Religious Studies

Chair
- Diana F. Cates

Undergraduate major: religious studies (B.A.)
Undergraduate minors: religion and media; religious studies
Graduate degrees: M.A. in religious studies; Ph.D. in religious studies
Faculty: https://clas.uiowa.edu/religion/people/faculty
Website: https://clas.uiowa.edu/religion/

The Department of Religious Studies encourages multidisciplinary inquiry into religious ideas, experiences, philosophies, cultural expressions, and social movements. It studies a rich array of traditions and paths, including South and Southeast Asian religions, ancient Judaism and early Christianity, African diaspora religions, modern European Christianity, various Islamic sects, North American religions, including Native American traditions, and new forms of religion that many people may not yet recognize as religions.

The study of religion helps students to think critically and creatively about the many forms that religion takes and the subtle ways in which it operates. Students learn how people from around the world have responded to age-old questions about life, love, suffering, and death. They learn about religion’s impact on global events, including its influences on the construction of personal and communal identities, and its roles in shaping processes of social change, both historically and in the contemporary digital era.

Programs

Undergraduate Programs of Study

Major
- Major in Religious Studies (Bachelor of Arts)

Minors
- Minor in Religion and Media
- Minor in Religious Studies

Graduate Programs of Study

Majors
- Master of Arts in Religious Studies
- Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

Courses

Religious Studies Courses

RELS:1000 First-Year Seminar 1 s.h.
Small discussion class taught by a faculty member; topics chosen by instructor; may include outside activities (e.g., films, lectures, performances, readings, visits to research facilities). Requirements: first- or second-semester standing.

RELS:1001 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam 3 s.h.
Introduction to sacred literature, beliefs, and rituals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as historical and contemporary relationship between these three Abrahamic religions. GE: Historical Perspectives.

RELS:1010 CLAS Master Class 1-3 s.h.

RELS:1015 Religions in a Global Context: The Critical Role of Religion in International Affairs 3 s.h.
Essentials of world’s religions; focus on religion’s role in national and international events, fundamentalism, millenarianism, protest movements, religion and youth culture, religion and popular culture, contact between religious communities past and present.

RELS:1050 Big Ideas: Introduction to Information, Society, and Culture 3 s.h.
What is information? What does it teach us about societies and cultures? How is information used to shape societies and even personal preferences? What types of information are there and how can we understand and use them? Students work with faculty from multiple disciplines to investigate these questions using inquiry-based activities to build success in critical thinking and teamwork. GE: Quantitative or Formal Reasoning. Same as POLI:1050.

RELS:1070 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament 3 s.h.
History, religion, and thought of ancient Jews as recorded in their scripture. GE: Values and Culture.

RELS:1080 Introduction to the New Testament 3 s.h.

RELS:1113 Gateway to the Bible 3 s.h.
Disagreement of Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox Christians about the Bible, one of the most influential works in Western culture, on how it should be interpreted, what books should be included, and what versions of those books should be authoritative; introduction to issues involved in creating and interpreting the Bible; how academic study of religion seeks to provide answers.

RELS:1130 Introduction to Islamic Civilization 3 s.h.
Major areas of Islamic religious tradition: Qur’an, traditions of the Prophet, development and character of Islamic law, theology. GE: International and Global Issues; Values and Culture. Same as HIST:1030.

RELS:1225 Medieval Religion and Culture 3 s.h.
Religion in Europe from classical antiquity to dawn of the Reformation; the religious element in traditions such as art, architecture, literature. GE: Historical Perspectives. Same as HIST:1025.

RELS:1250 Modern Religion and Culture 3 s.h.
European and American religious life from Renaissance to 21st century; focus on specific themes, such as secularism, regionalism, pluralism. GE: Historical Perspectives. Same as HIST:1050.
RELS:1323 Life in the Biblical World 3 s.h.
Examination of world depicted in Old and New Testaments of the Bible; archaeological evidence, ancient art, historical accounts, geography, and Bible text used to examine background of biblical text, shedding light on different aspects of daily life in antiquity from different points of view from Late Bronze Age through Roman period. Same as CLSA:1323.

RELS:1350 Introduction to African American Religions 3 s.h.
GE: Values and Culture. Same as AFAM:1250.

RELS:1404 Living Religions of the East 3 s.h.
Religious beliefs, practices in India, China, Japan. GE: Values and Culture. Same as ASIA:1040, HIST:1610.

RELS:1410 Introduction to Indian Religions 3 s.h.
Religions with origins in the South Asian geographic region (e.g., Vedas in mid-second millennium BCE, Jainism and Buddhism from sixth to fourth centuries BCE, Sikhism in 15th century, Indian Christianity, Islam); focus on Hinduism and Buddhism; rise of varied literary forms, ritual, rise of devotional religion, Tantra, how religious practices affect indigenous medical traditions, traditions developed in different South Asian regions; broad changes in South Asian religion in 20th and early 21st centuries, current politicization of religion.

RELS:1430 The Bible: Frequently Asked Questions 3 s.h.
Curious about what the Bible is or how it was created, the biblical character that your friends keep referencing, where ideas like Satan and the apocalypse come from, or how the Bible influences our world today? Introduction to the Bible and its influences on Western culture; course format organized by question types to allow flexibility in learning.

RELS:1502 Asian Humanities: India 3 s.h.
Introduction to four thousand years of South Asian civilization, through popular stories. GE: Values and Culture. Same as SOAS:1502.

RELS:1506 Introduction to Buddhism 3 s.h.
Development of Buddhism in India, its spread across Asia, and arrival in the West; exploration of diverse Buddhist philosophies, practices, and cultures; readings from India, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. GE: Values and Culture. Same as ASIA:1060, HIST:1612.

RELS:1510 Gods, Buddhists, and Ghostly Officials: The Past and Present of Chinese Religions 3 s.h.
History of religious beliefs and practices in China; role in modern-day Chinese society; specific case studies that illuminate current situation of religion in China and impact on Chinese society; focus on the still widespread worship of gods and ancestors, the Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist traditions, recent upsurge of Christianity in China, and emergence of new religions (e.g., the Falun gong). Same as ASIA:1110.

RELS:1606 Civilizations of Asia: South Asia 3-4 s.h.
Civilization of a vast region that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. GE: Historical Perspectives; International and Global Issues. Same as ASIA:1606, HIST:1606.

RELS:1610 Japanese Religions 3 s.h.
Religions of Japan from ancient times to the present day; elite and popular Japanese interpretations of Chinese Buddhist and Daoist traditions; the parallel development of an indigenous kami tradition; contemporary new religious movements; focus on the codification of a variety of religious (and sometimes quasi-religious) paths, including the way of tea, the way of the brush, and the way of the samurai. Same as JPN:1115.

RELS:1620 Bhagavad Gita: Essential Teachings of Indian Religion 3 s.h.
Students read the Bhagavad Gita and discuss its interpretations and use in classical and modern religious, literary, and political contexts; composed around 2000 years ago, it is the best known and most influential religious text in Indian history and concisely addresses war and peace, duty and righteousness, renunciation, devotion, and the nature of the universe; its been read, debated, and discussed by ancient philosophers, modern religious teachers, and political figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern Independent India. Same as SOAS:1620, TRNS:1620.

RELS:1702 Religion in America Today 3 s.h.
How American men, women, and children practice their beliefs in today's society. GE: Values and Culture.

RELS:1725 Gender and Religions in Visual Culture: Korea 3 s.h.
Students draw creatively on visual materials to illuminate complex experience of Korean women in various religious traditions of Korea.

RELS:1765 U.S. Latino Religions 3 s.h.
Beliefs and practices of U.S. Latinos and Latinas, ways that their beliefs and practices are unique and where they overlap with mainstream U.S. society: beliefs, symbols, and practices among U.S. Latinos and Latinas on national and local level; field visits to local churches and religious sites; class visitors share insights. Same as LAS:1765, LAT5:1765.

RELS:1810 Happiness in a Difficult World 3 s.h.
Religious backgrounds and unique spiritualities of Maya Angelou (an African-American Christian), Black Elk (a Lakota Sioux medicine man), and the Dalai Lama (a Tibetan Buddhist monk); forms of oppression that humans can experience as obstacles to happiness, and forms of liberation that are possible (social, political, economic, mental, emotional, spiritual). GE: Values and Culture.

RELS:1903 Quest for Human Destiny 3 s.h.
Quests for destiny in terms of perceived options/goals and ability to recognize, pursue, achieve them. GE: Values and Culture.

RELS:1997 Harry Potter: The Mystery and Magic of Life 3 s.h.
Exploration of Harry Potter novels and films that offer millions of people an entrée into a world of wizards, witches, and muggles; this engrossing world created by J.K. Rowling invites readers and viewers to explore the power of human imagination, creates a space for asking questions of personal significance (What defines me as a person? What sort of person am I in the process of becoming? What are the most significant factors that are shaping my identity and destiny?); students read selections and view film segments while exploring these essential questions.

RELS:2041 Understanding "The Muslim World" 3 s.h.
Exploration of expressions and experiences of Muslims in increasingly diverse societies around the world. Same as ASIA:2041, IS:2041.
RELS:2064 Tricksters, Fools, and Creators: Mythical Agents of Change 3 s.h.
Trickster figures found all around the world in many forms, including coyote, br'er rabbit, spider, raven, and gods; how they are often depicted as bungling fools or dupes, but also as creators, transformers, or culture heroes; how they get into trouble and solve human problems; how storytellers have long entertained and educated their listeners with tales of trickster exploits; trickster figures that have been recast in comic books and on movie screens (e.g., Loki); examination of historical and contemporary trickster figures to understand how they are experienced by different cultures and how they shape and inform human behavior.

RELS:2068 Jews in Popular Culture 3 s.h.
Exploration of a wide variety of ways in which Jewish people represent themselves through production of cultural media.

RELS:2080 Public Life in the U.S.: Religion and Media 3 s.h.
Examination of how the U.S. came into being through specific communication practices, how religion has helped and hindered that process; religious roots of the idea of the U.S., intertwined histories of print media and religion, role of religion and secularism in public discourse; U.S. pride as a nation in which diversity thrives in public discourse; communicative acts that created and sustained this country and also mark sites of discord, conflict, and confusion from the very beginnings of the U.S. to today; how religion has been a source of national identity and national division. Same as COMM:2080.

RELS:2087 Narnia and Beyond: The Writings of C.S. Lewis 3 s.h.
Exploration of C.S. Lewis’s use of fantasy to describe the indescribable, his efforts to empathize with human suffering while hoping in possibility of miracles, and his jargon-free narration of Christian beliefs for a war-weary country; Lewis’s works that continue to attract attention, ranging from children’s literature to science fiction to autobiography and nonfiction; as a professor of medieval and renaissance literature, Lewis’s unique perspective on Christianity that led him to make use of imagery, metaphors, and narratives previously neglected by Christian thinkers.

RELS:2090 Issues in American Catholicism 3 s.h.
Major issues that have faced Catholics in America; special attention to issues of gender, racial, and ethnic identities.

RELS:2110 Diversity in American Religious History: Experimenting with Gender and Sexuality 3 s.h.
Introduction to select popular, alternative, and communal religious groups from the 19th and 20th centuries that have challenged society’s norms for gender and sexuality. Same as GWSS:2110, HIST:2210.

RELS:2182 Ancient Mediterranean Religions 3 s.h.
Introduction to major religious traditions of ancient Mediterranean world; Mesopotamia, the Levant (Hebrew Bible), Egypt, Greece, and Rome; central aspects of mythology, ritual, and archaeology, individually and in comparative perspective; ancient Judaism and Christianity considered in their various cultural contexts; basic concepts for understanding cultural exchange; fundamental theories in the study of religion. GE: Values and Culture. Same as CLSA:2482.

RELS:2225 Messianic and Apocalyptic Prophecy in the Bible 3 s.h.
Literary, historical, and theological analysis of biblical prophecies and their impact. Same as CLSA:2425.

RELS:2260 Hard Cases in Healthcare at the Beginning of Life 3 s.h.
Exploration of ethical impact that advances in biotechnology—including genetic, reproductive, and neonatal technology—are having in the medical arena and on humanity; consideration of the powerful influence that religion and spirituality have on most people’s thinking about life and death. Same as GHS:2260.

RELS:2265 Hard Cases in Healthcare at the End of Life 3 s.h.
Preparation for future healthcare providers to make difficult ethical decisions regarding the end of life; interactive course. Same as GHS:2265.

RELS:2272 Religion and Film 3 s.h.
Religious ideas that are often explored and debated in movies; movies that retell a particular story (Noah or Kundun) or rework ancient themes (Little Buddha or The Matrix); movies that go beyond mere entertainment to try to persuade audiences to change their view of the world and how movie watchers do not realize that this process is taking place; analysis of movies that use ancient or religious material to try to shape people’s minds and imaginations today. Recommendations: some background in religious studies helpful.

RELS:2289 Jerusalem: The Holy City 3 s.h.
Religious, political, and cultural history of Jerusalem over three millennia as a symbolic focus of three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; integration of several digital learning technologies, including digital reconstructions and Google Earth tours of Jerusalem. Same as CLSA:2489.

RELS:2320 Jesus and the Gospels 3 s.h.
How Jesus was depicted in the writings of the early church; reasons for the different portrayals. Same as CLSA:2420.

RELS:2333 Economics and Religion: Theories and Practices 3 s.h.
Students survey theories and ideas from emerging fields of the study of economics of religion and religious economy; special focus on Islamic and Jewish economic institutions and principles as case studies.

RELS:2353 Love: Journey of an Idea Through Time 3 s.h.
Idea of love from influential texts of the past to various aspects of contemporary culture and experience (e.g., romantic love, mystical experience, digitally mediated friendships, family relationships); idea of universal human rights: cybersex.

RELS:2361 Middle East and Mediterranean: Alexander to Suleiman 3 s.h.
GE: Historical Perspectives. Same as CLSA:2461, HIST:2461.

RELS:2420 Do Androids Dream of Being Human? Human Identity in Science Fiction 3 s.h.
What does it mean to be human? What distinguishes humans from other sorts of entities, such as cyborgs and robots? What are the ethical implications of a post-human future? Students pursue these questions through exploration of science fiction in books, short stories, film, and television.
RELS:2475 Islam in America 3 s.h.  
Survey of Islam in America; exploration of the roots of Islam in the Atlantic world and antebellum America to the current day; urban-based African American Muslim communities; interactions between African American Muslim women and South Asian Muslim women around issues of gender; focus on Islamic political experiences and artistic expressions to explore the connections between the civil rights movement, black power movement, and African American music genres such as jazz; creative ways in which Muslim Americans have engaged with hip hop culture—including rap, poetry, and protest—in the wake of 9/11.

RELS:2486 Religious Coexistence and Conflict in the Middle East 3 s.h.  
Examination of coexistence and conflict in the region that includes Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen; relationship between religion and politics in the Middle East; how the region's diverse ethnic and religious communities coexisted in the past and what now seems like a remarkably tolerant environment; investigation of questions (Did Muslims, Christians, and Jews really live together in peace? If so, how and why has that changed?); history of communal relations in the Middle East; use of this background to analyze how religion and ethnicity function in contemporary politics.

RELS:2510 Fed Up with Organized Religion 3 s.h.  
Explores the rise of discontent with organized religion in America and the flourishing of alternative means for understanding the meaning and purpose of life and the universe.

RELS:2540 The Walls Between Us: Historic Uses of the Bible Defining the Other 3 s.h.  
Major events in Western history in which people disagreed about who deserves to be treated as human; students examine how the Bible was used to expand and restrict the circle of humanity, ranging from the Crusades and the Reformation to slavery and women's suffrage. Recommendations: some background in religion and religious studies is helpful.

RELS:2552 Atheism, Agnosticism, and Religion 3 s.h.  
History and analysis of religious skepticism in Western culture from the classical period through modern times. Same as CLSA:2552.

RELS:2570 Introduction to Islamic Psychology 3 s.h.  
Psychology in Islamic civilization; the nature of the human being; pathology, illness, healing, and therapies in the Islamic tradition; Islamic models compared with Euro-American frameworks. Recommendations: basic knowledge of psychology and Islam. Same as GHS:2570, IS:2570.

RELS:2620 Politics, Sex, and the Bible 3 s.h.  
Examination and analysis of the role of the Bible in contemporary culture; how different groups can read the exact same passages, yet reach different conclusions about how they and others should live. Recommendations: basic familiarity with the Bible or religion.

RELS:2674 You Are What You Eat: Food, Belief, and Identity 3 s.h.  
Introduction to study of food and identity in a global context.

RELS:2700 Sacred World of Native Americans 3 s.h.  
GE: Values and Culture. Same as NAIS:2700.

RELS:2730 African American Islam 3 s.h.  
Same as AFAM:2730.

RELS:2771 Sexual Ethics 3 s.h.  
Introduction to religion and ethics; diverse secular, Jewish, and Christian perspectives on human sexuality and sexual activity; religious views underlying divergent attitudes toward same-gender sexuality and abortion. Same as GWSS:2771.

RELS:2775 The Bible and the Holocaust 3 s.h.  
Religious and philosophic implications of the Holocaust viewed through survivors' writings.

RELS:2791 Religion and Social Life 3 s.h.  
Religion as a dimension of experience that can find diverse forms of expression, especially in social life and production of culture, not simply a social institution that is defined by a set of beliefs and practices.

RELS:2834 Philosophy of Religion 3 s.h.  
Historical to contemporary treatments of central issues; nature of faith, existence and nature of God, science and religion, ethics and religion, miracles, religious experience, interpretation of religious texts. Requirements: sophomore or higher standing. Same as PHIL:2534.

RELS:2852 Women in Islam and the Middle East 3 s.h.  
Women in the Islamic community and in non-Muslim Middle Eastern cultures; early rise of Islam to modern times; references to women in the Qur'an and Sunnah, stories from Islamic history; women and gender issues. GE: International and Global Issues; Values and Culture. Same as GWSS:2052.

RELS:2855 Human Rights, Law, Religion, and Culture 3 s.h.  
Application of historical and analytical approaches to explore social norms, political principles, religious teachings, cultural practices, and legal doctrines that have shaped the debate on human rights in the global context and within Islamic societies; analysis of historical accounts, legal documents, and past and current events to introduce students to human rights beyond its international law framework.

RELS:2877 Sport and Religion in America 3 s.h.  
Sport as a religion; religiosity in sports; examination of religion and sport as connected in important ways in American society. Same as SPST:2077.

RELS:2912 The Bible in Film: Hollywood and Moses 3 s.h.  
How Hollywood has interpreted the Biblical stories of Adam and Eve, Moses, and David the King.

RELS:2930 Digital Media and Religion 3 s.h.  
Influences of digital media on religion and spirituality today. Same as COMM:2079.

RELS:2947 Quest II: Sex, Love, and Death 3 s.h.  
Readings from the Hebrew Bible, Sophocles' Antigone, Melville's Billy Budd, Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, Salinger's A Perfect Day for Banana Fish, the film From Here to Eternity.

RELS:2980 Religion and Contemporary Popular Culture 3 s.h.  
Representation and appropriation of world religions in contemporary popular culture (film, television, music, new media); new religious movements arising within popular culture; religion in the digital age; commodification and globalization; focusing on cultural production in North America and Asia.

RELS:2986 Religion and Women 3 s.h.  
Sexism and its disavowal in biblical narrative, law, wisdom texts, Gospels, epistles; contemporary impact. GE: Values and Culture.
RELS:3003 Classical and Hellenistic Periods I 3 s.h.
Readings in Greek literature of the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Prerequisites: CLSG:2002. Same as CLSG:3003.

RELS:3020 Religion and Politics 3 s.h.
Major trends in Islamic religious thought since the colonial period, focusing on encounters between Islamic and the modern world; Ibn Khaldun; renewal movements; varieties of religious reform and accommodation; nationalism, socialism, and so forth. Recommendations: prior course work in content topic.

RELS:3055 Death, Dying, and Beyond in Asian Religions 3 s.h.
Survey of cultural and religious approaches to the dying process, post-death rituals, and conceptions about the afterlife in different religions in Asia. Same as ASIA:3055.

RELS:3103 Biblical Archaeology 1,3 s.h.
Contributions of Syro-Palestinian archaeological research to understanding historical, cultural backgrounds of biblical period.

RELS:3105 The World of the Old Testament 3 s.h.
Historical, intellectual background; focus on patterns of thought, religion in Near East, relation to Israelite religion.

RELS:3129 Native American Prophecy 3 s.h.
Religious movements, effects of prophecies on followers of religious movements, and resulting tensions with Americans; powerful visions described as messages from a spirit being experienced by several 19th-century Native Americans after waking from coma-like states—wonderful prophecies of the restoration of Native American world to what it once was before American colonization, prophecies leading to religious movements that called for return to traditional practices, rejection of many elements of white American culture, and warnings of an impending destruction of the world.

RELS:3190 Medieval to Modern: The Birth of Protestantism 3 s.h.
Same as HIST:3190.

RELS:3243 Pagans and Christians: The Church from Jesus to Muhammad 3 s.h.
Introduction to history of early Christianity, from time of Jesus to rise of Islam; focus on major movements, intellectuals, institutions in this period; growth of Christianity in different geographical areas including the Middle East, Greece, Western Europe, Africa; Christian relations with Jews, pagans, Muslims; conversion; orthodoxy, heresy, making of biblical canon; martyrdom; women and gender roles; asceticism, monasticism, sexuality; church and state; theological controversies and schisms; cult of saints; the Holy Land and pilgrimage. Same as CLSA:3443.

RELS:3245 Mythology of Otherworldly Journeys 3 s.h.
Examination of mythology of otherworldly journeys from earliest religions to Hellenistic period; historical context; comparison for common themes in their evolution over time; directed readings of mythological texts dealing with otherworldly journeys; ways in which past cultures confronted larger mysteries of life and death. Same as CLSA:3445.

RELS:3247 Banned from the Bible: Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha 3 s.h.
Introduction to biblical Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha; writings dating from third century B.C.E. to third century C.E. fictionally attributed to characters in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, or written as though they originated in the First or Second Temple periods, not included in Jewish or major Christian canons of scripture; English translations of documents from this period; key themes and interpretative techniques common throughout biblical texts that provide tremendous insight into the worlds that produced the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Same as CLSA:3247.

RELS:3333 Economics and Islam 3 s.h.
Origins, functions, and impact of Islamic and related religions' ideas and practices in the realms of economic development, financial services and products, business models, and matters of social justice. Same as IS:3333.

RELS:3340 Recovering Eden: The Afterlife in Early Judaism and Christianity 3 s.h.
Development of afterlife ideology in Jewish and Christian traditions; ideas that influenced this development, particularly as related to problem of suffering. Same as CLSA:3440.

RELS:3360 Religion Beyond Reason: Emotion and Communication 3 s.h.

RELS:3375 Birth of the Holy Land: Art and Architecture in the Ancient Middle East 3 s.h.
Major developments in architecture, sculpture, ceramics, and mosaics in Israel, Palestine, Syria, and Arabia from death of Alexander the Great to rise of Islam (4 B.C.E. to 8 C.E.); Greek and Roman influences versus local traditions; Roman Empire; growth of churches, synagogues, and mosques; identity and religion. Same as ARTH:3375.

RELS:3385 Early Modern Catholicism 3 s.h.
Same as HIST:3485.

RELS:3431 Gender and Sexuality in Asia 3 s.h.
Conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality in the religions of China, Korea, and Japan; asceticism and celibacy; sexual alchemy; the difference between male and female bodies and souls; intersexed persons; female saints and immortals; transgressive sexuality; gender and sexuality in colonial Asia; East Asian religions and postcolonial feminism. Same as GWSS:3131.
The Allure of Krishna: Sacred Sexuality in Indian Culture

For thousands of years, Krishna, the dark-skinned flute-player, has been central to the religious experience of many Hindus; his diverse roles as mischievous divine child, sensual teenage cowherd, and adult statesman, warrior, and philosopher celebrated in poetry and prose, painting and sculpture, music, dance, drama, film, and television; exploration of multiple facets of Krishna’s character through literary and visual sources, performances; focus on Indian interpretations of erotic content prominent in his story and to the figure of Radha, Krishna’s mistress and beloved. Same as SOAS:3448.

Dying for the Promised Land: Martyrdom and Warfare in the Western World

How martyrdom evokes images of innocents who are killed for their faith and terrorists who commit suicide bombings; how these groups may appear distinct, but share a heritage that relates absolute obedience to God and (often human) sacrifice to conquest and possession of a Promised Land; development of martyrdom ideology and its uses in religious and political conflict in Western history; examination of the Crusades, Reformation, and modern religious and political conflicts beginning with works from the Bible, Greco-Roman culture, and early Jewish and Christian literature. Same as CLSA:3520.

The Devil in Judaism and Christianity

While known by many names, the Devil as a central figure in Western religious tradition; surprisingly, how he is not found in earliest texts in the Old Testament; the Devil as embodiment of evil that has its genesis in early Jewish and Christian sectarian conflicts; how he is used as a terrifying dragon or seductive stranger to demonize those perceived as threats to a group’s existence; how the Devil is used to explain righteous suffering and create cultural boundaries throughout Western culture, from ancient texts and medieval witch trials to modern cinema and politics. Recommendations: some background in Judeo-Christian tradition. Same as CLSA:3524.

Comparative Ritual

Practice and theory; rituals from religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Indian religions; theories of interpretation. Same as ASIA:3890.

East Meets West: The Western Reception of Eastern Religion

Introduction of religious ideas and forms from India, China, and Japan into Europe and America to late 20th century, from Greeks to New Age. Same as ASIA:3775.

Religion and Healing


Enlightenment: Cross-Cultural Experiments in Religious Realization

Enlightenment as one of the most important ideas that feeds contemporary religious and spiritual imagination; exploration of this concept in contemporary religious and spiritual discourse. Same as SOAS:3920.

Gandhi and His Legacy

In-depth introduction to the life, ideas, and ongoing impact of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948); from his conservative upbringing to his early career as a lawyer, his transformative experiences, and self-transformation into a charismatic mahatma (“great soul”), the pursuit of political and social liberation through non-violent civil disobedience, the assertion of human rights, and the quest for sustainable lifestyles that uphold the common good and protect the natural environment; evolution of Gandhi’s thought and activism and his legacy. Same as HIST:3644, SOAS:3644.

Buddhist Philosophy

Theories and arguments concerning the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Same as PHIL:3845.

Zen Buddhism

Same as ASIA:3655, HIST:3655.

Japanese Religion and Thought

Same as JPNS:3660.

The History of a Religious and Spiritual Practice: Yoga in Asia and Beyond

Historical, textual, and anthropological readings; visual material, yoga demonstrations, discussions of yoga practices; theory underlies readings, including ritual theory and practice theory; psychology and inquiries into the nature of religious adaptation and syncretism.

Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness I

Operational and financial aspects of nonprofit management; mission and governance of organization; strategic planning for effective management, including finance, budget, income generation, fund-raising. Same as ENTR:3595, MGMT:3500, MUSM:3500, NURS:3595, SSW:3500.

Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness II

Qualities for leadership of nonprofit organizations, including relationships with staff and volunteers; relationship of nonprofit and outside world; marketing, public relations, advocacy strategies for nonprofits. Same as MGMT:3600, NURS:3600, SSW:3600.

Egyptian Art

Sculpture, painting, architecture, and luxury arts from Pyramid Age to Death of Cleopatra. Same as ARTH:3320.

Anthropology of Religion

Approaches; religious roles; shamanism, witchcraft, curing; mythology; place of religion in social and cultural change. Same as ANTH:3114.

Greek Religion and Society

From Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period, in context of Mediterranean culture; evidence such as choral hymn, inscribed prayers, magical curses inscribed on lead, architecture, sculpted offerings to the gods. Same as CLSA:3416.

Twentieth-Century African American Religion: Civil Rights to Hip-Hop

Twentieth-century African American religious history; major political and cultural movements, such as civil rights, black power, black feminism/womanism, hip-hop. Same as AFAM:3245.
RELS:3808 Malcolm X, King, and Human Rights 3 s.h.
Religion and politics of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the context of U.S. civil rights and international human rights in West Africa and the Muslim world; emphasis on civil rights connections to Gandhi, the Nobel Peace prize, and other international experiences that have impacted Pan Africanists, such as Stokely Carmichael, who worked on human rights. Recommendations: international studies major or undergraduate standing. Same as AFAM:3500.

RELS:3834 Arab Spring in Context: Media, Religion, and Geopolitics 3 s.h.
Protest movements that started in Tunisia in 2011 and swept across North Africa and the Middle East transforming Arab and Islamic societies in radically different ways; function of social media, satellite television, communication technology; influence of religious leaders and groups on some protest outcomes; impact of wealth and geopolitics on social fabric of Islamic societies within and outside Arab countries. Same as IS:3834, JMC:3146, WLLC:3834.

RELS:3845 Islam in Africa 4 s.h.
African Islamic history beginning with earliest Muslim migrants from Arabia to Ethiopia in early 7th century C.E. to dawn of 21st century; focus on historical development of Islam on African continent, specific regions, and particular themes; part of Islamic Studies Virtual Curriculum and Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) CourseShare Program. Same as HIST:3745, IS:3745.

RELS:3855 Human Rights and Islam 3 s.h.
Human rights in religious and secular discourse, seventh century to present; Islamic law, human rights law, religion, politics. GE: International and Global Issues. Same as IS:3855.

RELS:3976 American Indian Environmentalism 3 s.h.
Clean water, plant diversity, animal health as worldwide issues; Native American relationships and responsibilities to the living things of their homelands—from the earth itself to the raindrops that fall from the sky—and how those relationships have been altered in the last 150 years; explore innovative Native American efforts to restore their relationships to plants, animals, and landscapes that have been damaged by resource development, manufacturing, population growth, and political interests. Same as NAIS:3276.

RELS:4001 Biblical Hebrew I 4 s.h.
RELS:4002 Biblical Hebrew II 4 s.h.

RELS:4124 Digital Archaeological Modeling 1-3 s.h.
Introduction to foundational theory, methodology, programming skills, and conceptual understanding necessary to model remains and reconstructions of archaeological sites in various three-dimensional digital modeling environments. Recommendations: background in archaeology. Same as CLSA:4131.

RELS:4153 Magic Machines: Technology and Social Change 3 s.h.

RELS:4155 Religious Conflict: Early-Modern Period 3 s.h.
Religious conflict among European Christians (Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Radicals), as well as between Christians and non-Christians from the Late Middle Ages through the Reformation of the 16th century and beyond. Same as HIST:4455.

RELS:4181 Special Topics in Western Religion 3 s.h.
Examination of a specific topic of interest related to Western religious traditions. Recommendations: some background in Judaism, Christianity, or classics.

RELS:4352 The Dead Sea Scrolls 3 s.h.
Introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls: reading of the scrolls in English translation; examination of Qumran site archaeology; survey of broader sociopolitical context of Second Temple Judaism (586 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.) out of which the scrolls emerged. Same as CLSA:4452.

RELS:4730 Religion and Environmental Ethics 3 s.h.
How humans conceptualize the biophysical environment through religious beliefs and practices; how images of the environment influence people's activities, how they are used by grassroots environmental movements. Requirements: junior or senior standing. Same as ANTH:4130.

RELS:4741 Varieties of American Religion 3 s.h.
Examination of varied 20th- and 21st-century American religious individuals and groups; understand and analyze unique communities. Same as HIST:4241.

RELS:4870 Islamic Cultural Presence in Spain 3 s.h.
Islamic history and culture in the Iberian Peninsula from Middle Ages to present. Taught in Spanish. Requirements: one literature or culture course taught in Spanish numbered SPAN:3200 or above. Same as SPAN:4870.

RELS:4893 Classical Arabic: Vocabulary, Syntax, and Grammar 1-3 s.h.

RELS:4950 Senior Majors Seminar 3 s.h.
Issues central to academic study of religion.


RELS:4970 Honors Tutorial 2-3 s.h.
RELS:4975 Honors Essay 2-4 s.h.
RELS:5001 Biblical Aramaic 4 s.h.
This course introduces the basics of Biblical Aramaic grammar and syntax and provides an introduction to the Biblical lexicon. There will be extensive grammatical exercises, both in class and at home, as well as frequent opportunities to apply grammatical and lexical knowledge to the Biblical text. Recommendations: Biblical Hebrew recommended.
RELS:5002 Targumic Aramaic 4 s.h.
Language used by Targums—Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible—for use in the study of interpretative traditions of later Jewish groups.
RELS:5067 Readings in Islamic Studies arr.
Current scholarship in the field of Islamic studies; major works in areas such as modern Islamic thought, Islamic legal and philosophical traditions, religion and politics.
RELS:5100 Teaching and Public Engagement 2-3 s.h.
Critical importance of educating people about religion within increasingly globalized and digitized contexts; preparation to excel as classroom teachers and facilitators of cross-religious dialogue in public sphere.
RELS:5200 Varieties of Religion in the Contemporary World 3 s.h.
Limited content of multiple religious traditions from different parts of contemporary world; conversing knowledgeably about global religious diversity; preparation to design and teach a world religions course.
RELS:5300 Genealogies of Religion 3 s.h.
Genealogies of the idea of religion, academic study of religion, and comparative study of religions; intellectual and ideological foundations of discipline; preparation to work skillfully across traditions.
RELS:5400 Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion 3 s.h.
Principal methods, theories in academic study of religion.
RELS:6040 Tiberius to Trajan arr.
Authors and topics from the first and second centuries C.E. Same as CLSL:6013.
RELS:6070 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness I 3 s.h.
Operational and financing aspects of nonprofit management; mission and governance of organization; strategic planning for effective management, including finance, budget, income generation, fund-raising. Same as HMP:6360, LAW:8751, MGMT:9150, SPST:6010, SSW:6247, URP:6278.
RELS:6075 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness II 3 s.h.
RELS:6150 American Religious Histories 3 s.h.
Focused examination of the variety and vagaries of religious experiences in the Americas, 16th to 21st centuries. Same as HIST:6250.
RELS:6200 Seminar: Religious Ethics 3 s.h.
RELS:6350 Gender and Religion 3 s.h.
What contemporary religious and spiritual groups and their members believe about sex, sexuality, and gender; how they define and redefine what it means to be a “man” and a “woman”; exploration of contemporary “conservative” and “progressive” cosmologies and theologies; underlying beliefs that construct these perspectives and the impact on individual and group practices; broader implications of individual and group beliefs and practices on national and global policies. Same as GWSS:6350.
RELS:6475 Seminar: Reformation Culture arr.
Culture and thought of 16th-century Europe. Same as HIST:6475.
RELS:6520 Seminar: South Asian Religion 3 s.h.
Topics in South Asian religions. Same as ASIA:6520.
RELS:6580 Seminar: Religion and Society 3 s.h.
RELS:6625 Seminar: Religion and Health 3 s.h.
Examination of global perspectives on relationships between religion, health, disease, living well, and dying. Same as ANTH:6625, GHS:6625.
RELS:6723 Seminar on Islamic Law and Government 3 s.h.
Islamic legal and political legacy from formative period until modern time; critical analysis of logic and context of development; development of jurisprudential, legal, and political literature; overview of theories and practices of governance in Islam beginning with Caliphate system and ending with modern nation-state models. Same as LAW:9723.
RELS:7100 Readings in American Religions arr.
RELS:7200 Readings in Religious Ethics arr.
RELS:7260 French Paleography 1,3 s.h.
Independent study of original French writings.
RELS:7300 Critical Theories of Religion 1-4 s.h.
Exploration of theories that pertain to religion with an emphasis on contemporary critical theory.
RELS:7400 Readings in Theology and Religious Thought arr.
RELS:7450 Readings in History of Christianity arr.
RELS:7500 Readings in Asian Religions arr.
RELS:7600 Readings in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies 1-3 s.h.
Advanced works and/or texts in primary languages (Arabic, Persian, etc.) in the broad field of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. Requirements: proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic.
RELS:7650 Readings in Ancient Near Eastern Religions arr.
Ancient Near Eastern religious texts; focus on their place in ancient Near Eastern history and religious thought.
RELS:7900 Individual Study: Graduates arr.
RELS:7950 Thesis arr.