

Religious Studies

HUMANITIES DIVISION

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The Department of Religious Studies approaches religion as a global and pluralistic phenomenon. We understand the study of religion as a crucial element in the larger study of culture and history. Our goals include helping students (1) to recognize and examine the important role of religion in history and the contemporary world; (2) to explore the wide variety of religious thought and practice, past and present; (3) to develop methods for the academic study of particular religions and religion in comparative perspective; and (4) to develop the necessary skills to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the nature of religion.

Since the phenomena that we collectively call “religious” are so varied, it is appropriate that they be studied from a variety of theoretical

perspectives and with a variety of methods. The diversity of areas of specialization and approaches to the study of religion among our faculty members ensures the representation of many viewpoints. Our courses investigate the place of religion in various cultures in light of social, political, philosophical, and psychological questions. We also encourage religious studies majors to take relevant courses in other departments, and our faculty members frequently team-teach with members of other departments.

The Curriculum

The curriculum mirrors the diversity of the faculty. We offer courses in Judaism, Christianity, religions of the Americas, Islam, Buddhism, South Asian religions, and East Asian religions. Religious studies majors are required to take courses in at least four of these areas. In our courses we emphasize work with primary sources, both textual and nontextual. To this end, students are encouraged to study relevant languages, and to spend at least part of their junior year abroad in an area of the world relevant to their particular interests. Our courses require no commitment to a particular faith. Students of any background, secular or religious, can benefit from the personal questions of meaning and purpose that arise in every area of the subject.

Our introductory courses (RLST 101, 102, and 103) are designed especially for students new to the study of religion, although they are not prerequisites to other courses. RLST 101 is a regular class; RLST 102 covers the same material in the format of a seminar limited to first-year students; RLST 103, also a

first-year seminar, covers equivalent material with a focus on women and religion. Students who enroll in any one of these, and wish to fulfill their humanities requirement with religious studies courses, may do so by taking any other course in the department. For this purpose we especially recommend our foundation courses (200-level), which can also serve as first courses in religious studies.

The introductory and foundation courses are indicated below by the ♦ symbol. A few upper-level courses do have specific prerequisites, and a few with no specific course prerequisites do require sophomore or junior standing. They are so noted below. The 200-, 300- and 400-level courses do not need to be taken in sequence.

Requirements for the Major

Students majoring in religious studies are required to take RLST 101, 102, or 103; RLST 390 (Approaches to the Study of Religion); RLST 490 (Senior Seminar); and 3.5 other units. These units must include foundation courses (200-level) in traditions or areas representing at least four of the five fields of study (see lists below). In one of the traditions/areas, at least one more advanced course must also be taken. (Note: there are seven traditions/areas grouped in five fields of study. The advanced course must be in the same tradition or area, not just the same field.)

It is highly recommended that majors take all four of their required foundation courses, if possible, before their senior year. Students who are considering spending any portion of the junior year abroad should take RLST 390 (Approaches) in the sophomore year; otherwise the junior year is recommended.

Unless specified otherwise in the course description, any student may take any course; the numbering system does not correspond to levels of difficulty.

A. Fields of Study

(covering seven traditions/areas)

1. Judaism
2. Christianity
3. Religions of the Americas
4. Islam, South Asian religions
5. Buddhism, East Asian religions

B. Foundation Courses

(by tradition/area)

Judaism:

RLST 210 The Judaic Tradition

RLST 211 Modern Judaism

RLST 212 The Jews in Literature

Christianity:

RLST 220 Faith of Christians

RLST 225 New Testament

Americas:

RLST 230 Religion and Society in America

RLST 232 Afro-Caribbean Spirituality

Islam:

RLST 240 Classical Islam

South Asian:

RLST 250 South Asian Religions

Buddhism:

RLST 260 Buddhist Thought and Practice

East Asian:

RLST 270 Chinese Religions

RLST 275 Japanese Religions

Senior Exercise

The Senior Exercise in religious studies consists of (1) the Senior Seminar, RLST 490; (2) a comprehensive examination consisting of short-answer, objective questions on the seven traditions/areas; (3) a fifteen-to twenty-page essay on an assigned topic; OR, if approved by the department faculty, a longer comparative research paper (twenty to twenty-five pages); and (4) satisfactory participation in a Senior Symposium (a discussion and critique of the senior papers with a small group of students and faculty).

Honors

Students with an overall grade point average of 3.33 or better and 3.5 or better in religious-studies courses are eligible to submit a proposal for an honors project. Honors candidates select a field of concentration entailing 1 to 1.5 units of advanced research and writing under the supervision of one or more faculty members.

Requirements for the Minor

The religious studies minor is designed to expose students in a systematic way to the study of religion, while simultaneously giving them some degree of more advanced knowledge in at least one religious tradition. A total of 3 units is required for the minor in religious studies. The following are the minimum requirements:

- RLST 101, 102, or 103 (.5 unit)
- A foundation course and at least one further course in one of the seven areas listed above (1 unit)
- A second foundation course in another religious tradition (.5 unit)
- Two additional courses (1 unit)
- At least one course must be a seminar.

Cross-Listed Courses

The following courses are cross-listed in the religious studies offerings for 2006-07:

ASIA 490 Asia in Comparative Perspective

ENGL 331 The Reformation and Literature: Dogma and Dissent

HIST 258 Ottoman History

Year Course**Senior Honors**

RLST 497Y-498Y (1 unit)

Staff

Prerequisite: permission of department.

First-Semester Courses**Introduction to the Study of Religion**

◆ RLST 101 (.5 unit)

Staff

The format of this course is lecture and discussion. The usual enrollment in each section is twenty to twenty-five students. The course includes brief introductions to four or five major religious traditions, while exploring concepts and categories used in the study of religion, such as sacredness, myth, ritual, religious experience, and social dimensions of religion. Traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, and Native American traditions are presented through their classic scriptures and traditional practices.

Readings vary among sections, but typically include important primary sources on Hindu thought and practice (e.g., the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gita), Buddhist thought and practice (The Questions of King Milinda, the Heart Sutra), Jewish life and thought (selections from the Hebrew Bible, the Sayings of the Fathers), Christian origins (one or more Gospels, selected Pauline letters), Islam (selections from the Qur'an and Sufi mystical poetry), Confucianism (the Analects), Taoism (the Tao Te Ching), and modern expressions of religion (e.g., Martin Buber's I and Thou). Many of the primary sources are studied in conjunction with relevant secondary sources (e.g., Rudolf Otto's The Idea of the Holy, important articles by anthropologists of religion). The Department of Religious Studies emphasizes writing, and several essays are assigned in this course. The course is open to all students.

Faith of Christians

◆ RLST 220 (.5 unit)
Suydam

This course presents an inquiry into the main elements of the traditional beliefs held in common by Christians and an examination of how those beliefs function in the modern world. Students will explore the diversity of views expressed by Christians on central issues such as God, Christ and the Spirit, the church, creation, history, and the end-time.

Classical Islam

◆ RLST 240 (.5 unit)
Schubel

Islam is the religion of nearly a billion people and the dominant cultural element in a geographical region that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. This course examines the development of Islam and Islamic institutions, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad until the death of Al-Ghazali in 1111 CE. Special attention will be given to the rise of Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi piety as distinctive responses to the Qur'anic revelation.

Chinese Religions

◆ RLST 270 (.5 unit)
Adler

This course is a survey of the major historical and contemporary currents of religious thought and practice in Chinese culture. Our aim will be to gain a richer understanding of some characteristic Chinese ways of experiencing the self, society, and the world. We will examine the three traditional "teachings" (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), as well as "popular religion," and the contributions of all four to Chinese culture. Specific themes will include ancestor worship, sacrifice and divination, religious ethics, meditation, and longevity techniques. In each section we will attempt to identify those aspects of Chinese religion which are inextricable from traditional Chinese culture and those which are capable of crossing cultural boundaries. Classes are a mixture of lecture and discussion. Readings will focus on

primary religious texts, supplemented by films and slides.

Women and Islam

RLST 325 (.5 unit)
Kilic-Schubel

This course will examine the construction of gender and the history of women in Islamicate societies. Challenging popular Western stereotypes and images of women in Muslim societies, it will explore a wide range of women's roles and experiences in a variety of cultural regions and historical periods. Through reading both primary and secondary sources by or about women, we will examine the historical processes that have influenced the status of women as well as the ways and strategies women have used to respond to them. Among the topics we will discuss are the methodological problems of approaching issues involving gender in Islamicate societies, women in early Islamic history, the diversity of positions of women in urban, rural, and nomadic societies in the premodern and modern periods, the roles of women in nationalist movements, and changing gender relations in new nation-states. We will proceed in chronological order, but the course will have a strong thematic approach. Prerequisite: RLST 240 or permission of instructor.

Prophecy

RLST 382 (.5 unit)
Dean-Otting

Prophets were the messengers of justice and social responsibility in antiquity. This course poses the question: Are there contemporary prophets? We will first focus on the origins of prophecy in the Ancient Near East, and then will explore a number of contemporary writers. Max Weber, Victor Turner, Abraham Joshua Herschel, Cornel West, and Martin Buber will provide theoretical perspectives. We will examine the role of biblical prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and others) and the prophetic roles of Jesus and Muhammad. In the last two-thirds of the semester we will study a selection of modern voices on current social issues:

Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol, Wendell Berry, Arundhati Roy, Bob Marley, June Jordan, and Aharon Shabtai. Enrollment limited to students with sophomore standing.

Approaches to the Study of Religion

RLST 390 (.5 unit)
Schubel

This is an introductory survey intended to acquaint students with major methods employed in the academic study of religion. The course will cover phenomenological, psychoanalytical, sociological, and anthropological approaches to religion. Authors to be discussed will include Frazer, Marx, Freud, Weber, Durkheim, Eliade, Levi-Strauss, Douglas, Geertz, and Turner. This course is required for religious studies majors. Prerequisites: RLST 101, 102, or 103.

Modern Catholicism

RLST 421 (.5 unit)
Rhodes

This course examines the reform and renewal of Catholicism confronting modernity. We will study major trends, using documents from official sources and the writings of key figures, from Cardinal Newman to John Paul II. The changing role of the papacy will be discussed in terms of historical statements, recent ecumenical exchanges with other Christians and non-Christian groups, and developing alternate models of the church. Catholic thought on peace and social justice, sexual ethics, and trends in spirituality will be traced using theological, artistic, and literary sources. No prerequisites.

Religion and Nature

RLST 481 (.5 unit)
Adler

This seminar examines various religious perspectives on the meaning and value of the natural world and the relationship of human beings to nature. The focus will be on environmental ethics in comparative perspective. We will look at Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism,

and Native American religions to see what conceptual resources they can offer to a contemporary understanding of a healthy relationship with the natural world. Prerequisite: RLST 101 or a foundation course in religious studies (200-level).

Senior Seminar

RLST 490 (.5 unit)
Rhodes

This year's topic will offer opportunities to examine different relationships between film and religion. Rather than reject cinematic depictions of religion in comparison with "real" religion, we will explore film as a religious function in itself, tracking the diverse images of religion and religious traditions that circulate in contemporary cultures worldwide. How does this popular medium convey lessons about values, symbols, and beliefs that shape both religion and society? Themes of myth/ritual, world views, founder figures, and "otherness" will be discussed using such films as: *Devi*; *Kundun*; *La ultima cena*; *Mahabharata*; *The Quarell*; *King of Kings*; *Nazarin*; *Secret of Roan Inish*; and *Aliens*. The course is required for, but not limited to, senior religious studies majors. Religious studies minors are encouraged to enroll, provided there is space. Non-majors should consult the instructor for permission to register for the course. Enrollment limited. Permission of instructor required.

Individual Study

RLST 493 (.5 unit)
Staff

Prerequisites: Permission of instructor and department chair.

Second-Semester Courses

Introduction to the Study of Religion

◆ RLST 101 (.5 unit)
Staff

See first-semester course description.

First Year Seminar: Introduction to the Study of Religion: Women and Religion

◆ RLST 103 (.5 unit)
Dean-Otting

This course presents an introduction to the study of religion, focusing particularly on women. A variety of religious traditions will be explored as we look into myths, rituals, and practices particular to women. Traditions to be explored may include Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and some Native American religions. Students will have a hand in shaping the syllabus in the last third of the semester, with the expectation that individual interests can be accommodated. Enrollment limited to twelve first-year students.

The Jews in Literature

◆ RLST 212 (.5 unit)
Dean-Otting

This course will use literature as a vehicle to introduce religious practices and themes in Jewish life. The course will examine outstanding works from the fourteenth through the twentieth century in a variety of genres (poetry, drama, folktales, short stories, and novels). We will study literature that was originally written in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, and English. Authors in our study may include: Mendele Mocher Sforim, I.L. Peretz, Anski, Scholem Aleichem, H. N. Bialik, S.Y. Agnon, Chaim Grade, Anzia Yeziarska, Mary Antin, Tillie Olsen, Yehuda Amichai, Aharon Appelfeld, Amos Oz, Philip Roth, Bernhard Malamud, and Leslea Newman, as well as non-Jewish writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and George Eliot.

The New Testament

◆ RLST 225 (.5 unit)
Suydam

This course is an introduction to the literature of the New Testament. Primary texts in English translation will be read to understand the social, political, and religious concerns of Christian writers of the first and second centuries. Students will learn about canon formations, problems of historical criticism, and competing

forms of Christianity within the ancient world (including differing views of Jesus within canonical and non-canonical writings). The course will also examine the relation between Christianity and the Roman Empire, the relation between Christianity and Judaism, the relation between Christianity and Gnosticism, and the placement of women within the New Testament. Various methodologies currently practiced in biblical exegesis, including form criticism, redaction criticism, literary-criticism, and socio-historical criticism, are also introduced. Students are required to read assigned writings critically, analyzing structure, themes, and the narrative voices of the texts to discover the distinctive literary and religious difference among the various writings. No previous familiarity with the New Testament is required.

Religion and Society in America (U.S.)

◆ RLST 230 (.5 unit)
Edmonds

This course explores the religious history of the United States, with an emphasis on the relationship between religious beliefs/values and broader social and political processes. Section one examines the attempt of European immigrants to establish church-state compacts in New England and Virginia, while the middle colonies adopted a more pluralistic approach. Section two surveys the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War, looking at the separation of church and state, the growth of religious pluralism, and the continued existence of the "Peculiar Institution." Section three looks at how various social forces shaped religion in the United States from the Civil War to World War II: immigration, urbanization, prejudice, and the Social Gospel; expansionism and missions; and modernism and fundamentalism. Section four examines the shaping of the American religious landscape from World War II to the present through such forces as religious revitalization, activism for personal and civil rights, new waves of immigration, and new communication media.

The Holocaust: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry

INDS 231 (.5 unit)

Allan Fenigstein, professor of psychology; Dean-Otting

This course presents an interdisciplinary inquiry into the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. How was it that in the twentieth century, in the midst of civilized Europe, a policy of genocide was formulated and systematically implemented? We will examine the Holocaust within the contexts of modern European history, Nazi ideology and practice, the Jewish experience in Europe, the history of anti-Semitism, and the psychology of human behavior. Data will be drawn from films, literature, art, memoirs, theology, and historical investigations. An ongoing concern of the course will be the significance of the Holocaust in political discourse and in our own thinking as individuals. The course may be counted as credit toward majors by students in history or religious studies. Paired with another religious studies course, it will fulfill the diversification requirement in the humanities. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or higher. Enrollment limited.

The Reformation and Literature: Dogma and Dissent

RLST 331 (.5 unit)

Adele Davidson, associate professor of English; Rhodes

The Reformation deeply influenced the literary development of England and transformed the religious, intellectual, and cultural worlds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The long process of Reformation, shaped by late-medieval piety, the Renaissance, Continental activists, and popular religion, illustrates both religious continuities and discontinuities in the works of poets and prelates, prayer books and propaganda, sermons and exorcisms, bibles and broadsheets. This interdisciplinary course will focus on a range of English literature, from the Humanists under early Tudor monarchs to the flowering of Renaissance writers in the Elizabethan and Stuart eras, in

the context of religious history, poetry, drama, prose, and iconography. Writers and reformers, such as More, Erasmus, Cranmer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Southwell, Herbert, and Donne, will be examined. Note: This course is cross-listed as ENGL 331.

Religion and Popular Music in the African Diaspora

RLST 342 (.5 unit)

Edmonds

Religious spaces, ideas, and practices have exerted a formative influence on the cultures of the people of African descent in the Americas. Nowhere is this more evident than in the musical traditions of the African Diaspora. This course will examine the relationship between African Diaspora religious expressions and popular music in the United States and the Caribbean. It will focus primarily on the African-American (U.S.) musical traditions, *rara* from Haiti, calypso from Trinidad and Tobago, and reggae from Jamaica. Special attention will be given to the religious roots of these musical expressions and their social functions in shaping identity and framing religious, cultural, and political discourses. Readings, videos, audio tapes, and CDs, along with presentations and discussions, will assist us in the exploration of the various facets of our topic. Enrollment limited.

Meanings of Death

RLST 381 (.5 unit)

Rhodes

In all cultures, the idea of death and dying has shaped the imagination in myth, image, and ritual. This course will explore the symbols, interpretations, and practices centering on death in diverse religious traditions, historical periods, and cultures. We will use religious texts (the Bible and the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying), art, literature (Gilgamesh, Plato, Dante), psychological interpretations (Kuebler-Ross), and social issues (AIDS, atomic weapons, ecological threats) to examine the questions death poses for the meaning of existence. Prerequisite: sophomore standing. Enrollment limited.

Seminar on Sufism

RLST 440 (.5 unit)

Schubel

This seminar will examine some of the important ideas, personalities, and institutions associated with Islamic mysticism. Students will read and discuss important primary and secondary sources on such topics as the development and organizations of Sufi tariqahs, Sufi mystical poetry, the nature of the Sufi path, and Sufi psychology. A crucial aspect of the course will be an examination of the role of the veneration of "holy persons" in Islamic piety. Prerequisite: RLST 240 (Classical Islam) or permission of the instructor. Enrollment limited.

Taoism

RLST 472 (.5 unit)

Adler

This seminar will examine the various expressions of Taoism (Daoism) in the Chinese religious tradition. Beginning with the classical Taoist texts of the third century BCE (often referred to as "philosophical Taoism"), we will discuss the mythical figure of Lao Tzu and the seminal and enigmatic text attributed to him (Tao Te Ching), the philosopher Chuang Tzu, and the shadowy "Huang-Lao" Taoist tradition. We will then examine the origins, beliefs, and practices of the Taoist religion, with its hereditary and monastic priesthoods, complex body of rituals, religious communities, and elaborate and esoteric regimens of meditation and alchemy.

Some of the themes and questions we will pursue along the way are: (1) the relations between the mystical and the political dimensions of Taoist thought and practice; (2) the problems surrounding the traditional division of Taoism into the "philosophical" and "religious" strands; (3) the relations between Taoism and Chinese "popular" religion; and (4) the temptation for Westerners to find what they want in Taoism and to dismiss much of its actual belief and practice as crude superstition, or as a "degeneration"—from the mystical purity of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

Prerequisite: any one of the following: RLST 270 (Chinese Religions), RLST 471 (Confucianism), HIST 250 (East Asia to 1800), or permission of instructor.

Senior Seminar: Asia in Comparative Perspective

ASIA 490 (.5 unit)

Adler

The topic of senior seminar this year will be the social, economic, and cultural aspects of Buddhism throughout Asia. As one of the major connective links among the varied cultures of South, Southwest, and East Asia for over two millennia, Buddhism has reflected and influenced cultural change on a wide variety of levels. The seminar will focus on Buddhism's role in intra-Asian trade via the "Silk Road," urbanization, the construction of identity (personal, national, and transnational), conceptions of power, (numinous, political, and economic), and conceptions of order (cosmic, spiritual, and temporal). Specific topics will include Buddhist cosmology, notions of kingship (the cakravartin and the dharmaraja), the Buddhist community (sangha) and the wider social order, missionary activity, pilgrimage, commerce, the confluence of spiritual and political power in Tibet, and the ways in which religious and secular phenomena can be mutually conditioned. Open to Asian studies concentrators and others by permission.

Individual Study

RLST 494 (.5 unit)

Staff

Prerequisites: permission of instructor and department chair.

The following courses may be offered in 2007-08:

- RLST 329 Christian Mysticism
- RLST 422 Victorian Religion
- RLST 441 Islam in Central Asia and the Turkic World
- RLST 471 Confucian Thought and Practice
- RLST 210 The Judaic Tradition

Courses in other departments that meet requirements for the Department of Religious Studies:

The list below is a sample of courses taught in other departments that may be counted as meeting religious studies department requirements for the major, up to 1 unit. Religious studies majors who wish to use these courses (or others) to satisfy requirements for the major must discuss them with their advisors and with the chair of the department.

- ANTH 252 Anthropology of Religion
- ARHS 111 Art of Christian Europe
- ARHS 235 Art of China
- CLAS 114 Classical Mythology
- HIST 187 African Christianity
- INDS 231 The Holocaust
- PHIL 200 History of Ancient Philosophy
- PHIL 212 Early Chinese Philosophy
- PHIL 240 Philosophy of Religion
- SOCY 221 Religion in Modern Society
- SOCY 243 Ethics and Social Justice