
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Chair, Professor Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

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The study of religion in a college curriculum involves the historical and comparative scrutiny of the religious traditions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shinto. Inevitably, the examination of basic questions about religion—traditional understandings of the divine, religious experience and its literary and artistic expressions, and the role of religion in society and nature—are central to the discipline.

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 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

- 273 Survey of East Asian Art

Government

- 251 Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Accommodation
- 252 Introduction to Politics of the Middle East

History

- 285 Foundations of Islam
- 317 Universities, Cathedrals, Courtly Love: 12th-Century Renaissance
- 381 Women and Gender in Islam

Jewish Studies

- 226J Community Organizing and Social Justice

Latin American Studies

- 373 Religion and Unbelief in Latin American History

Music

- 254 Music of Meditation

Philosophy

- 114 Central Philosophical Issues: Nature and God
- 266 Buddhist Philosophy
- 274 Philosophy of Religion

Sociology

- 236 American Religion and Society

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

[RE136] 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.**

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 rich collection 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

[RE181] 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.

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 Zoom-optimized, 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.

RE217f 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. HARPER

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 Benjamin, 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.

[RE231] Religious Life of Things Icons, relics, scriptures, beads — we often overlook the fact that the spiritual is everywhere present in material images and objects. We will learn methods of understanding the role of religious images and objects. Students will use semiotic tools to analyze religious images, become familiar with contemporary approaches to the study of religious objects, and be able to use those approaches to analyze a religious object. Guided research will make use of library and online resources. Four credit hours. A.

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

[RE236] 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.**

RE242j The Good Life What does the good life look like? What does it mean to live life well? We explore these questions through in depth engagement with a number of diverse traditions including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism. We will also examine intellectual traditions (including Emerson and Thoreau) and modern imaginings (*The Good Place*). This class will include visits from contemporary individuals who understand their lives to be shaped by the traditions in question. *Three credit hours.* **S.** ASCH

RE244f Anthropology of 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

RE256s 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.** HARPER

[RE257] Women in American Religion An examination of women in American religion from colonial times to the present, including experiences of ordinary women and leaders of reform movements and alternative communities. Attention to how women have embraced and adapted traditional religions and constructed alternative communities and theologies. Increases students understanding of religious diversity and marginalization, as well as the role of organized religion in promoting (and impeding) justice and equality; provides practice in discussing controversial religious issues; refines writing skills; helps students to form their own opinions on issues related to women in American religion. *Four credit hours.* **H, U.**

RE263s Buddhism across East Asia Listed as East Asian Studies 263. *Four credit hours.* **L.** ORZECH

RE265f 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.** ORZECH

[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 Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible Explores the roles of gender and sexuality in biblical literature, including the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Through close analysis of both narrative as well as ritual and legal texts, we will examine the construction of gender norms and sexual mores by different biblical writers. Beginning with an examination of biblical tradition in its ancient context, the course then interrogates its ongoing cultural legacy of these texts in modern discourses about gender and sexuality. Topics discussed in the course include gender hierarchy and sexual agency, marriage and adultery, and homoeroticism. *Four credit hours.* SONIA

RE298s Narratives of Israel/Palestine Explores the stories that Palestinians and Israeli Jews tell themselves, one another, and third parties about their relationship to their homeland. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the Israel/Palestine conflict and its underlying narratives while developing their critical reading skills and their ability to understand diverse perspectives. Students may request a complementary 2-credit independent study in which they will research an aspect of the Israel/Palestine conflict. *Two credit hours.*

[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. *Four credit hours.* L, I.

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. SINGH

[RE322] 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.

[RE331] 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.

[RE346] 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.

[RE357] Jesus Christ Superstar: The Bible in Film An examination of Hollywood's (and other filmmakers') obsession with retelling the stories of the Bible. Beginning with De Mille's classic *The Ten Commandments*, through Gibson's controversial *The Passion of the Christ*, including films that range in interpretative expression from literal to metaphorical—the former being an attempt to recreate the story, the latter being an attempt to reinterpret the story. Students also will learn some basic film theory as well as techniques for interpreting film. *Four credit hours.* A.

RE381s Women and Gender in Islam Listed as History 381. *Four credit hours.* H, I. TURNER

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. FREIDENREICH

RE397f Sacred Sounds: Music and American Spirituality What makes a song sacred or secular? Centralizing American music from the late 19th century to the present day, this course will explore the ways artists, audiences, religious groups, critics, and recording executives have conceived of spirituality in music. Students will develop and apply critical interpretive skills as they pertain to music and lyrics, and they will gain a sense of the wide breadth of the American musical and spiritual landscape—covering works that span racial, regional, and religious boundaries. *Four credit hours.* A, U. HARPER

RE397Af Zionism and its Opponents Listed as Global Studies 397. *Four credit hours.* SIMON

RE398s War and the Bible From the battle of Jericho to the apocalyptic wars in the Book of Revelation, the Bible is full of violent conflict. Wars are waged between nations, peoples, and even gods. What ideologies of war underlie these depictions? How does the Bible understand warfare and its many facets? What is a just or holy war? Are there war crimes in the ancient world? What is the role of divine beings in these conflicts? Does the God of the Bible ever lose? Through close readings of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, we will consider the different ways in which war is depicted by biblical texts in different historical periods. We will also examine the ongoing influence of biblical warfare on later discourses about violent conflict around the world. *Four credit hours.* SONIA

RE483f 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

[RE483J] Religious Studies Honors Program *Noncredit.*

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