RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Chair, Professor Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh
Professors David Freidenreich and Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh; Visiting Assistant Professors Ryan Harper and Kerry Sonia

Religious studies aims to train students to think critically about the nature of religion, to apply different methods within the academic study of religion, and to explore diverse social, cultural, and ethical issues related to religious traditions and phenomena. Inevitably, the study of different religious traditions, as well as various approaches to analyzing those traditions, will include historical, political, textual, material, ethnographic, aesthetic, and philosophical inquiry.

Requirements for the Major in Religious Studies

A minimum of 10 courses, to include at least one from each of the three following groups: Eastern religions (111, 212, 218, 265); the Bible and its reception (143, 144, 181, 136); and religion and the modern world (117, 182, 217, 256, 263). The 10 required courses will include three religious studies courses at the 300 level or above and a 400-level senior independent study project. The three required 300-level courses may not include courses from other departments or institutions. The senior independent study project may take one of three forms: a four-credit independent study (491 or 492) sponsored by a member of the religious studies faculty or an approved faculty member from another department; a two-semester project in the honors program (483, 484) described below; or a Senior Scholars project with one mentor from the religious studies faculty. As part of the culminating experience, all seniors are required to present their independent research in a symposium held at the end of the spring semester. For the purpose of fulfilling the requirement of 10 religious studies courses, two two-credit courses or independent studies count as the equivalent of a single course.

The point scale for retention of the major applies to all courses that count toward the major.

Honors Program in Religious Studies

Students majoring in religious studies may apply during their junior year for admission to the honors program. Students are expected to submit their proposal to the department chair by April 15. Admission is contingent on a GPA of 3.65 or higher in the major at the completion of the junior year. On successful completion of the work for the honors program, including a thesis, students will graduate from the College with “Honors in Religious Studies.”

Requirements for the Minor in Religious Studies

A minimum of six courses in religious studies to include at least one from each of the three following groups: Eastern religions (111, 212, 218, 265); the Bible and its reception (143, 144, 181, 136); and religion and the modern world (117, 182, 217, 256, 263). The six required courses will include two religious studies courses at the 300 level or above. The two required 300-level courses may not include courses from other departments or institutions. For the purpose of fulfilling the requirement of six religious studies courses, two two-credit courses or independent studies count as the equivalent of a single course.

Courses from Other Departments That Can Serve as Electives in the Religious Studies Major/Minor

(Students may petition the chair to consider other courses toward the major)

Art
- 125 Art and Architecture of the Islamic World, 622-1250
- 126 Art and Architecture of the Islamic World, 1258-1914
- 127 History of Architecture: From Pyramids to Cathedrals
- 213 Early Medieval Art
- 323 Destroying Culture: Iconoclasm

Anthropology
- 244 Anthropology of Religion
- 246 Religion and Everyday Life in Muslim Societies
- 316 Religion and Social Change in Contemporary Africa

Biology
- 147 Anatomy and Physiology of Yoga and Mindful Practice

Classics
- 136 Myth and Magic

East Asian Studies
Course Offerings

RE111s  **Religions of India**  Introduces the diversity of religious ideals and practices in South Asia. We will read primary Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi, and Sikh texts, and study their myths, artistic expressions, and ritual performance. We will discuss representation and resistance of caste, religion, class, gender, and race inequities. Importantly, the inter and intra relationship of Asian religions in our pluralistic landscape. The goal is to gain an enhanced awareness of personal values and attitudes as global citizens, and to hone analytical and critical reading, writing, and oral skills.  
Four credit hours.  S, I.  SINGH

[RE114]  **Introduction to the Study of Religion: Religion, Ritual, the Body**  Piercing, restraint, sleep deprivation, starvation, tattooing. We examine religious modifications of the body through ritual, the use of clothing, the treatment of hair, and through other forms of decoration and even violent modification. In this introduction to the study of religion and recent theories of religion, ritual, and the body, students will learn how scholars investigate religion. They will also learn to describe two major theoretical approaches to religious ritual, to use these tools to explain practices from prayer to extreme forms of asceticism, and to describe and evaluate sources of information for the study of religion.  
Four credit hours.  S.

RE117f  **A Passage to India: India and the Western Imagination**  Beginning with Walt Whitman’s romantic journey toward the “soul” of the universe, Western attitudes towards India and India’s encounter with Western culture will be studied. Literature and film include *A Passage to India*, *The Razor’s Edge*, *The English Patient*, *Siddhartha*, *The Namesake*, *Gitanjali*, *Blinded by the Light*, and *Four Quartets*. Historical, political, religious, and visual context of the texts will be provided. A close reading of the texts for their aesthetic value, their existential disclosures, and as narratives on colonialism, racism, and orientalism.  
Four credit hours.  L.  SINGH

RE136f  **Introduction to Christianity**  Considers historical turning points in key Christian ideas, texts, and practices in order to understand the lived experience of contemporary Christians around the world. Studies debates and controversies of faith in the context of social categories like gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, and disability. Readings magnify voices of Christian people at the margins of evident power structures, especially (but not exclusively) in the U.S. context.  
Four credit hours.  H.  HARPER

RE143f  **Introduction to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament**  Explores the best-selling book of all time by focusing on the first part of the Bible, i.e., the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. We will study famous biblical characters and analyze challenging and unexpected narratives. Students will gain an informed understanding of this richcollection of texts by concentrating on their literary, social, and historical contexts. We will also take into consideration the ways in which these texts have been used in contemporary poetry, film, art, and music.  
Four credit hours.  L.  SONIA
RE144s  Introduction to the New Testament  The purpose of this class is to introduce students to the field of New Testament and Christian Origins. Students will learn about the construction of New Testament texts, early Jesus followers, and the origins of Christianity through a survey of New Testament writings and other Jewish/Christian/Jesus-centered documents. No prior knowledge is required. Note: This course is supported by Davis Connects.  Global Innovation course.  Four credit hours.  L,  SONIA

RE181f  Conceptions of Jews and Judaism  A survey of the history of the Jewish people and the religion called Judaism from the biblical era through the Middle Ages, tracing the development of ideas, texts, beliefs, and practices that continue to influence Jewish life and thought today. Examines Christian and Islamic ideas about Jews and Judaism and the historical impact of inequality, prejudice, and persecution on Jewish society and culture. Students will develop broadly applicable critical reading skills as well as those that relate specifically to the analysis of religious texts.  Four credit hours.  H, I.  FREIDENREICH

RE182s  Jews, Judaism, and the Modern World  A survey of the social, cultural, intellectual, and political history of the Jews of Europe, the United States, and Israel/Palestine from the 17th century to the present. Traces the emergence of contemporary Judaism in its various manifestations. This discussion-oriented course focuses particular attention on dynamics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, with the goal of applying lessons from Jewish history to contemporary challenges in American and global societies.  Four credit hours.  H, I.  FREIDENREICH

RE212  Religions of China, Japan, and Tibet  An examination of Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and Buddhism—the indigenous religions of China, Japan, and Tibet—tracing the entrance of Buddhism into China, Japan, and Tibet and the resulting transformation of this religion in its interaction with these civilizations. The political ideology of Confucianism, the mystical dimensions of Taoism, the mythological aspects of Shinto, the meditative experiences of Zen (haiku, swordsmanship, the tea ceremony, etc.), and the psychological and artistic practices of Tibet.  Four credit hours.  S.

RE217  Religion in the Americas  Examines religion and culture in the Americas, beginning with Native American religions and European-Indian contact and moving forward to contemporary movements and phenomena. Topics will include slavery and religion, politics and religion, evangelical Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the United States, “cults” and alternative spiritualities, and religion in/as popular culture. While the United States will serve as the primary focus, we will consider issues of cultural exchange across national boundaries in the Western Hemisphere, especially Mexico, Canada, and Caribbean countries.  Prerequisite: Sophomore or higher standing.  Four credit hours.  H.

RE218f  Global South Asia: Literature, Art, Environment  Explores South Asians in their diasporic and transnational context. What contributions are Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Jews, and Sikhs from the South Asian subcontinent making to contemporary global literature, film, art, and environmentalism? How do tradition and modernity intersect in their works? How do they negotiate religion, gender, sexuality, race, class, environmentalism, medicine, and globalization? Includes writings by Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Hanif Kureishi, Shashi Tharoor; films by Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta; art by Siona Benjaim, Anish Kapoor, M.F. Husain, Arpana Caur, Singh Twins; and the environmentalist works of Vandana Shiva and Maneka Gandhi.  Four credit hours.  L, I.  SINGH

RE221  The Jews of Maine  Participants will advance popular understanding of the experiences of Maine’s Jews past and present by producing mini-exhibitions for display at the Maine State Museum, along with thematically related programs for school groups and adult audiences. We will explore the question, “What does it mean to be from Maine?” Students in this humanities lab will develop transferable skills in research, multimedia communication, and collaboration while gaining a richer understanding of how Jews and others have staked their claim to authenticity as Mainers.  Four credit hours.  H, U.

RE223  Religion in the Modern State of Israel  Many Israelis—both Jews and Palestinians—live their lives in keeping with "tradition," but they define that past and their relationship to it in a wide variety of ways. This readings course will introduce students to religious dimensions of Israeli society and culture and, in the process, to a wide variety of methods in the study of religion. Students will also sharpen their skills in the evaluation of scholarly arguments advanced in secondary literature.  Two credit hours.

RE224  Jewish Theology  Listed as Jewish Studies 224.  Four credit hours.

RE232s  American Spirituality and the Environment  Examines historical and contemporary connections between spirituality and environmentalism in American culture. From early Quakers to mid-19th-century Romantics to contemporary Buddhists, we explore how individuals and groups in the United States have conceived of the relationship between environmentally responsible living, spiritual discipline, and social witness. While the course will span geographic regions, special attention is paid to movements and figures centered in Maine. Previously listed as RE298B (Spring 2019).  Four credit hours.  S, U.  HARPER

RE236s  Modern Christianity  Examines critical turning points in the relationship between Christianity and modernity, including the Protestant Reformation; the encounter between religion and reason; the emergence and development of evangelical Christianity;
Christianity's complex relationships with movements to fight racial, ethnic, gender, and class-based oppression. Designed to increase students' understanding of the evolution and diversity of Christianity, provide practice in discussing controversial religious topics, refine writing skills, and prepare students to reach their own conclusions about Christianity and its history.  

Four credit hours.  

H. HARPER

RE242]  The Good Life  What does the good life look like? What does it mean to live life well? In the desire to achieve good grades, to get a good job, and to succeed, we often fail to take a step back. This course is a chance to take a breath and think about how we are using the time that we have. We will explore questions of what makes life 'good' through engagement with a number of diverse traditions and practices that have helped human beings live a good life over centuries. We will also look at research on happiness and participate in projects designed to boost our happiness. This class will include visits from individuals who will share how they lead a good life. The hope is that you will leave this class with a better idea of what it means for you to live life well and tools to enact your vision at Colby and beyond.  

Three credit hours.  

S. ASCH, SMANIK

RE244f  Spirits, Specters, and Global Divinities: Contemporary Religion  Listed as Anthropology 244.  

Four credit hours.  

I. STROHL

RE246s  Religion and Everyday Life in Muslim Societies  Listed as Anthropology 246.  

Four credit hours.  

I. STROHL

[RE256]  The African-American Religious Experience  A sociological analysis and historical overview of the diverse religious organizations, leaders, experiences, and practices of black people in the United States. Emphasis upon the predominant Afro-Christian experience, its relationship with the African background, contemporary African religions, other religions (e.g., Islam), political institutions, social change, urban problems, and the arts. Special attention to the role of black Christian women in church and society. Formerly offered as Religious Studies 356.  

Four credit hours.  

U.

[RE263]  Buddhism across East Asia  Listed as East Asian Studies 263.  

Four credit hours.  

L.

[RE265]  Buddhism: An Introduction  Buddhism introduces students to the family of religions we call Buddhism. The course explores the histories, literatures, material culture, and practices of Buddhism from its origins to the present day. We will examine central Buddhist teachings and practices and their development in the literature of the Theravada tradition and Mahayana Buddhist traditions. The last segment of the course pays special attention to Buddhism in the modern West, the emergence of "Socially Engaged Buddhism" and the application of Buddhist ethical principles to contemporary issues of war, terrorism, and ecological degradation. Involves intensive reading of key primary texts and important historical and critical secondary works.  

Four credit hours.  

L.

[RE285]  Faith, Class, and Community  Explores the various intersections between religious traditions, socioeconomic structures, and faith-based communities/organizations (among others), with particular attention to dynamics in Waterville. Students gain a deeper understanding of religious and other ethical approaches to issues related to wealth, poverty, and inequality. Students develop skills associated with community organizing and non-profit leadership through meaningful engagement with organizational partners. Humanities lab course.  

Four credit hours.  

U.

RE297f  Who Owns the Bible?: Scribes, Manuscripts, and Forgeries  Where does the Bible come from? How did different texts come together to form the biblical canon? What is at stake—politically and theologically—in these processes? This course considers such questions and examines the composition and transmission of the Bible as we know it today. In particular, the course focuses on the materiality of the Bible, including the surviving manuscripts and artifacts that help us reconstruct the ways in which biblical texts circulated from ancient times to the present day. We analyze the problems posed by the discovery of such objects, either through archaeological excavation or purchase on the antiquities market, and why such factors matter to scholars of religion.  

Four credit hours.  

SONIA

RE297Af  Contemporary Challenges in Israeli Society  Listed as Jewish Studies 297.  

Four credit hours.  

I. COHEN FISHER

RE298s  Religion, Technology, and the Human Self  What distinguishes a human being from a machine? Or a human being from a god? What are the roles of creation, knowledge, and technology in defining these categories? In this course, we will examine the nature of knowledge and the self in biblical literature, including the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, as well as non-canonical Jewish and Christian texts. From the divine logos of Stoic philosophy to the ethical questions posed by artificial intelligence, the course will explore ancient and modern discourses about the nature of human beings and its relationship to the divine. From there, we will explore the ways in which scholars today are using new technologies, including artificial intelligence, to better understand ancient texts and religious communities.  

Four credit hours.  

SONIA

[RE312]  Global South Asia: Literature, Art, Environment  Explores South Asians in their diasporic and transnational context. What contributions are Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Jews, and Sikhs from the South Asian subcontinent making to contemporary global literature, film, art, and environmentalism? How do tradition and modernity intersect in their works? How do they negotiate religion, gender, sexuality,
race, class, environmentalism, medicine, and globalization? Includes writings by Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Hanif Kureishi, Shashi Tharoor; films by Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta; art by Siona Benjamin, Anish Kapoor, M.F. Husain, Arpana Caur, Singh Twins; and the environmentalist works of Vandana Shiva and Maneka Gandhi.  

**RE319s**  Bollywood and Beyond: South Asian Religions through Film  
A study of South Asian religions through Bollywood and world art cinema. Focus will be on religious diversity, the partition of the Indian subcontinent, and topics of gender, sexuality, diaspora, and transnationalism. Films and assigned readings will provide historical, social, and aesthetic contexts. Goals are to expand students’ knowledge of South Asia, to hone their verbal and writing skills, and to inspire awareness of and empathy for inequities and injustice. Attendance at a weekly evening film screening (to be arranged) is required.  

Four credit hours.  
L, I.

**RE322s**  Food and Religious Identity  
An examination of the ways in which religiously inspired food practices and food restrictions relate to the establishment and preservation of communal identity. Explores sources from diverse religious traditions and time periods with an eye both to commonalities and to elements found only within specific communities. Students will develop proficiency in the contextual analysis of primary sources and the critical evaluation of secondary literature.  

Four credit hours.  
S.

**RE331s**  Mysticism, Spirituality, and Religious Experience  
Mysticism has often been defined as the essence of religion, and mystical experience is commonly characterized as ineffable, transcendent, beyond the rational, and expressible only in paradox and metaphor. Drawing on a wide range of religious thinkers and on recent critical reflection on religious experience, we read religious texts that have been deemed mystical and examine the history of mysticism in an effort to understand the relationship between religious experience, language, and rationality.  

Four credit hours.  
L.

**RE346s**  Jews of Germany, Past and Present  
Examines Jewish life in Germany from the Middle Ages to the present, with particular attention to modernity, the Holocaust, and its aftermath. Explores the impact of German culture on Jewishness and the roles of Jews in conceptions of Germanness. Students will engage in traditional and experiential learning and will develop independent research, writing, and oral communications skills. Includes an optional spring break trip to Germany subsidized by DavisConnects.  
Global Innovation course.  

Four credit hours.  
H, I.

**RE354s**  Zionism and its Opponents  
Listed as Global Studies 354.  

Four credit hours.

**RE381s**  Women and Gender in Islam  
Listed as History 381.  

Four credit hours.  
H, I.

**RE387s**  Anti-Judaism and Islamophobia in Christian/Western Thought  
How have Christian and other Western thinkers put ideas about Jews and Muslims to work in making sense of the world? What are the similarities and differences between ideas about Judaism on the one hand and Islam on the other? How did these intertwined ideas change over time, and how do they reflect conceptions of Christian/Western self-identity? Students will develop proficiency in the contextual analysis of primary sources, the critical evaluation of secondary literature, and original research. We will devote particular attention to the related questions, "What makes academic writing effective?" and "How can I write that way myself?"  

Four credit hours.  
I.

**RE397s**  American Cult: New Religious Movements from Salem to QAnon  
What is a cult? What is a religion? Is there a difference? How do each intersect with more supposedly secular phenomena, such as communal movements or online groups organized around conspiracy theories? This course studies new religious movements (popularly called cults) in the United States. We will consider several historical movements (e.g., the Millerites and early Latter-Day Saints) and move to contemporary examples (e.g., Heavens Gate, QAnon), always attending to the issues of charismatic leadership, conversion, and belief maintenance, as well as the lived practices and experiences of members and ex-members of such groups.  
Prerequisite:  

Junior or senior standing.  

Four credit hours.  
S.  
HARPER

**RE483fj**  Religious Studies Honors Program  
Research conducted under the guidance of a faculty member and focused on an approved topic leading to the writing of a thesis.  
Prerequisite:  

A 3.65 average in the major at the end of the junior year and permission of the department.  

Four credit hours.  
FACULTY

**RE483Jj**  Religious Studies Honors Program  
Noncredit.  
SONIA

**RE491f, 492s**  Independent Study  
Individual projects in areas where the student has demonstrated the interest and competence necessary for independent work.  
Prerequisite:  

Permission of the instructor.  

One to four credit hours.  
FACULTY