaders as the worst dictators, and its people as brainwashed, tortured, and starving to death. The still ongoing Cold War discourse, intensified by the North Korea’s recent secret nuclear weapons program, furthers these negative images, and outsiders have passively internalized these images. However, these simplistic characterizations prevent one from gaining a balanced understanding of and insight into North Korea and its people on the ground. Topics other than political, military, and security issues are rarely given attention. On the whole, even though North Korea’s land area is larger than South Korea and its population of 25 million accounts for a third of all Koreans, North Korea has been neglected in the scholarly discussion of Korean culture. This class tries to make sense of North Korea in a more comprehensive way by integrating the political and economic with social, cultural, and religious dimensions. In order to accomplish this objective, students examine leadership, religious (especially cultic) aspects of the North Korean Juche ideology, the daily lives of its citizens, religious traditions, the Korean War, nuclear development and missiles, North Korean defectors and refugees, human rights,
Christian missionary organizations, and unification, among others. Throughout, the course places North Korean issues in the East Asian and global context. The course draws upon recent scholarly books, articles, journals, interviews with North Korean defectors, travelogues, media publications, and visual materials.

* 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 209a, Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Southeast Asia  
David Moe
Religion, ethnicity, and nationalism are three of the most potent forces that have shaped contemporary Southeast Asia. This course is intended to provide context and a foundation for understanding the theory of nationalism and religious perspectives on everyday politics, including ethnicity, nation-imagination, minority-majority identity conflict, conflict among ethnic minorities, militarism, and tribalism. Drawing on case studies from across the region, we will critically examine why and how religion serves as a source of ethnic conflict and exclusion, as well as a potential source of conflict resolution and embrace. In doing so, we will also fill in some gaps by examining nuanced approaches toward religious doctrines related to community, human rights, and human identity, as well as the lived experiences of both public and hidden resistance to ethnic domination. Looking at these religious dynamics in Southeast Asia can also be applied to similar ethnic conflicts elsewhere in the world, including in the US.

* RLST 211a / EALL 213a / HUMS 292a / PHIL 205a, Philosophy, Religion, and Literature in Medieval China  
Xiaojing Miao
Exploration of the rich intellectual landscape of the Chinese middle ages, introducing students to seminal works of Chinese civilization and to the history of their debate and interpretation in the first millennium. No previous knowledge of China is assumed. Instead, the course serves as a focused introduction to Chinese philosophy, religion, and literature.

* RLST 227b, Erotic Faith in Christian Thought  
Adam Ployd
Focusing on figures such as the Desert Fathers & Mothers, Augustine, and Julian of Norwich, as well as movements such as Pietism, Queer Theology, and Womanist theology, this course examines the role of desire in Christian thought. We examine how different historical Christianities have understood the need for and mechanisms of the reformation of human desire in relation to ethics and piety.

* RLST 229a / EAST 420a, Buddhist Ethics  
Meghan Howard
This course explores ethical action in a range of Buddhist traditions, with an emphasis on Mahayana Buddhism in India and Tibet. Rather than starting with the categories of Western philosophy, we seek to develop an account that emerges from Buddhist sources. We begin by establishing a working model of karmic acts—describing the status of agents and patients, the mechanics of karma, and the cosmological and
soteriological contexts for action. We then examine the paradigmatic ethical act of giving as embodied by two great virtuous exemplars: the Buddha (archetypal renunciate) and Vessantara (archetypal layman). From there, we turn to case studies of ethical cultivation and negotiation in three realms of Buddhist practice: the Vinaya precepts governing monastic life, the altruism and skillful means of bodhisattvas, and the antinomian ethics of Buddhist tantra. The course concludes with a reflection on the intersection of aesthetics and morality in Buddhist thought. 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 234b / HIST 234Jb, History of the Supernatural from Antiquity to Modernity  Carlos Eire
This survey course aims to provide an introduction to ancient, medieval, and early modern Western beliefs in supernatural forces, as manifested in saints, mystics, demoniacs, ghosts, witches, relics, miracles, magic, charms, folk traditions, fantastic creatures and sacred places. Using a wide range of primary sources and various historical methodologies, our aim is to better understand how beliefs and worldviews develop and change and the ways in which they shape and determine human behavior. This course is not open to students previously enrolled in HIST 299. HU

RLST 245b / ARCG 244b / NELC 109b, The Age of Akhenaton  Nadine Moeller and 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 0 Course cr

* RLST 259a, Muslim Societies in Africa  Matthew Steele
While the Western academy has long devoted attention to Africa and Islam, it has not commonly treated the two together. Their estrangement in the literature belies the significance of Islam in Africa and conversely of Africa within the wider Islamic World. Indeed, today Africans constitute nearly a third of the global Muslim community. Islam enjoys a rich history on the continent, stretching from the migration of Muslims to seventh-century Abyssinia to the Islamic kingdoms of nineteenth-century West Africa. This course seeks to reimagine Africa not as a periphery but as a center of the Islamic World. It relocates a model of Islam that looks to the Middle East, instead highlighting the diversity of practice, scholarship, and politics of Muslim societies in Africa. It explores how constructions of race inform the representation of Islam in Africa today. It also questions whether one can even speak of Islam in Africa at all, reexamining what is lost and what is gained in such a geography of African and Muslim subjects. Rather than a comprehensive overview, the course provides a solid foundation for engaging in key theoretical debates on issues of religion, race, and politics in Africa and the wider Islamic World. HU
RLST 262a / ARCH 272a / HSAR 150a, Introduction to the History of Art: Art and Architecture of the Sacred  Staff
A wide-ranging, cross-temporal exploration of religious images, objects, and architecture in diverse cultures, from ancient Mesopotamia to modern Manhattan. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and various polytheistic traditions are represented. Thematic threads include the human body; transformations of nature; death, memory, and afterlife; sacred kingship and other forms of political engagement; practices of concealment and revelation; images as embodiments of the divine; the framing and staging of ritual through architecture.  

* RLST 264b / HIST 412Jb / HUMS 261b / NELC 364b, The Psalms, A Cultural History of Ancient Prayer  Stephen Davis
This course introduces students to the Book of Psalms and its significant cultural and religious impact in ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course is organized in three units. Unit 1 focuses on the text of the Psalms, with special attention to their literary forms, editorial organization, and early ritual context in ancient Israel. Unit 2 focuses on the reception and use of the Psalms in late ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with special attention to matters of translation, interpretation, worship, prayer, and scriptural authority. Unit 3 focuses on material and sensory encounters with the Psalms from antiquity to the present day within these three religious traditions — case studies related to tactile and visual contact with the physical book, oral and aural engagement through song or chant, and embodied forms of writing, reciting, and enacting the Psalms in the context of ritual practice, including magical spells. The goal of the course is thus to trace the life and afterlife—to write the textual and extra-textural “biography,” as it were—of a major biblical book.  

* RLST 289a / ER&M 444a, Race, Religion, and Transnational Mobilities  Gana Ndiaye
This course surveys how “migrants” and “desirable migrants” are produced through race and religion in the Americas and Europe. It also examines how racial identities and religious beliefs inform human mobilities and shape the experiences of such mobile persons as settlers, exiles, asylum seekers, temporary workers, and economic migrants. By the end of the course, participants will familiarize themselves with the crucial roles that religious beliefs and practices play in causing and responding to human mobilities. Students will also gain familiarity with the ways in which migrants’ religious practices transform local cultures, politics, and societies as their own religious practices are reconfigured by and in the context of host nations. Topics to be covered include citizenship and cultural difference, religion and the public sphere, multiculturalism, Islam and democracy, Christian Pentecostal missions, liberation theology, and African diasporic religions.  

* RLST 293b, Reform and Continuity in Islamic law  Matthew Steele
This course aims to provide students with an alternative reading of the Islamic legal tradition. It upends the view that Islamic law was in some way allergic to change. Likewise, it problematizes the notion that the medieval legal tradition either lacked innovation or was rendered obsolete by colonial reforms and modernist critique. It approaches Islamic law through the speculative enterprise of jurisprudence (fiqh), the work of legal scholars to elaborate God’s most likely position regarding any legal dilemma. Through the literature and opinions (fatwās) of legal specialists from the ninth through the twentieth century, the class interrogates the relationship
between change and continuity in Islamic law. We explore how jurisconsults balanced the doctrine of trans-regional schools of law with the local dilemmas faced by the communities in which they lived and served. Similarly, we consider not only the opportunities but also the risks that arise from adapting Islamic law to local conditions. The course challenges students to ask what is change within a tradition? In the debates and polemics of legal scholars, we contemplate the appeal and the limitations of reform within Islamic law, tracing how both have been contested and have evolved across different geographies and periods in the Muslim World. Likewise, we rethink the boundaries of continuity. We question how a legal school and a legal canon are constructed and revised, examining the ways in which both are capable of reinforcing – or imperiling – the Islamic legal tradition. Last, we explore the endurance of Islamic law in contemporary Muslim societies. The course reflects on the processes and the consequences of various projects of “modernizing” the Shari’a, asking how the institutions of the colonial and postcolonial state have reconfigured Islamic law in radically different ways.

* RLST 324a / HIST 268Ja / JDST 351a / PLSC 466a, The Global Right: From the French Revolution to the American Insurrection  Elli Stern

This seminar explores the history of right-wing political thought from the late eighteenth century to the present, with an emphasis on the role played by religious and pagan traditions. This course seeks to answer the question, what constitutes the right? What are the central philosophical, religious, and pagan, principles of those groups associated with this designation? How have the core ideas of the right changed over time? We do this by examining primary tracts written by theologians, political philosophers, and social theorists as well as secondary literature written by scholars interrogating movements associated with the right in America, Europe, Middle East and Asia. Though touching on specific national political parties, institutions, and think tanks, its focus is on mapping the intellectual overlap and differences between various right-wing ideologies. While the course is limited to the modern period, it adopts a global perspective to better understand the full scope of right-wing politics.

* RLST 327b / EALL 238b / EAST 394b, Buddhist Monastic Experience  Hwansoo Kim

Is monastic life relevant in contemporary society, where religion is increasingly considered less significant in our secular lives? Can we find valuable aspects of a monastic lifestyle that can be integrated into our daily lives? If so, what are these aspects, and how can we incorporate them? This seminar represents a collaborative effort to gain insight into one of the major monastic traditions: Buddhist monasticism. Throughout this seminar, we delve into various facets of Buddhist monastic life, examining its origins, historical development, monastic identity, rules and regulations, practices, and the dynamics between monastics and the laity. We also explore the tensions that often arise between the ideals of monasticism and the realities it faces in today’s world. As part of this exploration, we embark on an eight-week monastic life project, during which students create their own set of daily rules (precepts), adhere to these rules, engage in meditation and other relevant practices, and establish a regular communal gathering with fellow students.
RLST 342b / AMST 234b / ER&M 243b / HIST 188b, Spiritual But Not Religious
Staff
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 0 Course cr

* RLST 347b / HIST 240b / SOCY 331b / WGSS 291b, Sexual Minorities from Plato to the Enlightenment  Igor De Souza
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

RLST 375a / SAST 256a, Hindu Nationalism  Supriya Gandhi
This course analyzes the development of Hindu nationalism from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Students interrogate the emergence of Hinduism as a religion, before exploring the reform and revivalist movements in the nineteenth century that paved the way for the articulation of Hindu nationalism. Students also read from key writings of several Hindu nationalist thinkers of the twentieth century and investigate the historical and social contexts leading to the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a major political force. Topics include: colonialism, modernity, the idea of Hinduism, nationalist ideologies, gender, and religious violence.  HU, SO

* RLST 380a / ENGL 289a / HUMS 388a / LITR 389a / PHIL 385a, The Force of Life  Nancy Levene and James Wood
The point of departure for this course is a line from James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*: “To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.” We study four authors—Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Baldwin, and Jacques Derrida—in light of the values Baldwin expresses and their challenges. Our work between philosophy and fiction involves striving to read each text according to the ideas it itself advances, as well as reading for connections and cross-pollinations.  WR, HU

RLST 402a / PHIL 256a, The Philosophy of Religion  Staff
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 429a / PHIL 431a, Phenomenology  Noreen Khawaja
In-depth introduction to phenomenology as a theory of what is and as a method for studying it. Key figures in the history of phenomenology, emphasizing connections to social theory, aesthetics, and religion. Readings from Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Fanon, Husserl, Ahmed, Barad, and others.  HU

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

* RLST 488a and RLST 489b, Individual Tutorial  Eric Greene
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  Hwansoo Kim
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 492a or b, The Senior Essay  Eric Greene
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.