

RELIGION

Overview & Learning Goals

Overview

The Department of Religion at Bowdoin engages students in efforts to understand how and why people are religious in various historical and cultural contexts, from a range of academic perspectives, and without sectarian bias. In a global context of increasing connectivity and conflict, religion courses at Bowdoin provide an unparalleled opportunity for students to have lucid and enduring encounters with an array of authoritative narratives, gender disciplines, kinship configurations, moral and legal obligations, and imagined utopias. In addition to our discipline's specific mission, we hold ourselves accountable to the broader mandates of a liberal arts education: to provide a first-rate education for the crafting of serious scholars, engaged citizens, and free humans. Finally, we impart to students key skills for the twenty-first century: the ability to analyze a text, report, or image; to formulate relevant questions; to craft a written argument; to recognize and provide evidence; to solve problems; to communicate ideas; to evaluate plausibility and consistency; and to research independently.

There are three common entry points into the department:

- **First-year writing seminars:** These introductory courses focus on the study of a specific aspect of religion and may draw on other fields of learning. These seminars include readings, discussions, presentations, and substantial writing assignments. Topics change from time to time and reflect emerging or debated issues in the study of religion.
- **1000-level courses:** For students desiring a broad overview of the academic study of religion, the department offers REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion. This course often uses case studies from different religions to illustrate thematic questions in the academic study of religion. The department also offers additional 1000-level courses, such as REL 1150 Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East or REL 1115 Religion, Violence, and Secularization.
- **2000-level courses:** The bulk of the department's offerings are at this level. These courses have no prerequisites and are an appropriate first course for a student desiring a more focused examination of a religion, book(s), or theme.
- **3000-level courses** study in depth a topic of limited scope but major importance, such as one or two individuals, a movement, type, concept, problem, historical period, or theme. Topics change from time to time. REL 3390 Theories about Religion is required for majors and minors and presupposes previous coursework in the department. Other advanced courses are open to any interested student.

Learning Goals

Students who major/minor in religion:

- Will engage with and understand classic and contemporary theories of religion and classical and contemporary methods for the study of religion
- Will be able to use material from their 2000-level courses to assess and analyze theories of and approaches to the study of religion
- Will be able to understand and analyze religious phenomena and texts in some (minors) or all (majors) of the following areas:

- Texts and traditions of:
 - Middle East and North Africa
 - South and Southeast Asian
 - Ancient Mediterranean
 - Modern Europe and North America
- Thematic approaches

- Will be able to explain how religion is an important human phenomenon that cannot be disentangled from categories such as (but not limited to): politics, gender, race, and society

Course Goals

Students in 1000-level courses:

- Will be able to distinguish confessional from academic approaches to the study of religion
- Will learn that not only is religion difficult to define, but also that claims of religious definition reveal the stakes of the problem
- Will recognize the presuppositions and historical contingencies that shape dominant definitions of religion
- Will become acquainted with some classic theories of religion
- Will study religious texts, phenomena, and practices to gain a deeper understanding of the precise contours and claims of various religions
- Will learn how those texts and practices are historically and socially constructed

Students in 2000-level courses:

- Study in greater depth a particular text—e.g., the Qur'an; religious tradition, e.g., Theravada Buddhism; or theme, e.g., human sacrifice—to be studied across traditions.
- Learn about methodological and theoretical approaches specific to the course's topic
- Read secondary literature—that goes beyond textbooks—on the course's topic

Students in 3000-level courses:

- Study a narrow topic in depth that includes understanding significant scholarly debates
- Write a long paper using primary sources in translation and/or a series of papers that examine certain theories of and approaches to the study of religion
- Conduct outside research beyond the readings listed on the syllabus

Options for Majoring or Minor in the Department

Students may elect to major in religion or to coordinate a major in religion with digital and computational studies, education, or environmental studies. Students pursuing coordinate majors may not normally elect a second major. Non-majors may elect to minor in religion.

Department Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/religion/>)

Faculty

Todd Berzon, *Department Chair*

Lynn A. Brettler, *Department Coordinator*

Professor: Robert G. Morrison (Middle Eastern and North African Studies)

Associate Professors: Todd Berzon, Elizabeth A. Pritchard‡

Assistant Professor: Claire Robison‡ (Asian Studies)

Visiting Faculty: Liyu Hua (Asian Studies), Jeannie Sellick

Faculty/Staff Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/religion/faculty-and-staff/>)

Requirements

Religion Major

The major consists of nine courses.

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
REL 1101	Introduction to the Study of Religion	1
REL 3390	Theories about Religion	1
Select one course on texts and traditions in each of the following four geographic areas ^{a,b}		4
Middle East and North Africa		
South and Southeast Asia		
Ancient Mediterranean		
Modern Europe and North America		
Select two courses on thematic approaches ^{a,b}		2
Select an elective course in religion at any level		1

- ^a One course, on either texts and traditions or thematic approaches must be at the 3000 level.
- ^b A thematic course can, with the permission of the department chair, replace a course on a geographic area.

The following are examples of courses offered in the department that satisfy the text and tradition requirements across the four geographic areas. Please consult the department for more information about additional courses that might satisfy these requirements. For a comprehensive list of all courses offered in the last four academic years, please consult the religion courses section of the Catalogue (<https://bowdoin-public.courseleaf.com/departments-programs/religion/#coursestext>).

Code	Title	Credits
Middle East and North Africa		
REL 1150	Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East	
REL 2207	Modern Judaism	
REL 2208	Islam	
REL 2209	Gender and Islam	
REL 2210	An Introduction to Sufism and Islamic Mysticism	
REL 2232	Approaches to the Qur'an	
REL 2237	Judaism Under Islam	
REL 2239	Judaism in the Age of Empires	
REL 2355	On the Road: Travel Writing and the Cosmopolitan World of Medieval Islam	
South and Southeast Asia		
REL 1188	Epics Across Oceans	
REL 2220	Hindu Literatures	
REL 2221	Religious Cultures of India	
REL 2222	Early Buddhism	
REL 2228	Militancy and Monasticism in South and Southeast Asia	
REL 2280	Goddesses, Gurus, and Rulers: Gender and Power in Indian Religions	
REL 2288	Religion and Politics in South Asia	

REL 2745 The Tigress' Snare: Gender, Yoga, and Monasticism in South and Southeast Asia

Ancient Mediterranean

REL 2215 The Hebrew Bible in Its World
 REL 2216 The New Testament in Its World
 REL 2235 Gender and Sexuality in Early Christianity
 REL 2251 Christianity

Modern Europe and North America

REL 2201 Black Women, Politics, Music, and the Divine
 REL 2271 Spirit Come Down: Religion, Race, and Gender in America
 REL 2500 New Religious Movements in the United States
 REL 2520 Popular Religion in the Americas
 REL 2522 Buddhism in America
 REL 2530 Jesus in the Modern Imagination
 REL 2534 Race and Religion in American Religious History
 REL 2540 The History of American Christianity
 REL 2544 Religion in the United States South

Religion Minor

A minor consists of five courses.

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
REL 1101	Introduction to the Study of Religion	1
REL 3390	Theories about Religion	1
Select three courses on texts and traditions in three of these four geographic areas ^b		3
Middle East and North Africa		
South and Southeast Asia		
Ancient Mediterranean		
Modern Europe and North America		

Additional Information

Additional Information and Department Policies

- No more than one first-year writing seminar may be counted toward the major.
- Typically, up to three courses taken at another college or university may count toward the major with departmental approval. One credit taken at another college or university may count toward the minor with departmental approval.
- With departmental approval, an independent study (intermediate, advanced, or honors) can be used to satisfy the elective course requirement for the major.
- In order to enroll in REL 3390 Theories about Religion, a major normally is expected to have taken four of the nine required courses.
- Courses that count toward the major or minor must be taken for regular letter grades (not Credit/D/Fail).
- Each religion course required for the major or minor must be passed with a grade of C- or higher.
- Majors and minors may not double-count courses with another department or program.

Honors in Religion

Students contemplating honors candidacy should possess a record of distinction in departmental courses, including those that support the project, a clearly articulated and well-focused research proposal, and a high measure of motivation and scholarly maturity. At the start of the first semester of their senior year, honors candidates enroll in REL 4050 with a faculty member who has agreed to supervise the project. If the proposal, due toward the end of the first semester, is accepted, the student goes on to enroll in REL 4051 for the second semester in order to complete the project.

Information for Incoming Students (p. 3)

Because the Religion Department at Bowdoin does not require students to take REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion in order to enroll in its intermediate or upper level courses, there is more than one entry point into the department's curriculum.

REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion, is comparative in approach and lays out the theoretical contours of the field. Since it is an excellent preparation for intermediate and advanced level courses in the department, potential majors should enroll in it as early as possible. Students are introduced to a theme or topic in at least two religious traditions and to various methodologies and specialized vocabularies employed in the field.

The Religion Department has begun to offer an additional 1000-level course every year. This year, that course will be in the spring semester. Finally, first-year students are welcome to enroll in our 2000-level courses. The Religion Department at Bowdoin is one of the few departments that regularly offers courses at the 2000-level in which students closely examine a particular topic or area (e.g. Christianity, Buddhism, Bible, Islam) in any one semester, and many students do begin with a 2000-level course.

Courses

REL 1008 (c, FYS) Believers, Converts, and Apostates

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Examines conversion in various religions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. Through primary and secondary source materials, students will explore historical and modern understandings and practices of conversion as a signifier, rite, or ritual of entrance or immersion into a religious tradition and its community. Students will read firsthand accounts of conversions, secondhand conversion narratives, attempts to define conversion, religious guidelines for conversion, and texts examining the implications of converting away from one community and into another. Among others, accounts of apostasy, coerced conversion, conversion for the purposes of marriage or inheritance, and conversions described as spiritual epiphanies will be examined. Students will also complete a writing-focused research project on conversion over the course of the semester. The project will incorporate a series of guided assignments for each step of the research project (proposal, annotated bibliography, draft, and presentation). This managed, writing-intensive research project will allow first-year students to develop their research and writing skills at the college level while familiarizing them with the resources Bowdoin has to offer for their research. This course questions how to define conversion and whether it is possible to formulate a universal definition for conversion across religions and cultures.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2019.

REL 1014 (c) Heretics: Dissent and Debate in the History of Religion

Todd Berzon.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 16.

Writing-intensive, focuses on readings in heretical texts, orthodox creeds, and scholarly treatments of the religious-ideological construction of heresy and orthodoxy. Fundamentally, heresy is dangerous precisely because of its proximity to orthodoxy. Examples focus on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions; attention given to categories such as dogma vs. freedom, pure vs. impure, society vs. individual. Facets of present-day debates on fundamentalism included.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

REL 1101 (c) Introduction to the Study of Religion

Jeannie Sellick; Todd Berzon.

Every Semester. Fall 2023; Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 50.

Basic concepts, methods, and issues in the study of religion, with special reference to examples comparing and contrasting Asian and Western religions. Lectures, films, discussions, and readings in a variety of texts such as scriptures, novels, and autobiographies, along with modern interpretations of religion in ancient and contemporary Asian and Western contexts..

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Spring 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2020, Spring 2020.

REL 1142 (c) Philosophy of Religion

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 50.

Does God exist? Can the existence of God be proven? Can it be disproven? Is it rational to believe in God? What does it mean to say that God exists (or does not exist)? What distinguishes religious beliefs from non-religious beliefs? What is the relation between religion and science? Approaches these and related questions through a variety of historical and contemporary sources, including philosophers, scientists, and theologians. (Same as: PHIL 1442)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Fall 2019.

REL 1150 (c, IP) Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Begins by showing how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the modern Middle East are intertwined closely with politics and with their local contexts. Case studies include modern Iran, Israel, and Lebanon. Investigates how the foundational texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were politically and socially constructed. Considers throughout the influence of other Middle Eastern religions. (Same as: MENA 1150)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2021.

REL 1188 (c, IP) Epics Across Oceans

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Introduces students to the classic Indian epics that form a core literary and cultural tradition within South and Southeast Asia: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Examines how the epics were adapted across different kingships and polities in South and Southeast Asia, becoming part of the traditional culture of almost every part of this vast region. Since the royal patrons and the heroes of these epics were often linked, the manner in which the epics were told reveals the priorities of the different regions. Drawing on film, graphic novels, and multiple performance genres, explores the continuous reworking of these epics for both conservative and radical ends, from ancient India to the present day. (Same as: ASNS 1770)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2201 (c, DPI, VPA) Black Women, Politics, Music, and the Divine

Every Fall. Enrollment limit: 16.

Seminar. Examines the convergence of politics and spirituality in the musical work of contemporary black women singer-songwriters in the United States. Analyzes material that interrogates and articulates the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality generated across a range of religious and spiritual terrains with African diasporic/black Atlantic spiritual moorings, including Christianity, Islam, and Yoruba. Focuses on material that reveals a womanist (black feminist) perspective by considering the ways resistant identities shape and are shaped by artistic production. Employs an interdisciplinary approach by incorporating ethnomusicology, anthropology, literature, history, and performance and social theory. Explores the work of Shirley Caesar, the Clark Sisters, Meshell Ndegeocello, Abby Lincoln, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Dianne Reeves, among others. (Same as: AFRS 2201, GSWS 2207, MUS 2291)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2021.

REL 2204 (c) Science, Magic, and Religion

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Traces the origins of the scientific revolution through the interplay between late-antique and medieval religion, magic, and natural philosophy. Particular attention is paid to the conflict between paganism and Christianity, the meaning and function of religious miracles, the rise and persecution of witchcraft, and Renaissance hermeticism. Note: This course fulfills the pre-modern requirement for history majors. Note: This course is part of the following field(s) of study: Europe. It also meets the pre-modern requirement for history majors and minors.. (Same as: HIST 2040)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021, Fall 2019.

REL 2207 (c, DPI) Modern Jewish Identities

Robert Morrison.

Every Other Spring. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Investigates the origins, development, and current state of modern Jewish identities. We will examine both perceptions and the historical realities of Jews' positions in hierarchies through the emergence of modern movements such as Zionism, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Hasidic Judaism. Course emphasizes how members of these movements perceive themselves as integrated into or apart from the rest of society. Topics include Jews and whiteness, Judaism as ethnicity, and Judaism as a global community.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2208 (c, IP) Islam

Robert Morrison.

Every Other Year. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 35.

With an emphasis on primary sources, pursues major themes in Islamic civilization from the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad until the present. From philosophy to political Islam, and from mysticism to Muslims in America, explores the diversity of a rapidly growing religious tradition. (Same as: MENA 2208)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021, Fall 2019.

REL 2209 (c) Gender and Islam

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Explores categories for interpreting female symbolism in Islamic thought and practice, and women's religious, legal, and political status in Islam. Attention is given to statements about women in the Qur'an, as well as other traditional and current Islamic texts. Emphasis on analysis of gender in public versus private spheres, individual vs. society, Islamization vs. modernization/Westernization, and the placement/displacement of women in the traditionally male-dominated Islamic power structures. Students may find it helpful to have taken Religion 2208 (Islam), but it is not a prerequisite. (Same as: GSWS 2209)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2020.

REL 2210 (c, IP) An Introduction to Sufism and Islamic Mysticism

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Explores, historically, the development and growth of Sufism and other esoteric movements of Islam. Questions that will arise include: Why is Sufism important for Sufis? Why is Sufism popular in modernity? How do we study religious ideas that thrive, sometimes, on defying description? Finally, how have Sufis been politically engaged now and in the past? (Same as: MENA 2210)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 2212 (c, IP) Religion and Science: Couples Therapy

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

As modern categories, religion and science cannot exist without each other, but the boundary has shifted over time. Traces the prehistory of these categories from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment and analyzes the conversations and arguments between religion and science in modernity. Focuses on the West with frequent comparisons to the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Pays attention to religious discussions of astrology, alchemy, and other occult disciplines. (Same as: HIST 2239)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2213 (c, DPI) Fictions, Fakes, and Forgeries: How Narratives Shaped the Religions of the Ancient

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What makes a text trustworthy? What do authority and authenticity have to do with revelation? Explores the question of what makes a story authentic and accepted within a particular religious tradition versus rejected and marginalized. Investigates stories that have traditionally been excluded from the Jewish and Christian Bible as well as other religious movements of the ancient Mediterranean such as Egyptian Hermeticism, the cult of Dionysus, and other Greco-Roman mystery cults. Includes discussions of ancient authorship, magic, canonization, heresy, and cultural history. Simultaneously discusses the ways in which these fictions, fakes, and forgeries have had (and continue to have) a great influence on the very religious traditions from which they were excluded.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2214 (c) A History of Anti-Semitism

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Introduces students to a history of anti-Semitism (and its antecedent, anti-Judaism) as discursive operations in the world. Its title reflects the approach to this topic— rather than trace a linear narrative of the history of anti-Semitism, students will investigate particular moments, cases, loci, and flashpoints of anti-Semitism via film, drama, short stories, treatises, dialogues, and scripture. Focusing on a range of forms and contexts, the course analyzes the continuities and discontinuities within the polemical discourses representing Jews and Judaism. The course will consider, for example, Biblical supersessionism; Blood Libel; The Merchant of Venice, Protocols of the Elders of Zion; Christian Zionist anti-Semitism; the Jewish Museum of London's recent exhibit Jews, Money, Myth; contemporary politics and BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions); and the rise of white nationalism. (Same as: ENGL 2903)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2020.

REL 2215 (c) The Hebrew Bible in Its World

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Close readings of chosen texts in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Old Testament), with emphasis on its Near Eastern religious, cultural, and historical context. Attention is given to the Hebrew Bible's literary forerunners (from c. 4000 B.C.E. onwards) to its successor, The Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 200 B.C.E. to 200 A.C.E.). Emphasis on creation and cosmologies, gods and humans, hierarchies, politics, and rituals.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2019.

REL 2216 (c) The New Testament in Its World

Jeannie Sellick.

Every Other Year. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Situates the Christian New Testament in its Hellenistic cultural context. While the New Testament forms the core of the course, attention is paid to parallels and differences in relation to other Hellenistic religious texts: Jewish, (other) Christian, and pagan. Religious leadership, rituals, secrecy, philosophy of history, and salvation are some of the main themes.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

REL 2220 (c, IP) Hindu Literatures

Liyu Hua.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 35.

In this exploration of Hindu texts, we delve into some of the most ancient and beloved literature from the Indian subcontinent. Students read major scriptural sources, including the Vedas and Upanishads. In our study of the epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad Gita), we discuss translations from Sanskrit and popular retellings of these stories into other languages and media. We discuss the Puranas, reading the story of the warrior Goddess in the Devi Mahatmyam and investigate visual representations of gods and goddesses. We also sample Sanskrit classical poetry and devotional literature to the Goddess translated from Bengali. (Same as: ASNS 2552)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021, Fall 2019.

REL 2221 (c, IP) Religious Cultures of India

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

A view of the religious cultures of India “from the ground up,” focused on studies of lived religion beyond texts and institutional orthodoxies. With more than 1.3 billion people, India is home to an incredible diversity of religious cultures, including Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist traditions. Readings examine traditions of pilgrimage, temple worship, yoga, goddess possession, healing practices, and rites of passage, including the ordination of monks and nuns. Themes include women's lived authority in contrast to patriarchal structures and contemporary intersections between religion, class, and modernity. Religious cultures of India also exist beyond the modern nation's borders, as diaspora populations have grown around the world and traditions of yoga, gurus, and mantra meditation are popular globally. The course explores these religious cultures in relation to new media and transnational networks, including debates about the practice of Indian religions in Asia and beyond. (Same as: ASNS 2553)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2020.

REL 2222 (c, IP) Early Buddhism

Liyu Hua.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Introduces students to the major trajectories of Buddhist religious thought and practice. Readings include primary sources such as sermons, monastic codes, miracle tales, sutras, and poetry, as well as secondary scholarship on diverse lived Buddhist practices. Examines Buddhism's transformations in specific historical and cultural settings, from its origins in South Asia to its spread throughout Central, East, and Southeast Asia. Highlights important historical developments, including early Buddhist monastic communities, philosophical traditions, the development of Buddhist art and architecture, Tibetan Buddhist traditions, devotion to the Lotus Sutra, Pure Land practice, and Chan/Zen traditions. Focuses on varied Buddhist practices and goals; dynamics of lay and monastic relations; debates about gender and ethnicity in Buddhist communities; and the interplay of everyday and transcendent concerns. (Same as: ASNS 2554)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2020.

REL 2228 (c, IP) Militancy and Monasticism in South and Southeast Asia

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines monastic communities throughout South and Southeast Asia and the ways they have been at the forefront of right-wing religious politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Across Asia, Hindu and Buddhist monks have been playing a political role that some consider contradictory to their spiritual image. Investigates how various monastic communities harness political power today, as well as how different communities in early-modern Asia used their spiritual standing and alleged supernatural powers to influence emperors and kings. (Same as: ASNS 2601)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2019.

REL 2230 (c) Human Sacrifice

Todd Berzon.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Uses the practice of human sacrifice to investigate the relationship between religion and violence. As an act of choreographed devotion, sacrifice implicates notions of debt, transformation, exchange, purification, sacredness, death, and rebirth. It is a ritual designed to destroy for an effect, for an explicit if often intangible gain. On the one hand, human sacrifice involves all of these same issues and yet, on the other, it magnifies them by thrusting issues of agency, autonomy, and choice into the mixture. Must a sacrificial victim go peaceably? Otherwise, would the act simply be murder? Investigates the logic of human sacrifice. How have religions across history conceptualized and rationalized the role and status of the human victim? Considers a diverse range of examples from the Hebrew Bible, Greek tragedies, the New Testament, science fiction, epics, missionary journals and travelogues, horror films, and war diaries.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2232 (c, IP) Approaches to the Qur'an

Every Other Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Explores a variety of approaches to and interpretations of the Qur'an, the foundational text of Islam. Special attention will be paid to the Qur'an's doctrines, its role in Islamic law, its relationship to the Bible, and its historical context. While the Qur'an will be read entirely in English translation, explores the role of the Arabic Qur'an in the lives of Muslims worldwide. (Same as: MENA 2352)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2020.

REL 2235 (c) Gender and Sexuality in Early Christianity

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Investigates the ways in which gender and sexuality can serve as interpretive lenses for the study of early Christian history, ideas, and practices. Can the history of early Christianity—from the apostle Paul to Augustine of Hippo—be rewritten as a history of gender and sexuality? In answer to that question, addresses a range of topics, including prophecy, sainthood, militarism, mysticism, asceticism, and martyrdom. In addition, by oscillating between close readings and contemporary scholarship about gender, feminism, masculinity, sexuality, and the body, looks beyond the world of antiquity. Aims to show how theories of and about sexuality and gender can fundamentally reorient understandings of Christian history. (Same as: GSWS 2231)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2020.

REL 2236 (c, IP) Religion, Nature, and the Environment

Robert Morrison.

Every Other Year. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Environmental degradation and climate change have become matters of deep concern to the leaders, institutions, and practitioners of many religious traditions. Practitioners and leaders' words and actions have a history in how nature has been understood as a space in which humans might learn about themselves, about the divine, and about their ethical responsibilities. Sometimes nature has been understood as divine, sometimes independent of divine control, and sometimes just as God's creation. With case studies taken from Christian, Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions, this course surveys changes in religions' views of nature and humanity's responsibilities to nature and, more recently, the environment. This course pays special attention to groups on the racial, socioeconomic, and political margins. (Same as: ENVS 2236)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 2237 (c) Judaism Under Islam

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Since the rise of Islam in the early seventh century C.E., Jews have lived in the Islamic world. The historical experience of these Jews has shaped their religious traditions in ways that have touched Jews worldwide. Places developments in Jewish liturgy, thought, and identity within the context of Islamic civilization. Answers the question of how Jews perceive themselves and Judaism with regard to Muslims and Islam. Analyzes the significance of the Jewish experience under Islam for current debates in Judaism and in Middle East politics.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

REL 2239 (c) Judaism in the Age of Empires

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

How did the Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian empires shape Jewish history? Investigates how ancient Judaism and Jewish society materialized under the successive rule of ancient empires. Analyzes both how the Jews existed as a part of and yet apart from the culture, religion, and laws of their imperial rulers. Readings include a cross-section of literature from antiquity—including the books of the Maccabees, the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic literature, the "Mishnah," and early Christian anti-Jewish polemic—to understand the process by which the Jews created Judaism as a religion in opposition to Christianity and Greco-Roman traditions.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2251 (c) Christianity

Jeannie Sellick.

Every Other Fall. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 35.

An introduction to the diversity and contentiousness of Christian thought and practice. Explores this diversity through analyses of the conceptions, rituals, and aesthetic media that serve to interpret and embody understandings of Jesus, authority, body, family, and church. Historical and contemporary materials highlight not only conflicting interpretations of Christianity, but also the larger social conflicts that these interpretations reflect, reinforce, or seek to resolve.

REL 2271 (c) Spirit Come Down: Religion, Race, and Gender in America
Every Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines the ways religion, race, and gender shape people's lives from the nineteenth century into contemporary times in America, with particular focus on black communities. Explores issues of self-representation, memory, material culture, embodiment, and civic and political engagement through autobiographical, historical, literary, anthropological, cinematic, and musical texts. (Same as: AFRS 2271, GSWS 2270)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2280 (c, IP) Goddesses, Gurus, and Rulers: Gender and Power in Indian Religions

Liyu Hua.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 35.

Provides a historical perspective on how gender and power have intertwined in the diverse religious traditions of India. Explores ideas about femininities, masculinities, and genderqueer identities in religious texts and premodern religious communities, analyzing the influence of monastic ideals, economic patronage, and gendered notions of divine authority. Readings examine mythology, rituals, and ideas about gender and social power in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim traditions; including gender roles in family and culture; transgender identity and religion; and, in the latter part of the course, the impacts of colonialism, nationalist politics, and migration on gender and religion. (Same as: ASNS 2740, GSWS 2292)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2286 (c, DPI, IP) Karma and Liberation: Violence in South Asian Religions

Liyu Hua.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

The course provides a historical perspective on forms of violence in several south Asian religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. It explores the role of violence by reading primary sources and reflects upon the significance of religious violence in their socio-historical contexts. The course content will examine Vedic sacrifice in comparison with sacrifice in other early civilizations, ascetic violence among Buddhist renunciators, the philosophical justification and legitimization of violence in Mahayana and Tantra, and finally the religious violence in anticolonial and nationalist movement in India and Sri Lanka. Standard Grading.

REL 2288 (c, IP) Religion and Politics in South Asia
Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

An introduction to religion and politics in a region that is home to about one-fourth of the world's population, with a focus on India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Topics include religious nationalism, religion and violence, and the role of religion in legislative debates about sexuality and gender. Over the past few decades, the region has seen the growth of religious nationalisms in India and Pakistan, a civil war in Sri Lanka that divided citizens along religious and ethnic lines, and the militarization of Kashmir. But South Asia is also home to shared religious shrines and communities whose identities are "neither Hindu nor Muslim," resisting easy categorizations. Pride parades are held in Indian cities, but debates ensue on the role of religion in legislating sexuality. Questions include: How is religion related to national identity? Should religion have a place in democratic legal systems? Can Buddhist monks justify the use of violence in times of war? (Same as: ASNS 2555)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Spring 2020.

REL 2305 (c, IP) Voicing the Divine: Religious Modes of Listening and Sonic Embodiment

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

This course explores the complex relationship between language, sound, and hearing in a myriad of religious traditions. Positioning sound and music as our primary lens of inquiry, we examine primary sources and ethnographic studies in our attempt to grapple with the variegated ways religious or mystical experiences are experienced and interpreted. A central component to this course is a focus on practices of listening and it will place in conversation relevant discourse from the fields of voice studies, ethnomusicology, religious studies, and sound studies. Students will engage in methods of vocal analyses and religious studies methodologies on performativity and embodiment. Weekly topics and their affiliated readings will include, but are not confined to Islam and El-Ghayb; spiritualism; African-American sermon traditions; Hindu mysticism; American evangelicalism; Jewish aniconism. (Same as: MUS 2306)

Prerequisites: REL 1101 or MUS 1100 - 1399 or MUS 2100 - 2399 or MUS 3100 - 3399.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2330 (c, IP) Introduction to Africana Religions through Literature

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Intermediate seminar. Africana religions are often described as lived traditions because experience is such a central part of their practice, nature, and structure. As an imaginative window into another lived experience, literature provides a unique opportunity to understand and experience the worldviews of Africana religions and peoples from more of an inside perspective than most academic material can provide. In this course literature written by and about people who come from these traditions will be studied in conjunction with academic sources on Africana religions and religion and literature to provide students with a deeper understanding of Africana worldviews and how they affect every facet of practitioners' lives. The works studied come from an array of different times, places, linguistic backgrounds, and traditions including the Yoruba religion, Islam, Christianity, Haitian Vodou, Brazilian Candomblé and more in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. (Same as: AFRS 2300, LACL 2300)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2354 (c, IP) On the Road: Travel Writing and the Cosmopolitan World of Medieval Islam

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 25.

Islamic medieval writings of travelers, explorers, and exiles present a cosmopolitan world of encounters of peoples and cultures. This 2000-level course uses these accounts as an entryway to the history of medieval Islam. We will consider how and why Islam emerged in seventh-century Arabia and follow its path through the Mongol expansion in the fourteenth century. We will examine the impact of the Islamic empire on the medieval Middle East, as it spread across most of the known world from Spain to India, and the cultural practices that it developed to manage cultural difference. The readings, lectures, and class discussions will focus on primary sources: the accounts of Muslims, Jews, and Christians who traveled the length and breadth of the Islamic empire. Emphasis on the interconnectedness of the medieval world and on narratives of inclusion and exclusion. Taught in English. For advanced Arabic students, Arabic 3354 with an Arabic reading and writing component will be offered concurrently with this course. Note: This course fulfills the premodern and non euro/us requirement for history majors and minors. (Same as: ARBC 2354, HIST 2440)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2020.

REL 2355 (c, IP) On the Road: Travel Writing and the Cosmopolitan World of Medieval Islam

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 15.

Students enrolled in this course will attend all regular class meetings of ARBC 2354, but will additionally meet once a week as a separate group to read and discuss primary sources in the original Arabic. Some short written assignments will be submitted in Arabic. Please refer to ARBC 2354 for a complete course description. (Same as: ARBC 3354)

Prerequisites: Five of: ARBC 1101 and ARBC 1102 and ARBC 2203 and ARBC 2204 and ARBC 2305.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2020.

REL 2388 (c, DPI, IP) Black Magic: Esoteric Arts of Africa and Its Diaspora

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

African and Afro-diasporic religions have historically been linked with stereotypes of evil superstition or “black magic,” causing a great deal of prejudice and misinformation. These traditions, however, have their own much more complex, fascinating, and powerful traditions of esoteric arts that differ greatly from Western conceptions of “witchcraft.” In this course students will learn about African concepts often translated as “magic,” “witchcraft,” “sorcery,” or “juju,” why they are frequently misunderstood by outsiders, and how they have important implications for issues like gender, politics, resistance to oppression, and ethics. By speaking to real practitioners of these arts and reading accounts of people engaged in them, the course will demonstrate how African-derived esoteric arts have gained salience in the modern era and how they engage with issues that include the emergence of “Blitchcraft” (Black witchcraft) online and African “witchcraft” as an analytical lens for the modern world. (Same as: AFRS 2388, LACL 2388)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2484 (c, IP) Deities in Motion: Afro-Diasporic Religions

Every Other Fall. Enrollment limit: 16.

Religion has been central not only in the lives of members of the Black Atlantic World and also in terms of the formation of this world. This class provides a survey of some of the most prominent Afro-Atlantic diasporic religions such as Haitian Vodou, Brazilian Candomblé, Trinidadian Shango, and Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha and also explores the particular dynamics of the Religion has been central not only in the lives of members of the Black Atlantic World but also in terms of the formation of this world. This class provides a survey of some of the most prominent Afro-Atlantic diasporic religions, such as Haitian Vodou, Brazilian Candomblé, Trinidadian Shango, and Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha, and also explores the particular dynamics of the African religious diaspora. Complicating common assumptions about relations between diaspora and homeland as well as what constitutes a religion, it addresses issues of authenticity and authority, ancestry, race, gender, transnationalism, and even problematic (mis)representations in Western society and pop culture. We will also pay close attention to the important and complicated role that the transatlantic slave trade played in the formation of these Atlantic societies and aspects of these religious traditions, such as conceptions of God and divinities, syncretism, divination, and spirit possession. (Same as: AFRS 2384, LACL 2384)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021, Fall 2019.

REL 2500 (c) New Religious Movements in the United States

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

The word “cult” conjures all sorts of stereotypes which obscure more than they reveal. This class aims to peel back the misapprehensions, prejudices, and biases relating to New Religious Movements in the U.S., analyze how and why they form, and what they tell us about religion in the modern world. This course will focus on a variety of movements including Mormonism, Heaven’s Gate, The People’s Temple, and Pastafarianism.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2020.

REL 2520 (c) Popular Religion in the Americas

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What makes a particular religious practice “popular,” and what does “popular” religion indicate about the future of religion in America? This course explores the relationship between institutional religion and popular religion—sometimes labeled “lived” or “vernacular” religion—in the Americas. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which popular religious practices challenge or complement institutional religion in the lives of practitioners. Readings will focus on social, economic, and political aspects of popular religious practices, examining the ways they challenge or reinforce categories like class, race, and gender. Topics may include the Mexican saint of death (Santa Muerte), the emergence of the designation “spiritual but not religious,” Sherlock Holmes fan culture, and the veneration of science and scientists.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Fall 2019.

REL 2522 (c) Buddhism in America

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines the two major strands of Buddhism in America: that of immigrant communities and that which is practiced by Americans without preexisting cultural ties to Buddhist traditions. After a brief introduction to Buddhism's emergence and spread in the first millennium, readings trace the differences between these varieties of American Buddhism. Themes to be explored include temples as sources of material, emotional, and spiritual support, Buddhist practices as source of cultural identity and connection to homelands, and religious innovations and controversies among American "converts." These latter include the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, and the widespread commercialization of Zen. (Same as: ASNS 2839)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2021, Fall 2019.

REL 2530 (c) Jesus in the Modern Imagination

Jeannie Sellick.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 35.

How has media shaped modern perceptions of the figure of Jesus? How do these representations fit or clash with the Jesus of the Bible and other ancient texts? Explores the narrative behind the Jesus movement and the countless stories about it told through a variety of media—texts, films, artwork, songs, etc. Investigates how these depictions are formed and how they shape cultural understandings of Jesus and Christianity. Includes discussions of historical Jesus, authorial intent, modern "forgeries," comedy and religion, gender and sexuality, and pop theology.

REL 2534 (c) Race and Religion in American Religious History

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

The course traces the development of the modern concepts of "race" and "religion" in the American context, with a specific focus on Christianity in the United States. In tracing this development, we will critically examine the ways in which these categories are presumed to be distinct and yet have been deeply connected in the beliefs and practices of various forms of racism. These connections include racialized Biblical justifications of slavery and segregation, the insignia and rituals of white nationalist terror, and on-going segregation within Christian denominations and communities. We will also look at various efforts to utilize the rhetorics and rituals of Christianity in order to condemn and dismantle specifically anti-black racism in the U.S.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2020.

REL 2540 (c) The History of American Christianity

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

In this course, we seek to understand the ways in which Christianity intertwines with the histories of colonization, settlement, slavery, progressivism and globalization that continue to shape life in the modern United States. In addition to introducing students to the denominations that both drove and were transformed by these histories (e.g. Catholicism and mainline Protestantism), we will examine the novel forms of Christianity that emerged in and are frequently identified with peculiarly American projects of individualism, work, self-help, and prosperity (Mormonism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism). Rather than simply focus on Christian theologies and doctrines, we will consider how ordinary Christians use their beliefs and practices to navigate these challenging periods in American history.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021, Spring 2020.

REL 2544 (c) Religion in the United States South

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

For many Americans, conservative, evangelical Christianity and the U.S. South are coextensive. And yet, for most of the colonial period and even into the Early Republic the south was not particularly religious. This course will seek to understand what changed in the early 1800s. We will trace the co-development of evangelicalism, English honor culture, slavery, and free market capitalism in the antebellum period in order to better understand the rise of Jim Crow. In addition, we will consider the distinct religious elements of the Civil Rights movement and the Catholic, immigrant, and secular dimensions of the Nuevo South.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2579 (c, DPI, IP) Spain of the Three Religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in Medieval Iberia

Seminar. For over seven hundred years, the Iberian Peninsula saw Muslims, Jews, and Christians living in close proximity, and thus historians dub it "Spain of the three religions." This course examines how relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews evolved across time. We will explore questions about religion and identity and what work both do in shaping communities, cultures, and prevailing historical narratives. Specific themes include forced conversion, trade, intellectual exchange, and religious polemics. Our readings begin with the Islamic conquest of Iberia in the early eighth century and end with the fall of Muslim Granada in 1492, the purity of blood statutes, and the dawn of the Spanish Inquisition. The primary sources encompass many different mediums and genres, including famous The Song of the Cid, Inquisition proceedings, treatises on conversion, law, and illuminated manuscripts. Note: This course is part of the following field(s) of study: Europe. It also meets the pre-modern requirement. (Same as: HIST 2507)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

REL 2745 (c, IP) The Tigress' Snare: Gender, Yoga, and Monasticism in South and Southeast Asia

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

There is no dearth of stories regarding the dangers of women and sexuality for Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Nath yogis and ascetics. Texts after texts written on ancient, classical, and early modern Asian monasticism point to the evil of women and the dangers they pose to those attempting to live monastic lives. Women, however, have historically been and continue to be involved in these religious traditions. This class will examine the highly gendered worldview found within South and Southeast Asian yogic and monastic texts. Primarily reading Hindu, Nath yogi, Jain, and Buddhist canonical teachings, the class will discuss the manner in which women have historically been viewed within these religious traditions. It will then shift to look at the manner in which women have been and continue to take part in these communities in their everyday life. Through the use of both academic readings and multimedia texts, the class will examine how women navigate their roles within these male-dominated communities, their reasons for joining these communities, and the differences that exist for women within the different monastic and yogic communities. (Same as: ASNS 2745, GSWS 2745)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2020.

REL 3209 (c) Religion on the Move: Migration, Globalization, and the Transformation of Tradition

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Contemporary migration and globalization trends have transformed where and how religious traditions are practiced, radically altering the landscape of local religion around the world. But religion in practice is always changing, and what we consider "timeless traditions" are also reframed by individuals and communities in every generation. While migration has been integral to the development of many religions, this course considers how contemporary migration and the global spread of practices like yoga and meditation have led to the creation of new religious identities, diversifying where religions are practiced around the world. Readings highlight debates about religious identity in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, and transnational communities, including the rise of mega gurus in India and the US, the global popularity of Buddhism, and the relationship between race, religion, and authority among American Muslims. (Same as: ASNS 3831)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 3305 (c) Religion and Emotion

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 12.

Introduces students to a variety of approaches to the study of religion and emotion. Explores in detail the tension between the social construction of emotion and the universality of emotion by considering such questions as: If social forces like religion shape our emotional experience, then how much of our emotional lives is truly ours? If emotions are biologically innate and identical for every person, then how does religion help mediate between society and the individual? Particularly focuses on the role of emotion in both shaping and resisting social structures such as race, class, and gender. For example, during the American Revolution, ministers taught that only those with the right emotional disposition can love liberty and engage in its defense. Since enslaved peoples were seen as emotionally underdeveloped, white colonists thought them incapable of pursuing, or even deserving, liberty. Primary sources include literature, newspapers, diaries, television, film, podcasts, and social media.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 3325 (c) Deadly Words: Language and Power in the Religions of Antiquity

Todd Berzon.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, speech was fraught with danger and uncertainty. Words had enormous power—not just the power to do things but a tangible power as things. Words attached themselves to people as physical objects. They lived inside them and consumed their attention. They set events in motion: war, conversion, marriage, death, and salvation. This course investigates the precarious and deadly presence of oral language in the religious world of late antiquity (150 CE to 600 CE). Focusing on evidence from Christian, Jewish, and pagan sources—rabbinic literature, piyyutim, curse tablets, amulets, monastic sayings, creeds, etc.—students will come to understand the myriad ways in which words were said to influence and infect religious actors. For late ancient writers, words were not fleeting or ethereal, but rather quite tactile objects that could be felt, held, and experienced. It is the physical encounter with speech that orients this course. (Same as: CLAS 3325)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 3333 (c) Islam and Science

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 15.

Surveys the history of science, particularly medicine and astronomy, within Islamic civilization. Pays special attention to discussions of science in religious texts and to broader debates regarding the role of reason in Islam. Emphasizes the significance of this history for Muslims and the role of Western civilization in the Islamic world. Students with a sufficient knowledge of Arabic may elect to read certain texts in Arabic.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2020.

REL 3390 (c) Theories about Religion

Robert Morrison.

Every Fall. Fall 2023. Enrollment limit: 16.

Seminar focusing on how religion has been explained and interpreted from a variety of intellectual and academic perspectives, from the sixteenth century to the present. In addition to a historical overview of religion's interpretation and explanation, also includes consideration of postmodern critiques and the problem of religion and violence in the contemporary world.

Prerequisites: REL 1101.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2020, Fall 2019.