

Religion (REL)

REL 201. The Old Testament. 3 Hours.

The life and thought of ancient Israel as seen in a literary, historical, and theological analysis of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha.

REL 202. The New Testament. 3 Hours.

The emergence of Christianity in the world as seen from an analysis of New Testament writings.

REL 220. The Christian Faith. 3 Hours.

The major convictions of the Christian faith examined historically and in relation to their relevancy for modern life.

REL 240. Religions of the World. 3 Hours.

An introduction to the major living religions found throughout the world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

REL 241. Religions of the World II: The Newer Traditions. 3 Hours.

An introduction to some of the religions founded during the last two centuries that now have a sizeable global following. Religions to be covered may include several of the following: Mormonism, the Adventist tradition, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, The Unification Church, Scientology, Falun Gong, Soka Gakkai, the Baha'i Faith, and Wicca.

REL 260. Introduction to Religion. 3 Hours.

This course is an introductory study of typical religious beliefs and practices. Characteristic forms of religion will be explored, specific rituals will be investigated, and particular problems in religion will be analyzed. Students will identify some religious aspects of contemporary cultures and will become familiar with methods used in the academic study of religion.

REL 261. Religious Pilgrimage. 3 Hours.

This course examines religious thought and practice through the lens of ritual theory. Students explore what various scholars in the field of religious studies and related fields (anthropology and sociology, for example) have said about rites and rituals. Primary topics of focus include the structure and role of initiation rites, the functions of communities, and the lives of religious virtuosos such as mendicants and shamans. Also considered are various types of quest and the roles these journeys play in the formation of identity.

REL 280. Selected Topics in Religion. 1 to 4 Hours.

Selected topics in Religion at the introductory or intermediate level.

REL 301. The Historical Jesus. 3 Hours.

An historical examination of Jesus of Nazareth, with special attention to the problems posed by the literary sources. Current historical and archaeological scholarship will be explored in order to identify what can and cannot be affirmed about Jesus with historical confidence.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 302. In Search of Paul. 3 Hours.

An investigation of Paul the apostle, including the content of his letters, the course of his life, and the normative assertions of his theology. Paul's long-term influence on religion and culture will be evaluated.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 303. The Johannine Literature. 3 Hours.

A critical study of the Gospel, the Apocalypse, and the Letters traditionally ascribed to 'John' in the light of the religious, historical, and literary issues which they raise.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 310. Lost Christianities. 3 Hours.

An exploration of orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity, with special focus on alternative forms of Christianity that did not survive. Particular attention will be devoted to Gnosticism, Arianism, Donatism, and Pelagianism, as well as non-orthodox scriptures and the selection of the New Testament canon.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 311. Prophecy and Apocalyptic. 3 Hours.

A study of messengers from God in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity, with particular attention to the contributions of these messengers to society, culture, ethics, and theology. The persistence of apocalyptic eschatology in global culture will be a topic of particular interest.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 312. Israel's Poetry and Wisdom Literature. 3 Hours.

The religious and philosophical thought of Israel's Wisdom Movement as found in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and portions of the Apocrypha. Also, a study of the forms of Hebrew poetry analyzed with reference to the Psalter as the vehicle of ancient Israel's devotional life in a community of worship.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 315. Archeology and the Bible. 3 Hours.

A field course in archaeological excavation of a site related to the Bible. Students will learn techniques of field excavation, archaeological interpretation, and biblical interpretation by participating in the excavation of a site from the biblical world. Offered Summer only.

Prerequisite: REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 323. Belief Amidst Bombshells: Western Public Religious Thought, 1900-1965. 3 Hours.

Beginning with the events which preceded the aftermath of the first World War, a study of the key Western theological positions that emerged during the next half-century. Attention is given to different Christian responses to the Nazi regime, particular writers' viewpoints on the relationship between Christianity and culture, theology in the United States, and major shifts in Catholic thinking which helped lead to the Second Vatican Council.

REL 324. Contemporary Theology: 1965-Present. 3 Hours.

An attempt to review the proliferation of theological schools of thought which have emerged in the past 40 years, focusing on black theology, feminist theology, the interaction between theology and science, the dialogue between Christianity and other religions, and liberation theology. The course also considers religious themes which are exhibited in major artistic works from this period.

REL 325. Religion, Literature & the Environment. 3 Hours.

Covering writers from Henry David Thoreau to Rachel Carson, Wendell Berry to Annie Dillard, students discuss religion and ecology, including ecospirituality, ecotheology, and environmental ethics. Writings from a spectrum of religious views are presented, and recent popular religiously based environmental movements are surveyed.

REL 326. History of Christian Theology: The Ecclesial/Political Relationship. 3 Hours.

This course focuses on major Christian thinkers' ideas on the appropriate or recommended relationship between the Christian community and the governmental realm. The course also includes analysis of major Supreme Court cases on church-state issues, discussion of the topic of secularization and its impact on the interaction between religion and politics in the contemporary world, and consideration of the nature and limits of patriotism.

REL 327. The Writings of Soren Kierkegaard. 3 Hours.

A careful analysis of key texts by this 19th century Danish author, as well as of related artistic works (e.g., Mozart's Don Giovanni). The course deals with topics such as the nature of love, fidelity, and commitment; various ways in which individuals seek satisfaction and happiness in their lives; and the identity and importance of Christ.

REL 328. To Hell with Dante. 3 Hours.

This course will attempt to provide students with detailed understanding of Dante's Divine Comedy through a careful reading of the poem itself, in connection with the study of works by major literary influences on Dante (such as Virgil and Guido Cavalcanti), of the Florentine political context, and of major developments in Christian history and theology during the 12th and 13th centuries. Special emphasis will be placed on questions raised by Dante's work regarding better and lesser ways to live one's life.

REL 329. The Problem of Evil. 3 Hours.

The course considers representations of human suffering from a variety of disciplines, including cinematic and literary. It analyzes some of the major Christian theodicies from the past 40 years, and concludes with focus on the practical issue of how to care for individuals who are dealing with pain and loss.

REL 330. Theology and the American Revolution. 3 Hours.

A study of the various ways religious ideas played a role in the American Revolution, including: the theological outlook of key figures in America's founding; the political content of sermons delivered during the revolutionary period; and religious arguments that were formulated both in favor of and against the revolutionary cause.

REL 340. Religion in the American South. 3 Hours.

Studies in the role played by the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the formation of American mores, thought, and culture, with due attention to the reciprocal impact of environment on faith.

REL 355. Islamic Religious Traditions. 3 Hours.

In this course, we will explore the historical roots of Islam, as well as the various traditions and interpretations (both textual and historical) that are indexed to this category. We will also consider more overarching questions related to the field of religious studies in general.

REL 356. Religions of Asia. 3 Hours.

A cultural analysis (continuing Religion 355) of major Asian religions focusing on Hinduism and Buddhism, but including also Jainism, Sikhism, and modern religious movements in Asia. Successful completion of this course satisfies the Cultures and Peoples requirement for graduation.

REL 357. Buddhist Religious Traditions. 3 Hours.

An examination of the roots of classical Buddhism in India, as well as the various schools of thought and practical traditions that have grown from these roots and spread into other countries. We will also consider more overarching questions related to the field of religious studies in general. Successful completion of this course satisfies the Cultures and Peoples requirement for graduation.

Prerequisite: REL 200 with a minimum grade of D or REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D or REL 203 with a minimum grade of D or REL 204 with a minimum grade of D or REL 205 with a minimum grade of D or REL 206 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 358. Hindu Religious Traditions. 3 Hours.

In this course, we will examine the historical context and development of "classical Hinduism." We will focus primarily on Hindu textual traditions, ritual practices, and philosophical queries. Our discussions will also address the meaning of the term "Hinduism" itself; the relatively recent politicization of the term; and the contested nature of Hindu studies in the world today. Successful completion of this course satisfies the Cultures & Peoples requirement for graduation.

Prerequisite: REL 200 with a minimum grade of D or REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D or REL 203 with a minimum grade of D or REL 220 with a minimum grade of D or REL 240 with a minimum grade of D or REL 241 with a minimum grade of D or REL 260 with a minimum grade of D or REL 261 with a minimum grade of D or REL 262 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 360. Death and Dying. 3 Hours.

This course explores the cultural and religious representations of death in American society. It examines such topics as the funeral home industry, burial practices, death entertainment, and most importantly, the complementary and competing ways that the world's religions conceptualize death.

REL 361. Fieldwork on Religion. 4 Hours.

This course has a simple objective: for students to learn how to document religious experience from the ground up. Course participants learn fieldwork techniques - including participant observation, interviews, and ethnographic writing - and put them into practice as they interact with practitioners in Spartanburg religious communities.

REL 365. Religion & Pop Culture. 3 Hours.

This course examines the relationship between religion and pop culture. Possible course topics include the depiction of religion in popular culture, the use of popular culture in religion; and the religious function of popular culture.

REL 370. Religious Extremism. 3 Hours.

A study of religious groups associated with established religious traditions (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) that support and/or commit violent acts in the accomplishment of their theological and social agendas. Particular emphasis will be placed on why these groups understand violence as a religiously acceptable and oftentimes necessary course of action.

REL 373. Religion & Law. 3 Hours.

This course explores the ways in which religion and law are understood as concepts. It examines the presuppositions that impact the ways these terms are defined, and the ways in which these definitions get mapped onto institutional contexts. In addition, the course also examines how a particular group's understanding of religion and law, as well as its understanding of the proper interface between the two, plays into its understanding of what the state is (or should be). The course focuses primarily on the interplay among these concepts in the United States, though it also might consider the relationship and tensions between religion and law in other countries.

Prerequisite: REL 200 with a minimum grade of D or REL 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D or REL 203 with a minimum grade of D or REL 204 with a minimum grade of D or REL 205 with a minimum grade of D or REL 206 with a minimum grade of D.

REL 375. Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements. 3 Hours.

This course examines the formation, social organizations, and religious identities of new religious movements (popularly called "cults"). Some questions that may be examined include: What causes new religious movements to form? Who joins them? Why do some thrive while others die out? What role does gender differences play in new religious movements? How do new religious movements relate to the more "established" religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, etc.)?.

REL 379. American Evangelicalism. 3 Hours.

This course examines many of the key historical moments and distinguishing features of American Evangelicalism, a movement of conservative Christians from the Fundamentalist, Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and the Neo-Evangelical traditions.

REL 380. Special Topics in Religion. 1 to 4 Hours.

Seminars on selected topics in Religion offered on an occasional basis.

REL 470. Independent Study. 1 to 3 Hours.

Extensive investigation of an approved topic culminating in a full-length essay. Credit hours to be determined by the instructor. Normally restricted to students completing the major in Religion.

REL 474. Theories of Religion. 3 Hours.

An intensive exploration of critical theories currently employed by scholars in the academic study of religion, based upon readings of the classic works in which those theories have been expounded. Required of majors in the spring of the junior year. At the conclusion of the junior seminar, students will identify the topic for their senior directed study.

REL 475. Senior Directed Study in Religion. 1 to 3 Hours.

A course of individualized directed study in which the student researches, writes, and presents a paper on a topic of current interest in the academic study of religion. Required of all majors in the fall of the senior year.

REL 480. Advanced Topics in Religion. 1 to 4 Hours.

A seminar in which a selected theme or problem is thoroughly studied. Emphasis on bibliography and methodology in research.

REL 500. Honors Course. 3 Hours.

At the discretion of the faculty, students may undertake a six-hour independent course of study in the senior year in order to broaden their educational experience within their major area of study. Students must meet specific GPA standards and arrange a faculty sponsor. The honors course criteria are outlined in the Academic Honors portion of the catalog.