

Religious Studies

Humanities Division

Faculty

Joseph A. Adler
Professor

Miriam Dean-Otting
Professor

Ennis B. Edmonds
Assistant Professor

Nurten Kilic-Schubel
Assistant Professor of History

Royal W. Rhodes
Donald L. Rogan Professor
(on leave)

Donald L. Rogan
Professor Emeritus

Vernon J. Schubel
Chair, Professor

Mary Suydam
Assistant Professor

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-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 religion-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 2007-08:

- ASIA 490 Asia in Comparative
 Perspective
 HIST 260 Medieval Islamic Empires

Year Course**Senior Honors**

- RLST 497Y-498Y (.5 unit)
 Staff

Prerequisite: permission of department.

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

◆ RLST 101 (.5 unit)

Adler, Dean-Otting, Edmonds, Suydam

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.

The Judaic Tradition

◆ RLST 210 (.5 unit)

Dean-Otting

This course will explore fundamental Jewish texts and practices from the Babylonian Exile through the early modern period. We will study

the Biblical foundation, Rabbinic Judaism (Mishnah and Talmud), mystical literature (The Zohar) and philosophical works of Saadia Gaon, Jehuda ha-Levi, and Moses Maimonides. The course will end with Baruch D'Espinoza and Glueckel of Hameln.

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.

Afro-Caribbean Spirituality

◆ RLST 232 (.5 unit)
Edmonds

This course explores the contours of the religious expressions that people of African descent have forged in the Caribbean. It will examine the context of domination and resistance in which African spirituality was forged, give a brief overview of African influence on religious expressions in the Americas, and explore the religious traditions of Vodou, Santeria, and Rastafari, paying close attention to their social history, their understanding of the universe, their social structure, and their rituals and ceremonies.

Classical Islam

◆ RLST 240 (.5 unit)
Schubel

Islam is the religion of nearly a billion people and is 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 constructions of gender and history of women in Islamic societies. Challenging popular stereotypes and images of women in these societies, this course will explore the diversity in women's roles and experiences in a variety of cultural contexts and historical locations. Using historical, literary, ethnographic sources, this course addresses topics such as the methodological problems of approaching issues related to gender and women in Islamic societies, the intersection of gender and religion, feminist readings of Islamic texts, politics of gender, nationalism and women's activism and women's strategies of resistance and negotiation in various cultural settings. Throughout this course will develop a critical approach to understanding and studying women in Islamic societies. Enrollment limited to twelve students. Permission of instructor required.

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.

Trials, Debates, and Controversies

RLST 411 (.5 unit)
Edmonds

This course aims at an in-depth exploration of controversial issues in U.S. religious history issues that resulted in trials and/or significant national debates, for example, the antinomian controversy and the trial of Anne Hutchinson, the Salem witch hunt, the Quaker Invasion, slavery and abolition, social gospel, Jim Crow and civil rights, and abortion and same-sex marriage. Each offering of the course will explore two or three such issues, utilizing role playing or more specifically the pedagogical approach called "Reacting to the Past," developed by Mark Carnes, history professor at Barnard College. Students will assume, research, and reenact the roles of the various participants in these controversies. For fall 2007, the course will focus on the trial of Anne Hutchinson, the north-south division of the Episcopal Methodist Church over the issue of slavery, and the current debate over gay marriage and abortion.

Senior Seminar

RLST 490 (.5 unit)
Adler

For fall 2007, the seminar will examine the phenomenon of new religious movements in global perspective. The term "new religious movements" (NRMs) has become, in recent years, the preferred term for what used to be called "cults" and "sects."

Although those terms had and still have legitimate sociological usages, over the past few decades they have acquired distinctly negative connotations, so most scholars now use the newer terminology. The study of NRMs has developed into a distinct sub-field within religious studies. We will be examining both its methodological considerations and a wide variety of case studies, ranging from North America to Europe to Africa and Asia.

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)
Suydam

See first-semester course description.

First Year Seminar: Introduction to Religion

◆ RLST 102 (.5 unit)
Schubel

This course covers the same material as RLST 101 (see first-semester course description), but it is open only to first-year students and will be run in a seminar format.

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.

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 differences among the various writings. No previous familiarity with the New Testament is required.

The Holocaust: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry

◆ INDS 231 (.5 unit)
Eliza Ablovatski, assistant professor of history; 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.

Hebrew Scriptures/ Old Testament

◆ RLST 310 (.5 unit)
Dean-Otting

This course will serve as an introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) as they reflect the myths, history, and institutions of ancient Israel. Topics to be explored will include biblical narratives and poetry, law codes, prayers and ritual, the prophetic critique of religion and society, and wisdom literature. We will also have opportunities to read a few selections of short fiction and poetry that have been inspired by biblical literature.

Women in Christianity

RLST 328 (.5 unit)
Suydam

This course explores the significance of Christianity for women in that tradition. Why wasn't Mary considered one of the disciples? How did a system of church government evolve that excluded women? How have women responded to that system? We will examine founders of church-reform movements such as Clare of Assisi, as well as founders of new Christian churches (e.g., Ellen White, founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science). The course will also explore contemporary Christian issues involving women, such as ordination, abortion, and marriage and divorce laws. One of the goals of the course is to explore the importance and consequence of gender in the Christian experience. Is Christianity different for men and women? A respect for the variety within Christianity and the choices made by different women within it are also important parts of this course

African-American Religions

RLST 332 (.5 unit)
Edmonds

This course seeks to combine a survey of the history of African-American religious experiences with an exploration of various themes emerging from that history. Special attention will fall on the social forces shaping such experiences; the influence of African-American religious commitments on their cultural, social, and political activities; and the diversity of religious experiences and expressions among African-Americans. The survey will encompass African religious heritage and its relevance in America; the religious life of slaves on the plantations and rise of independent African-American churches in both the North and the South; the role of African-American churches during the reconstruction and Jim Crow; the emergence of diverse African-American religious traditions and movements in the first half of the twentieth century; African-American religion in the civil-rights era; and current trends and issues in African-American religion and spirituality. Some of the themes of the course include religion and resistance; religion and cultural formation; African-American Christian missions; the Back-to-Africa movement; the aesthetics of worship in African-American churches; class, gender and social mobility; and religion and political activism. Students will employ a combination of primary and secondary readings along with audio-visual materials in exploring the development of and the issues in African-American religious experiences.

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, raga 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 students in the exploration of the various facets of this topic. Enrollment limited.

Zen Buddhism

RLST 360 (.5 unit)
Adler

This course will cover the history, doctrines, and practices of Zen Buddhism in China, where it originated and is called Chan; Japan, where it has influenced many aspects of Japanese culture and from where it was exported to the West; and the United States. The class format will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Readings will be in both primary texts and secondary studies and will be supplemented by several films.

Voices in Contemporary Islam

RLST 443 (.5 unit)
Schubel

This seminar will explore some of the crucial issues and debates in the contemporary Muslim world. Issues to be examined will include the compatibility of Islam with democracy, the connections between Islam and terrorism, the role of Wahabism in the construction of contemporary Islamic movements, feminist movements within Islam, Islam and pluralism, and Sufism in the contemporary context. The course will focus on primary sources, including writing by Khaled Abou Fadl, Fatima Mermissi, Abdulaziz Sachedina, and Mohammed Arkoun. Prerequisite: RLST 240 (Classical Islam) or permission of instructor. Enrollment limited.

Confucian Thought and Practice

RLST 471 (.5 unit)
Adler

This seminar will explore the philosophical and cultural history of the Confucian tradition, primarily in China, from its inception to the present day. Readings will include both primary texts and secondary studies covering the Five Classics and the sayings of Confucius and Mencius, the Neo-Confucians of the Sung and Ming dynasties, and the "New Confucians" of the twentieth century. Among the general questions to be considered are: In what senses can Confucianism be considered a religious tradition? How is Confucianism in China related to the tension between tradition and modernity? Which aspects of the tradition are culture-bound and which are universally applicable? The last four weeks will focus on a particular question of contemporary interest, such as the role of women in Confucianism or the question of human rights.

Individual Study

RLST 494 (.25 unit)
Staff

Prerequisites: permission of instructor and department chair.

The following courses may be offered in 2008-09:

RLST 211 Modern Judaism
RLST 329 Christian Mysticism
RLST 331 Reformation and Literature
RLST 380 Ethics and Social Justice
RLST 381 Meanings of Death
RLST 382 Prophecy
RLST 440 Seminar on Sufism
RLST 481 Religion and Nature

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.

ARHS 114 Introduction to Asian Art

ARHS 374 Topics in Medieval Art

ARHS 235 Art of China

ARHS 375 Topics in Renaissance and Baroque Art

ARHS 233 Early Christian and Byzantine Art

CLAS 114 Classical Mythology

HIST 328 The Crusades

INDS 231 The Holocaust

PHIL 212 Early Chinese Philosophy

PHIL 240 Philosophy of Religion