

Religious Studies

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The Religious Studies Department offers an array of courses that provide broad exposure to diverse religious texts, traditions, practices, and themes throughout various world cultures/regions from the ancient to the modern periods. The program focuses on the intersection of religious meanings and specific cultural contexts that shape those meanings. The approach to the study of religion is therefore largely interdisciplinary, with any single course providing exposure to several different methods of analysis and interpretation. Using these diverse approaches, the religious studies program investigates the complex, often ambiguous processes, products and performances of religious communities and individuals over time. The faculty also seeks to understand and assess religious phenomena on their own terms, appreciating their contributions to human vitality in the past and present, and examining their significance for the future. The department welcomes students from all religious and theological/ philosophical/ ideological persuasions, and aim to foster an environment in which students feel free to deepen their understanding of their own traditions while engaging alternative perspectives that provide challenges and new insights.

Alongside various other course offerings, the Religious Studies Department has three fields of concentration:

1. Asian religions and cultures
2. Bible and culture
3. Christian theology and history

These fields correspond with the current strengths and interests of the department.

Degree Plans Offered in Religious Studies

Major in Religious Studies

Minor in Religious Studies

A **major in religious studies** consists of:

Introductory Courses (2 courses, must be in different traditions, as grouped below):

Group 1:

_____ REL 110 Intro of Buddhist Traditions

_____ REL 115 Intro to Hinduism

_____ REL 140 Intro to Islam

Group 2:

REL 155 Religion Outside of Religions

REL 165 What is Christianity?

REL 175 Intro to Biblical Studies

Methods Course (at least 1 course, department recommends majors take both):

_____ REL 291 Why Do Christians Do That?

_____ REL 390 Theories and Methods for Religion Research

Electives (5 courses attending to the different Course Categories below)

_____ REL any level

_____ REL any level

- _____ REL 300 level or higher
- _____ REL 300 level or higher
- _____ REL 300 level or higher

Course Categories – the electives above must include at least one course from 3 of the 4 following categories (note: a course can be used for only one category):

- _____ **RBS: Religion, Bodies, and Perspectives on Science** (REL 220, 253, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category)
- _____ **RSG: Religion and Society in Global Perspective** (REL 201, 220, 222, 253, 315, 352,411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category; SOC 345)
- _____ **RLA: Religion, Literature, and the Arts** (REL 220, 225, 253, 366, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category)
- _____ **RTI: Religious Texts and Ideas** (REL 220, 253, 265, 317, 365, 366, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category; PHIL 312)

Other considerations when planning for the major:

- Most 300- and 400-level courses have specific prerequisites and are not recommended for freshman students.
- Majors are strongly encouraged to take both methods courses, ideally Religious Studies 291 in the freshman or sophomore year and Religious Studies 390 in the junior year.
- Students considering the major should consult with department faculty about projected offerings in the categories above in order to plan adequately.

Total Credits Requirement = 8 course credits

A minor in religious studies consists of:

Introductory Courses (2 courses, one from each group/traditions):

Group 1:

- _____ REL 110 Intro of Buddhist Traditions
- _____ REL 115 Intro to Hinduism
- _____ REL 140 Intro to Islam

Group 2:

- REL 155 Religion Outside of Religions
- REL 165 What is Christianity?
- REL 175 Intro to Biblical Studies

Electives (3 courses, attending to the different Course Categories below):

- _____ REL any level
- _____ REL 200 level or higher
- _____ REL 300 level or higher

Course Categories – the electives above must include at least one course from 3 of the 5 following categories (note: a course can only be used for one category):

- _____ **Methods** (REL 291 or 390)
- _____ **RBS: Religion, Bodies, and Perspectives on Science** (REL 220, 253, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category)

RSG: Religion and Society in Global Perspective (REL 201, 220, 222, 253, 315, 352, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category; SOC 345)

RLA: Religion, Literature, and the Arts (REL 220, 225, 253, 366, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category)

RTI: Religious Texts and Ideas (REL 220, 253, 265, 317, 365, 366, 411; REL 250, 350, and 450 when indicated for this category; PHIL 312)

Other considerations when planning for the minor:

- Most 300- and 400-level courses have specific prerequisites and are not recommended for freshman students.
- Majors are strongly encouraged to take both methods courses, ideally Religious Studies 291 in the freshman or sophomore year and Religious Studies 390 in the junior year.
- Students considering the major should consult with department faculty about projected offerings in the categories above in order to plan adequately.

Total Credits Requirement = 5 course credits

COURSES

REL 110 Introduction to Buddhist Traditions

An introduction to diverse Buddhist traditions from their South Asian origins to their transformations in East Asia and the West. The course examines Buddhism as both a pan-Asian and cultural tradition in religious literature, ritual and the arts. Explores themes such as enlightenment, suffering, rebirth, and karma.

Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Global Diversity. Former title: The Life and Teachings of the Buddha. (Every other year; alternates with Religious Studies 115)

REL 115 Introduction to Hinduism

An introduction to the many distinct yet interrelated religions of South Asia labeled "Hinduism." From the ritual cosmos of the ancient Vedas to the political views of Gandhi, this course examines the development and colonial interpretations of the Hindu tradition. Exploration of key concepts including dharma, God, karma, devotion, liberation, and yoga with special attention to sacred space and pilgrimage. Former title: Hinduism.

Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover, Global Diversity, and Foundation Writing Competency. (Every other year; alternates with Religious Studies 110)

REL 140 Introduction to Islam

This course introduced practices, ideas, sources, institutions, and contexts that are central to the religious lives of Muslim communities and societies. Core topics include the life of Muhammad, major concepts and principles in the Qur'an and Hadith, the Five Pillars, key points in Islamic history, and the Islamic world today. Other topics (e.g., Islamic art and literature, Islamic movements) and geographical focus may vary. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 155 Religion Outside of Religions

This course introduces the study of religion by using concepts commonly applied to religion in order to analyze activities and institution that are usually considered separate from organized religion. Case-studies are drawn primarily U.S. culture and society and may include such topics as professional sports, dieting, the free market, medical expertise, self-help culture, education or similar phenomena. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 165 What is Christianity?

A survey of practices, power-structures, and perspectives that make Christianity what it is. We assume that there is not just one "true" or "correct" form of Christianity; instead we seek to understand how it is true in different ways for different people. The emphasis is on how Christianity functions in the lives of the participants as well as in broader society. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover.

REL 175 Introduction to Biblical Studies

An introduction to scholarly approaches to studying the Bible, emphasizing its literary qualities in their social and political contexts. The course does not address whether or how the Bible is "true," but instead how it was constructed through human activities and how it, in turn, constructs meanings. Possible topics include sources and genres of biblical texts, competing worldviews within the Bible, diverse ways of interpreting the Bible, or various ways the Bible has been used. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 201 Religious Diversity in the U.S.

An introduction to religious traditions in the United States, emphasizing religious practices and institutions but also including texts and ideas. The focus may be present-day communities, historical communities, or tradition that originated in other geographical regions (e.g., Asia). Topics may include adaptation and conflicts between religious groups, separation of "church" and state, and intersection of religious and other identities. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 220 Medicine and Public Health in Asian Traditions

Explores the theories and practices of Asian medicine medical systems particularly their scientific and cultural (religious, philosophical) foundations, and the impact of Asian medicine in the promotion of public health. Depending on the semester, the course examines "traditional" Chinese medicine, Indian Ayurveda, Tibetan medicine, and Islamic medical systems alongside ritual dimensions of healing and the intersection of Western and Asian medicine in cultural contexts. Critical examinations of the impact of infectious disease on public health, the development of institutions of health, and the role of cultural and religious views of disease, prevention and healing are central the course. PREQ: One course in Asian religions or Asian studies, or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. Previous course title, "Illness, medicine and Healing in Asian Religions." (Every other year)

REL 222 Religions of East Asia

Focuses on the historical and modern development for the religious traditions of China and Japan. The course may include an examination of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shinto in relation to beliefs about the natural order, the individual, and society. Explores topics such as divination, filial piety, ancestor veneration, cosmology, and immortality. Attention will be given to the signification of images in rituals, tea ceremonies, and landscape construction like rock gardens. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Global Diversity. (Alternate years)

REL 225 Sacred Image, Sacred Space in South Asia and Tibet

Focuses on the religious dimensions of visual culture and space in South Asia and Tibet. What defines a sacred image? How is it that some physical locations have deeper meanings - becoming symbolically powerful in individuals' experiences? How do images and space come together for sacred meaning and even share the vision of geographic locations? This course examines such topics as role of images, religious transformation of landscapes, pilgrimage sites, and temple architecture. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 250 Topics in Religious Studies

Study of particular issues in religious thought and practice. These topics are more specific than the broad introductory courses, but generally require no prerequisites. They are taught at different times, depending on

student and faculty interests. May be repeated when topic varies. (Typically at least one each year) The following courses are examples:

- Violence and Nonviolence in Asian Religious Traditions
- Rituals in the Hindu Tradition
- The Erotic and the Ascetic in Indian Traditions
- Tibetan Buddhism and Politics
- Buddhist Philosophy
- Religion and Art of India and Tibet
- Religion, Sex, and Sexuality

REL 253 Sex, Self, and Society

A critical exploration of the relationships between sexual practices, having a good life, and creating a good society. Possible topics include hooking up, marriage (and alternative relationship forms), porn, sexual safety, and similar matters. Drawing examples from diverse sexual cultures in the U.S, we consider both Christian and “secular” perspectives (which, we will see also rely on moral convictions and function in a religious manner). Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Systems of Power, Privilege, and Inequality. Cross-listed with Gender Studies 254. (Every year)

REL 260 Intermediate Directed Study

Student investigation of topic of interest working in collaboration with a faculty member resulting in significant oral and written work. See On-Campus Learning Opportunities for more information. PREQ: Freshman January term or Sophomore standing. Special permission required. Offered in variable course credit from 0.25-1.00.

REL 265 Christian Ethics

A survey of ethical stances and strategies within Christianity, analyzing what Christians think is at stake in ethical decisions, what they base those decisions on, and what ethical matters are the most challenging for them. Topics may include economic justice, the environment, political activism, violence/pacifism, racism, medical ethics, relations with other religions, criminal justice, or similar matters. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Occasional)

REL 291 Why Do Christians Do That?

An exploration of different strategies for understanding what motivates various Christians to act, speak, or think the way they do. One can, for instance, observe Christians in everyday activities or analyze texts they consider sacred. By comparing several methods alongside each other, we will learn more about how scholars use different kinds of evidence to construct new understandings of religion. PREQ: One 100 level religious studies course. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Half Writing Competency. (Alternate years)

REL 292 Intermediate Independent Study Off-Campus

See program director for more information about this course. Offered for variable course credit.

REL 294 Intermediate Student Research

Intended for less experienced students to develop and execute a research project related to religious studies, beyond the constraints of the normal classroom, suitable for public dissemination on or off campus under mentorship of a faculty member. Typically this work results in a formal presentation, written work, or creative works. Course credit varies from 0-1.00. PREQ: Instructor permission required.

REL 315 Religion and Violence

Examines the role of religion in justifying, shaping, and resolving violence in scriptural text and modern movements alongside critical theories about religion and violence. Does religion appear to promote or discourage violent acts? The course will examine and compare case studies in Asian contexts. PREQ: Two

religious studies courses including at least one in Asian religion or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 317 Love, The Divine, and Devotional Movements

This course explores the varieties of devotional experiences and popular organized movements called bhakti, the expression of love for a divine being, in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim traditions of India. Devotional movements are often cast as transgressing social and gender norms, impacting political views, and maintaining, to some extent, the status quo in Asia. Particular attention is paid to how emotion, bodily gestures, embodiment, and artistic expressions (sculpture/painting, songs, poetry, dance) in ritual contexts express deep devotion in the form of sensual engagement or love for a divine being. PREQ: Two religious studies courses, including at least one in Asian religion or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Global Diversity. (Alternate years)

REL 350/450 Advanced Topics in Religious Studies

A variety of courses focusing on theories and practices of textual interpretation. They are taught at different times, depending on student and faculty interests. Prerequisites vary. May be repeated when topic varies. (Typically at least one each year) The following courses are examples:

- Readings in Hindu and Buddhist Texts
- Ritual Studies in Asian Traditions
- Body and Power in Asian Religions
- Feminist and Liberation Theology
- Hermeneutics
- The Bible and the Formation of the Secular Modern

REL 352 Christianity and Capitalism

An investigation of Christianity's contradictory responses to capitalism, revealing the interplay of religion, economics, and politics in both ideas and actions. We consider Christians who have pursued capitalist enterprise as an extension of their faith as well as Christians who have felt morally compelled to limit or disrupt capitalism's power. At the same time, we analyze how capitalism itself functions as a religion in contemporary society. PREQ: Religious Studies 165 or 291 and one additional religious studies course or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 360 Directed Study

Student investigation of topic of interest related to the major or minor working in collaboration with a faculty member resulting in significant oral and written work. See On-Campus Learning Opportunities for more information. PREQ: Junior or Senior standing. Special permission required. Offered for variable course credit from 0.25-1.00.

REL 365 Christianites: Historical Survey

A survey of the major eras in the history of Christian communities, starting from the assumption that there is no universal or single "correct" form of Christianity: there is only Christianites. We examine not just what Christians have believed or thought, but how they have lived - their everyday practices, power-structures and conflicts, and relationships with other societal institutions and religious communities. PREQ: Religious Studies 165 or 175 or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 366 Jesus, Christ, and Culture

An examination of differences between the Jesus of history, the Jesus of the Bible, the Christ of faith, and the Christ of popular culture. We study three kinds of sources: ancient/medieval theological explanations of Jesus/Christ as well as contemporary re-interpretations of Jesus/Christ in theology and popular culture. PREQ:

Religious Studies 165 or Religious Studies 291 and one other religious studies course or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover. (Alternate years)

REL 390 Theories and Methods for Religion Research

Focuses on fundamental theoretical and methodological issues and pluralism pertaining to the academic study of religion. Exposes student to some of the more important theories of the origin, character, and function of religion, and key approaches to the academic study of religion. This course also provides the opportunity to apply theories and methods to specific texts, concrete issues, or cultural formations. This is an ideal course for building research and writing skills. PREQ: Junior or Senior standing and two religious studies courses or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover and Full Writing Competency. (Offered as directed study only.)

REL 394/494 Advanced Student Research

Intended for advanced students to develop and execute a research project related to religious studies suitable for public dissemination under mentorship of a faculty member. Students are expected to present the results of their research in a public forum. Typically this work results in a formal presentation, written work, or creative works. Offered for variable course credit from 0-1.00. PREQ: Instructor permission required.

REL 411 Gender, Body, and Power in Asian Religious Traditions

Explores the power dynamics of gender and the body in Asian religious texts and art. This course considers how images of the feminine, conceptions of the body and its regulation, and constructions of gender in Asian religious traditions have either reinforced and/or challenged religious doctrines, religious status, and societal views about women. PREQ: Two religious studies courses, including at least one in Asian religion or instructor permission. Requirements met: Humanities Breadth/Discover, Full Writing Competency, Advanced Writing Competency, Global Diversity, and Systems of Power, Privilege, and Inequality.

REL 460 Advanced Directed Study (Variable course credit)

An opportunity for students to investigate subjects in religion that are not covered by regularly offered courses, or to cover aspects of lower-level courses in greater depth. PREQ: At least two previous courses in religious studies (as specified by the instructor) or instructor permission.

REL 464 Teaching/Learning Participation

An individualized study that includes sharing in the instructional process for a particular course in religious studies under the supervision of the faculty member teaching the course. Open only to certain highly qualified juniors and seniors by invitation. See On-Campus Learning Opportunities for more information.

REL 490 Independent Study

Student-driven independent work to produce a high quality body of work such as paper, report, art project, etc. See On-Campus Learning Opportunities for more information. PREQ: Junior or Senior standing. Special permission required. Offered in variable course credit from 0.25-1.00.

REL 491 Honors Thesis in Religious Studies

Extensive independent study in the major in a topic of special interest culminating in a bachelor's thesis with oral examination by thesis committee resulting in a bachelor's degree with Honors upon completion. See Departmental Honors Program for more information. Completed in last three semesters before graduation. Offered for variable course credit from 1.00-2.00.

REL 492 Individual Study Off-Campus/NSOC

Student-driven independent study in a topic related to the major completed at an off-campus site. See Off-Campus Learning Opportunities for more information. PREQ: Junior or Senior standing. Special permission required. Offered in variable course credit from 0.25-1.00.