

Religious Studies (REL)

REL 201. The Hebrew Bible. 3 Hours.

The life and thought of ancient Israel as seen in a literary, historical, and theological analysis of the Hebrew Bible 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 221. Introduction to Islam. 3 Hours.

This course will introduce students to the religion of Islam through an introduction to the foundational elements of Islamic religious tradition, history, and practice. It will also maintain a focus on developing the skills necessary to use this knowledge in approaching and interpreting current events and media coverage of Muslim societies today.

REL 222. Introduction to Confucianism. 3 Hours.

Roughly 2500 years after his death, Confucius still has significant, widespread influence in contemporary society. This course will focus on the nature of Confucian thought and practice, and look to understand the variety of ways Confucianism impacts modern Asian societies. It will do this by first studying early Confucian thinking, as well as the development of Neo-Confucianism. Then the course will turn to highlight the presence of Confucianism in the modern world, both as it appears in contemporary Asian literature, and in the political and social lives of countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

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 263. Ethnography of Religion in the Middle East & North Africa. 3 Hours.

Students will learn about religion in the Middle East and North Africa by way of ethnographic research. Students will learn the step-by-step process of ethnographic fieldwork by coming up with interview questions, trying participant observation and gathering secondary research on the ethnographic method.

REL 264. Religion & Medicine. 3 Hours.

A survey of the approaches to medicine and health found in a variety of the globe's religious traditions. In addition, the class will give attention to religious perspectives on key ethical questions that emerge in healthcare, as well as to the question of what roles religion may or may not play in the health of individuals.

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

Selected topics in Religion at the introductory or intermediate level.

REL 304. Gods of the Biblical World: Polytheism, Magic, and Israelite Religion. 3 Hours.

This course will situate Israelite religion, both as portrayed in the biblical texts and as reconstructed based on archaeological evidence and in its wider Levantine and Near Eastern religious contexts. This will be done through a comparative religions approach, examining the gods, rituals, and beliefs of Israel's neighbors Ammon, Moab, Phoenicia, Philistia, etc. Ultimately, consideration will be given as to how monotheism arose in Israel and survived through the biblical texts.

REL 306. Angels & Demons: Intermediary Celestial Beings in Historical Perspective. 3 Hours.

Students will become familiar with the Mediterranean and Near Eastern history of angels and demons. Readings will emphasize Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Levantine, Greek, Roman, and Arabian textual and archaeological sources (from the second millennium BCE to the first millennium CE) underlying angelological and demonological systems in many ancient and modern religious systems. Discussions will explore anthropological and religious studies' theory as well as recurring themes like cultural anxieties, desires for personal protection, and the flexible social roles these 'lesser' celestial beings seem to serve over time.

REL 307. The Bible & Human Migration. 3 Hours.

An introduction to the concepts and approaches to human migration in biblical literature. Analysis of the stories of migration, displacement, border crossings, and transcultural identities, including the Exodus, Babylonian exile, Jesus's birth narrative and diaspora writings of the New Testament. Engages students with biblical literature in the modern context of human migration.

REL 308. Sex & Bodies in the Hebrew Bible. 3 Hours.

A cultural approach to ancient embodiment in order to analyze diverse biblical texts, evaluate several critical approaches to the study of bodies, and explore how sexuality and embodiment relate to religious literature.

REL 309. Prison Narratives, Religion, and Mass Incarceration. 3 Hours.

From prison narratives in ancient Jewish and Christian Scriptures to writings by people incarcerated today, this discussion-based course examines prison as a space of religious resistance, power, reflection, and innovation. Students will explore how figures from the Apostle Paul to American hip hop artists engage the religious dimensions of prison experience, with special attention to African American authors and the heritage of mass incarceration in the U.S.

REL 316. Religion from the Inside Outside Out: Spiritual Autobiography and Memoir. 3 Hours.

An examination of how individual people interpret their lives and create meaning with the help of religious or spiritual metaphors, narratives, and symbols. Readings focus on memoirs and spiritual autobiographies written by people living within several religious traditions.

REL 323. 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 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 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 331. Christian & Islamic Theology in Comparative Perspective. 3 Hours.

This course will discuss the classical and modern traditions of Christian and Islamic theology in a comparative framework. Using readings in actual source texts, the course will provide an in-depth experience of both Christian and Islamic theological discussions of the nature of God, theological anthropology, human ethics, and definitions of tradition and modernity.

REL 332. Spirituality & Traditional Chinese Medicine. 3 Hours.

This course begins with consideration of the religious outlook, spirituality, and metaphysics that serve as the basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). It will subsequently cover central practices of TCM, including acupuncture, Tai Chi, and dietary measures and compare TCM with other therapeutic systems, such as biomedicine and ancient Greek medicine.

REL 333. Gender, Religion, George Eliot. 3 Hours.

An examination of the work of Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot), including her non-fiction, fiction, and translations (Spinoza, Feuerbach, Strauss). The focus will be on her use and skill in the variety of literature forms and the different ways in which gender and religion are represented.

REL 334. Exploring Friendship. 3 Hours.

Explores the concept of friendship from the perspectives of philosophy, religion, spirituality, and popular culture. Through readings, writing assignments, reflections, guest speakers, and discussions, students will deepen their understanding of friendship and its various manifestations in different contexts.

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 351. Political Islam. 3 Hours.

This course will explore Islamic political movements of the 20th and 21st century, a modern phenomenon broadly defined as "Islamism." This course will discuss the roots of Islamism and political Islam in the early-mid 20th century, and will focus in detail on the political and social ideologies of these movements as they ascended to prominence toward the end of the 20th century. Finally, this course will chart the transformations of political Islamic movements in the 21st century, as they yielded to post-Islamist revivals of Islamic theories of democracy, human rights, and religious nationalism.

REL 352. Premodern Islam. 3 Hours.

A discussion of the religious thought and social context of premodern Islamic civilization (ca. 700-1700). Because urban centers were the center of this global culture, it will focus on intellectual and social life in some of the great cities of the premodern Islamic world. Through a close analysis of some key examples of religious thought and social structures in these cities, this course will trace the rise and fall of premodern Islamic civilization, one of the most materially powerful and culturally advanced in all of world history.

REL 353. Contemporary Islam. 3 Hours.

This course will explore the experience of contemporary Islam with a special focus on the Islamic world since 1970. It will discuss major political, economic, and cultural shifts that have occurred in Muslim nations since this time and how these contexts have influenced new and current developments in the understanding and practice of Islam across the globe. The course will discuss in detail issues of special concern in the contemporary Muslim community such as gender, fundamentalism, colonialism, and religious reform.

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.

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.

REL 360. A Global Guide to Caring for the Self. 3 Hours.

Explores religious and secular beliefs and practices of self-care. Includes forms of self-care, specific rituals, analysis of particular problems with the concept of self-care, and identifying self-care aspects of a global cultures and religions.

REL 362. Ritualized Space in the Middle East. 3 Hours.

In this course students will learn about Christianity, Judaism and Islam and their histories from the visual rhetoric of ruins, art objects and architecture in the Middle East and North Africa. Through visual culture this course will trace the history, politics and social transformations and hybridizations of the Abrahamic traditions in the MENA region. Further, students will apply Victor Turner's theory of ritualized space and liminality to the MENA region's sacred spaces.

REL 363. Islam in the Media. 3 Hours.

Viewing Islam from the lens of media studies, this course will provide a very brief overview of Islam with the primary focus on analyzing how Islam is portrayed in various forms of media (internet, newspapers, film, novels, television, social media, etc.) in the Muslim world and in the United States.

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 201 with a minimum grade of D or REL 202 with a minimum grade of D or REL 220 with a minimum grade of D or REL 221 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 263 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 do 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. 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.