# Religious Studies

## Chair
- David Cunning

**Undergraduate major:** religious studies (BA)  
**Undergraduate minor:** religious studies  
**Graduate degrees:** MA in religious studies; PhD in religious studies  
**Faculty:** https://religiousstudies.uiowa.edu/people/faculty  
**Website:** https://religiousstudies.uiowa.edu/

## Religious Studies Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELS:1000</td>
<td>First-Year Seminar</td>
<td>1 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1001</td>
<td>Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Introduction to sacred literature, beliefs, and rituals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; historical and contemporary relationship between these three Abrahamic religions. GE: Historical Perspectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1015</td>
<td>Global Religious Conflict and Diversity</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Origins, evolution, and history of indigenous and global religions; role of religion in causing conflict, promoting peace, and/or mitigating effects of conflicts; religious, cultural, and institutional systems, conceptual and otherwise, that produce and/or manage violence, peace, and social change. GE: Diversity and Inclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1041</td>
<td>African American Religion and Popular Culture</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Examination of the role African American religions play in shaping 20th century and contemporary popular culture in the United States; students explore recent histories of Black Christianity, American Islam, and African diaspora religions; gender and race; cultural production in hip hop, jazz, rhythm and blues, literature, poetry, film, sports, cuisine, visual art, and style. Same as AFAM:1041.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1050</td>
<td>Big Ideas: Introduction to Information, Society, and Culture</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1070</td>
<td>Introduction to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>History, religion, and thought of ancient Jews as recorded in their scripture. GE: Values and Culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1130</td>
<td>Introduction to Islamic Civilization</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Survey of texts, ideas, events, institutions, geography, communities, literature, arts, sciences, and cultures in Islamic communities and societies since the 7th century. GE: International and Global Issues; Values and Culture. Same as HIST:1030.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1225</td>
<td>Medieval Religion and Culture</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1250</td>
<td>Modern Religion and Culture</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1350</td>
<td>Introduction to African American Religions</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>GE: Values and Culture. Same as AFAM:1250.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1404</td>
<td>Introduction to Asian Religions</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Religious beliefs, practices in India, China, Japan. GE: Values and Culture. Same as ASIA:1040, HIST:1610.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1502</td>
<td>Asian Humanities: India</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Introduction to 4,000 years of South Asian civilization through popular stories. Taught in English. GE: Values and Culture. Same as ASIA:1502, SOAS:1502.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1506</td>
<td>Introduction to Buddhism</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1606</td>
<td>Civilizations of Asia: South Asia</td>
<td>3-4 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1670</td>
<td>Korea in the World</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Comprehensive and critical understanding of Korea's place in the world; emphasis on historical and sociocultural roots of various aspects of life on the contemporary Korean peninsula (both North and South Korea); comprehensive list of topics including cultural production (K-pop and film), religions, economy, gender relations, cuisine, politics, and prospects for reunification. Taught in English. Same as ASIA:1670, KORE:1670.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1702</td>
<td>Religion in America Today</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>How American men, women, and children practice their beliefs in today's society. GE: Values and Culture.</td>
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<td>RELS:1810</td>
<td>Happiness in a Difficult World</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:1903</td>
<td>Quest for Human Destiny</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
<td>Quests for destiny in terms of perceived options/goals and ability to recognize, pursue, achieve them. GE: Values and Culture.</td>
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RELS:2000 Engaging Religious Diversity for Leadership and Entrepreneurship  
3 s.h.
Practical skills in engaging religious diversity for workplace success; understanding religion’s influences on perceptions and choices of business leaders, investors, customers, and coworkers; insight into how to build professional relationships with people from different backgrounds; clarity about your own ethical values. GE: Diversity and Inclusion.

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:2122 The Place of Animals in the Hebrew Bible  
3 s.h.
Why the biblical God permits humans to eat other animals' flesh; fundamental dietary differences between humans and the beasts.

RELS:2152 The Gnostic Religion: Knowledge, Institution, and Salvation  
3 s.h.
An introduction to Gnosticism, an early Christian heresy with a radical emphasis on salvation through knowledge, with ongoing influence and relevance for contemporary spirituality.

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:2240 The Worlds of Jews and Judaism: An Introduction to Jewish Studies  
3 s.h.
Introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Jewish studies; topics include history from ancient origins to the present, sociology of Jewish life in the U.S. and internationally, ethical and religious principles and practices, Jewish embeddedness in non-Jewish societies, and controversies within and surrounding the Jewish world. GE: Diversity and Inclusion. Same as SJUS:2240.

RELS:2250 Jews, Judaism, and Social Justice  
3 s.h.
Jewish frameworks for grappling with justice and ethics from ancient world to present day; emphasis on internal diversity of Jewish experience as well as interactions with dominant and other minority cultures. Same as GWSS:2050, HIST:2150, SJUS:2050.

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 people’s ethical and medical decision-making. 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 ASP:2265, GHS:2265.

RELS:2272 Gods and Superheroes: Mythologies for a Modern World  
3 s.h.
Introduction to important roles that religious and cultural myths play in culture; their relevance through interpretation and adaptation to answer important questions like the meaning of life and what it means to be human; ancient myths behind modern superhero movies and how they are adapted to fit a new context; and how modern superhero movies fulfill functions similar to the way myths and religion reinforce or question religious ideas of the culture that creates them. 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:2330 Wealth, Inequality, and Islam  
3 s.h.
Impacts of Islam and Islamic institutions on economic, religious, and political systems that produce wealth, use natural and human resources, design financial institutions, and structure business organizations. GE: Diversity and Inclusion.

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

RELS:2444 Cities of the Bible  
3 s.h.
Survey of the history and archaeology of key biblical cities and the contributions they made to the formation of the Bible. GE: Historical Perspectives. Same as CLSA:2444.

RELS:2515 Introduction to Chinese Religious Thought: How Best to Live  
3 s.h.
Overview of how different Chinese religious traditions are addressing central questions about human existence and the best ways to live. Same as ASIA:2515.

RELS:2620 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. GE: Diversity and Inclusion. Same as CLSA:2620.

RELS:2674 Food, Body, and Belief: A Global Perspective  
3 s.h.
Exploration of local, national, and global forces that shape food consumption, body image, and spiritual practices. Taught in English. Same as GHS:2674, GWSS:2674.

RELS:2775 The Bible and the Holocaust  
3 s.h.
Religious and philosophic implications of the Holocaust viewed through survivors' writings.
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<tr>
<td>RELS:2834</td>
<td>Philosophy of Religion</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2852</td>
<td>Women in Islam and the Middle East</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2877</td>
<td>Sport and Religion in America</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2930</td>
<td>Digital Media and Religion</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2947</td>
<td>Quest II: Sex, Love, and Death</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2955</td>
<td>Human Rights and Islam</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2980</td>
<td>Religion and Contemporary Popular Culture</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:2986</td>
<td>Religion and Women</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3003</td>
<td>Classical and Hellenistic Periods I</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3055</td>
<td>Death, Dying, and Beyond in Asian Religions</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3190</td>
<td>Medieval to Modern: The Birth of Protestantism</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3243</td>
<td>Pagans and Christians: The Church from Jesus to Muhammad</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3245</td>
<td>Mythology of Otherworldly Journeys</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3247</td>
<td>Banned from the Bible: Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3267</td>
<td>Dissent and Rebellion in Islamic Societies: Was There an Arab Spring?</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3275</td>
<td>Bioethics and Religious Diversity</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3375</td>
<td>The Great Collision</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3385</td>
<td>Early Modern Catholicism</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<td>RELS:3431</td>
<td>Gender and Sexuality in East Asia</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:3520</td>
<td>Religious Violence and Nationalism</td>
<td>3 s.h.</td>
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RELS:3550 Social Justice, Religion, and Spirituality: Faith and Belief Ignited 3 s.h.
Examination of some distinctively American traditions of religion, spirituality, and social justice, including women and men who have channeled their religio-spiritual beliefs into social justice in their communities; historical and anthropological focus; examination of U.S. movements (e.g., the Catholic Worker movement, the United Farm Workers movement, the civil rights movement, iterations of the feminist movement); direct involvement with the communities. Same as GWSS:3550, SJUS:3550.

RELS:3645 Buddhist Philosophy 3 s.h.
Theories and arguments concerning the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Same as PHIL:3845.

RELS:3655 Zen Buddhism 3 s.h.
Same as ASIA:3655, HIST:3655.

RELS:3700 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness I 3 s.h.
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.

RELS:3701 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness II 3 s.h.
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.

RELS:3704 Egyptian Art 3 s.h.
Survey of ancient Egypt over 3,500 years with emphasis on art and architecture in context; workshops, patrons, and audiences of Egyptian art; major principles, themes, and meanings of Egyptian art; relationship between writing and artistic representation; connections between art, kingship, and Egyptian view of the world; art and architecture of central elite and other social groups. Same as ARTH:3320.

RELS:3716 Greek Religion and Society 3 s.h.
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 CLA:3416.

RELS:3745 Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century African American Religion: Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter 3 s.h.
Twentieth- and twenty-first-century African American religious history; major political and cultural movements including civil rights, Black power, Black feminism/womanism, hip hop, and Black Lives Matter; their impact on Black Christianity and Islam in the United States. 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, HIST:3160.

RELS:3850 Perspectives on Migration 3 s.h.
Explores the origins and functions of migration in cultural, religious, political, and legal discourses over time from a plurality of disciplinary and experiential perspectives.

RELS:4001 Biblical Hebrew I 3-4 s.h.
Same as CLA:4901.

RELS:4002 Biblical Hebrew II 3 s.h.
Same as CLA:4902.

RELS:4154 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: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 CLA:4452.

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

RELS:4930 Internship in Research on Rights and Remedial Justice 1-3 s.h.
Faculty supervised research experience in human rights remedial justice.

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:4990 Research with Faculty 3 s.h.
Research with a faculty member on a scholarly project; discussions of primary and secondary literature; regular small-group meetings. Requirements: religious studies major.
RELS:5001 Biblical Aramaic 3 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. Same as CLSA:5903.

RELS:5002 Targumic Aramaic 3 s.h.
Language used by Targums—Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible—for use in the study of interpretative traditions of later Jewish groups. Same as CLSA:5904.

RELS:5100 Teaching and Public Engagement 1-3 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 Asian Religions in the Modern World for Graduate Students 3 s.h.
Introduction to religious traditions of Asia; framework for further studies in Asian religions; preparation to design and teach a world religions course; for Asian studies and religious studies graduate students.

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 Colonial Knowledge Production and Its Discontents: Religion and the Academy 3 s.h.
An interdisciplinary approach to how religion has participated in creating “Western” ways of knowing and the modern epistemologies that undergird academia. Course topics include colonialism, post-and de-colonialism, epistemology, race, and gender.

RELS:6040 Tiberius to Trajan arr.
Authors and topics from the first and second centuries C.E. Same as CSLI: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, MGMT:9150, PBAF:6278, SPST:6010, SSW:6247, URP:6278.

RELS:6075 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness II 3 s.h.
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 HMP:6365, MGMT:9160, PBAF:6279, SPST:6020, SSW:6248, URP:6279.

RELS:6125 Classical Arabic and Grammar 3-6 s.h.
Arabic alphabet, vocabulary, and syntax; poetry, legal texts, and media Arabic; converse in formal Arabic; for students with strong interest in classical Arabic grammar, and original texts, or research students in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies or in professional programs.

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:6343 Feminist Criticism 3 s.h.
Explore the rich terrain of feminist criticism within contemporary rhetorical and cultural studies; survey key interdisciplinary debates within contemporary feminist theory and criticism, trace significant trajectories within the history of feminist criticism, and consider how interdisciplinary feminist perspectives continue to shape humanities scholarship, including in communication studies and religious studies. Provides a strong foundation for exploring how feminism might meaningfully inform the art of academic inquiry and critical practice. Same as COMM:6343, GWSS:6343.

RELS:6345 New Materialisms 3 s.h.
Exploration of new strategies for rupturing persistent dichotomies of subject/object, representation/real, culture/nature, and active humans/passive things offered by theories of the vitality and agency of matter; introduction to origins of and developments in new materialisms; oriented to interdisciplinary inquiry and application to research in the humanities, broadly conceived; particular attention to actor-network theory, feminism, queer theory, infrastructuralism, and materialist theories of media. Same as GWSS:6345.

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 politics. 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.
Same as AFAM:6580.

RELS:6710 Seminar: Approaches to Human Rights 3 s.h.
Engagement with historical events, philosophical narratives, legal cases, institutional reports, lived experiences, and theoretical works to study origins, functions, and history of the discourse on human rights; application of a systems thinking framework to events involving treatment of women, Indigenous peoples, disabled persons, racial and ethnic groups, and other disempowered social groups across cultures and throughout history; examination of writings that attempted to explain key historical events and ideas relevant to human rights. Same as LAW:8575.

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:7400 Readings in Theology and Religious Thought arr.
RELS:7450 Readings in History of Christianity arr.
RELS:7500 Readings in Asian Religions  

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  
Ancient Near Eastern religious texts; focus on their place in ancient Near Eastern history and religious thought.

RELS:7900 Individual Study: Graduates  

RELS:7950 Thesis  