

Department of Religious Studies

The Department of Religious Studies offers Honours, Majors and Minors with a critical approach to studying religious traditions in their multiple contexts--historical, cultural, political, artistic or literary, for example, both local and global. Given the range and depth of these contexts, this critical study requires approaches that are at the same time interdisciplinary and focused on the diversity of religions. The Department offers courses at the introductory (1000), intermediate and advanced (2000-3000) as well as seminar (4000) levels which are either tradition-specific or multi-religious in scope.

Minor in Religious Studies

Students who select a Minor in Religious Studies must complete 18 credit hours of courses, including:

RELG 1006 Introduction to Religious Studies

and one of the following from the Tools Courses:

RELG 2243 Texts and Contexts

RELG 2313 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

RELG 2333 Introduction to the New Testament

RELG 2353 Introduction to the Qur'an

RELG 2413 Ritual Studies

Major in Religious Studies

Students who select a Major in Religious Studies must complete 36 credit hours of courses, including:

RELG 1006 Introduction to Religious Studies

and one of the following from the Tools Courses:

RELG 2243 Texts and Contexts

RELG 2313 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

RELG 2333 Introduction to the New Testament

RELG 2353 Introduction to the Qur'an

as well as:

RELG 2413 Ritual Studies

RELG 4023 Scope and Methods

Students contemplating a Major in Religious Studies will select their courses in consultation with a member of the Department. Students must declare their Major to the Registrar's Office and the Department Chair by the beginning of their third year.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of Religious Studies, students selecting the Major program are encouraged to consider the intellectual and practical value of obtaining a second major in another discipline.

Introductory Course

RELG-1006. Introduction to Religious Studies

A thematic, issues-oriented introduction to the study of religions. While each section of the course is different because it is taught by a different professor, the issues and themes are common to all. Some of the themes and issues encountered are prejudice, sexuality, death and after death, the long search, evil and suffering, music and religion. The data to illustrate these themes and issues are drawn from the religious traditions of the world. Fundamental to the course methodology is the identification of focal questions. The intention of the course is to foster in students an active appreciation of the religious dimension of life and to share with them the tools to think critically about it.

Intermediate and Advanced Courses

1. Multi-Religious Courses

Intermediate and Advanced Courses at the 2000-3000 level are organized into Multi-Religious courses which are more comparative in scope, and Tradition-Specific courses which are focused on an individual or regional tradition and its internal diversities. These courses serve the purpose of both the general and deepening interests of students. RELG 1006 Introduction to Religious Studies is not a prerequisite to these courses. Students with a general interest in religions are invited to enroll in any courses offered at the 2000-3000 level.

RELG-2133. Religion and Ecology (ENVS)

Many religious traditions display a variety of stances towards the environmental crisis, ranging from indifference to reform. Through critical and comparative study, this course explores religious approaches to ecology in a variety of traditions. Topics may include environmental stewardship, deep ecology, ecoliberation, ecofeminism and ethnic indigenous ecology.

RELG-2163. Contemporary Perspectives on Science and Religion

This course examines the recent debates over the relation between science and religion. The last few years of the 20th Century have seen a resurgence of interest in this relation. This has been sparked by developments in the sciences, particularly in physics and genetics, as well as by a newly-emerging understanding of what science is. The central questions include whether science and religion are compatible and whether recent developments in the sciences give new answers to religious and theological questions. Readings will represent all sides of these debates.

RELG-2173. Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding

Throughout the world, most religious traditions are involved both in legitimating violence and in building peace. This course critically and comparatively explores the roles of religious leaders, symbols, discourses and actions in conflict-prone settings. Topics may be related to identity-based conflict, genocide, post-conflict reform and reconciliation.

RELG-2183. Religion and Politics

Religious traditions and actors mobilize and in turn are mobilized by political movements at international, national, and community-based levels. Within a multi religious and comparative framework, this course explores the way in which religious and political identities, actors and systems interact on issues related, for instance, to religiously-based political parties, democratization movements, nationalism, fundamentalism and the politics of resistance.

RELG-3513. Bioethics

This course explores the basic approaches and issues related to the field of bioethics. A

RELG-3413. God in Western Thought (PHIL)

A survey, through lectures, readings, and discussion, of Western philosophical speculation regarding the divine. Themes: theism and atheism in classical antiquity; demonstrations of God's existence in medieval philosophy; the effect on religious belief of empiricism, idealism, Marxism, and existentialism. Prerequisite: PHIL 1013 and 1023, or permission of the instructor.

RELG-3433. Religions of Tibet, China and Japan

We shall investigate what scholars are saying about the religious traditions of China and Japan: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and the popular religions.

RELG-3453. Religious Traditions of India I

An inquiry into the religious traditions of India, including Hinduism in its many varieties, early Buddhism, and Jainism.

RELG-3473. Native American Religions

An inquiry into the issues in the study of Native American religions, and the results of that study. The focus will be on some of the diverse religions of First Nations people in what is now Canada and the United States.

RELG-3533. Islam in the West (Art and Architecture in New York City)

This course examines the physical presence of Islam in New York City. Students will tour the mosques of New York, visit collections of Islamic art and manuscripts, observe ritual music and dance, and taste food from around the Muslim world. Themes will include spiritual Islamic art, Islam in the West, and North American Muslims today. The goal of the course is to provide students with material objects that will enrich their understanding of culture.

RELG-3553. Islamic Ethics and Spirituality

This course will look at the various forms of Islamic spirituality, as expressed by individuals and organized orders. It will explore the symbolic path of the mystic and how it coalesced with popular piety and sainthood. It will also look at the ethical systems of rational mystics who 800's experiential, and 1300's and 1600's mysticism.

RELG-3653. Women and Christianity (WSGS)

Women's rights, gender sensitivities, and feminist movements both inside and outside the churches have inspired lively and complex debates within contemporary Christian theologies. By deconstructing, revising and rebuilding basic issues in theology on the basis of women's experiences and gender analysis, 800-1700 literature.

RELG-2543. Sociolog of Religion (SOCI)

This course focuses on the relations between the beliefs and institutionalized practices that people hold sacred, and contemporary community life. The students explore the contradictory trends of mass secularism and the rise of religious fundamentalism, and the practices through which people collectively mobilize to sustain, challenge, and change religious identities. The question raised by Durkheim is explored: If religion expresses and reinforces community solidarity, how can modern societies accommodate religious diversity? A further question is: How are religions implicated in political struggles, the women's movement, nationalism, and war?

RELG 3423. Reason and Religion (PHIL)

A survey of issues and authors, both classical and contemporary, in the philosophy of religion. Consideration will be given to the following: defining religion, religious experience and faith, the problem of evil, the meaning of religious language, the question of life beyond death. Prerequisite: PHIL 1013 and 1023, or permission of the instructor.

RELG-3643. Anthropolog of Religion (ANTH)

This course emphasizes an understanding of religious phenomena by viewing religion in the context of the diversity of cultures. Prerequisite: None.