Religious Studies

Department Website: https://divinity.uchicago.edu/undergraduate-program-religious-studies-0

Program of Study

The program in Religious Studies introduces students to the academic study of religion. Students in Religious Studies learn how to think, talk, and write about religion in a way that is well-informed, rigorously critical, and responsibly engaged. The study of religion investigates the way human societies construct practices, seek meanings, and pose questions about their world. These investigations may be constructive, cultural, and/or historical. Since it touches all facets of human experience, the study of religion is a crucial conversation partner with other fields of study and draws on the entire range of humanistic and social scientific disciplines. Students in the program are able to explore numerous religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, and are exposed to the sources, problems, methods, and methodologies of our diverse areas of study, including Biblical and Historical Studies; Ethics, Theology, and the Philosophy of Religions; as well as History of Religions, Anthropology, Sociology, and Religion and Literature. The interests of our students may be descriptive, explanatory, and/or normative.

Program Requirements

A major in Religious Studies consists of twelve courses, including one introductory course and a two-quarter senior seminar. It is preferable that students consult the Director of Undergraduate Studies and declare their major in Religious Studies before the end of their second year. Students and the Director of Undergraduate Studies will work together to create a program of study. The goal is to develop depth in one area so that a satisfactory BA paper will be written in the fourth year. Students are encouraged to explore more than one religious tradition in their courses.

Students with permission to enroll in graduate Divinity courses may count these toward the major. Students who wish to receive credit in the major for non-departmental courses must submit a petition to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Such requests are decided on a case-by-case basis. NOTE: The Office of the Dean of Students in the College must also approve the transfer of all courses taken at institutions other than those in which students are enrolled as part of a study abroad program that is sponsored by the University of Chicago. For more information, visit Transfer Credit.

Introductory Course

Students in Religious Studies are required to take RLST 10100 Introduction to Religious Studies. It need not precede other course work in the major, but students are advised to have completed it by the end of their second year. It will typically be offered every year during Autumn Quarter. This course will introduce students to some of the central themes in Religious Studies; its particular focus will vary according to the interests of the individual instructor.

Course Distribution

Religion is expressed in many forms throughout the world's cultures, and the academic study of religion therefore requires multiple perspectives on its subject. Students of religion should have some knowledge of the historical development of specific religious traditions, understand and critically engage the ethical and intellectual teachings of various religions, and begin to make some comparative appraisals of the roles that religions play in different cultures and historical periods. To introduce students to these multiple perspectives on religion and to provide a sense of the field as a whole, students are required to take at least one course in each of the following areas. To identify the areas, refer to the RLST number range (see below).

A. Historical Studies in Religious Traditions: courses that explore the development of particular religious traditions, including their social practices, rituals, scriptures, and beliefs in historical context (RLST 11000 through 15000, 20000 through 22900).

B. Constructive Studies in Religion: courses that investigate constructive or normative questions about the nature and conduct of human life that are raised by religious traditions, including work in philosophy of religion, ethics, and theology (RLST 23000 through 25900).

C. Cultural Studies in Religion: courses that introduce issues in the social and cultural contingencies of religious thought and practice by emphasizing sociological, anthropological, and literary-critical perspectives on religion, and by raising comparative questions about differing religious and cultural traditions (RLST 26000 through 28900).

Senior Seminar and BA Paper

The two-quarter senior sequence (RLST 29800 BA Paper Seminar I and RLST 29900 BA Paper II) will assist students with the preparation of the required BA paper. During May of their third year, students will work with the preceptor to choose a faculty adviser and a topic for research, and to plan a course of study for the following year. These must be approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Students will take part in the BA Paper Seminar convened by a preceptor during Autumn and Winter Quarters. This seminar will allow students to prepare their bibliographies, hone their writing, and present their research. Students will register for RLST 29800 BA Paper Seminar I in the Autumn Quarter and for RLST 29900 BA Paper II in the Winter Quarter. The BA paper will be due the second week of Spring Quarter. The length is typically between thirty and forty pages, with the upward limit being firm.

This program may accept a BA paper or project used to satisfy the same requirement in another major if certain conditions are met and with the consent of the other program. Approval from both departments is required. Students should consult with the departments by the earliest BA proposal deadline (or by the end of their third year, if neither program
publishes a deadline). A consent form, to be signed by both departments, is available from the College adviser. It must be completed and returned to the College adviser by the end of Autumn Quarter of the student’s year of graduation.

Grading

Religious Studies majors must receive quality grades in all courses in the major. With consent of instructor, nonmajors may take Religious Studies courses for P/F grading. Faculty will determine the criteria that constitute a Pass.

Honors

Honors are awarded by the Divinity School’s Committee on Undergraduate Studies. Students who write senior papers deemed exceptional by their faculty advisers will be eligible for consideration for graduation with honors. To be considered for honors, students must also have a 3.5 GPA or higher in the major and a 3.25 GPA or higher overall.

Summary of Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RLST 10100</td>
<td>Introduction to Religious Studies</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One course in historical studies in religious traditions</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One course in constructive studies in religion</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One course in cultural studies in religion</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six additional courses in Religious Studies</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 29800</td>
<td>BA Paper Seminar I</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 29900</td>
<td>BA Paper II</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
<td></td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Minor Program in Religious Studies

The minor in Religious Studies requires a total of seven courses. RLST 10100 Introduction to Religious Studies is required of all minors. The remaining six courses should be chosen to reflect a broad understanding of the academic study of religion. Of these six, students must take at least one course in each of our three areas of study [Historical Studies (A), Constructive Studies (B), and Cultural Studies (C)]. Courses in the minor may not be double-counted with the student’s major(s) or with other minors, and may not be counted toward general education requirements. Courses in the minor must be taken for quality grades, and more than half of the requirements for the minor must be met by registering for courses bearing University of Chicago course numbers.

The student must complete a substantial (at least 10–15 pages) paper or project. This work should engage critically with primary source materials and exemplify methodological sophistication in the study of religion, and should earn a grade no lower than B-. It is expected that this paper will normally be written as part of the student's course work for the minor. The Director of Undergraduate Studies will approve the paper for fulfillment of this requirement.

Students who elect the minor program in Religious Studies must meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies before the end of Spring Quarter of their third year to declare their intention to complete the minor. Consent to complete a minor forms are available from the student’s College adviser or online at https://college.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/attachments/consent_minor_program.pdf.

Sample Program

The following group of courses would satisfy a minor in Religious Studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RLST 10100</td>
<td>Introduction to Religious Studies</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 11004</td>
<td>Introduction to the Hebrew Bible</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 21801</td>
<td>Religion and Society in the Middle Ages</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 23603</td>
<td>Cosmos and Conscience: Looking for Ourselves Elsewhere</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 23900</td>
<td>Buddhist Thought in India and Tibet</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 22505</td>
<td>Histories of Japanese Religion</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLST 26800</td>
<td>The Mahabharata in English Translation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
<td></td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious Studies Courses

**RLST 10100. Introduction to Religious Studies, 100 Units.**

What are we talking about when we talk about religion? There are a multitude of answers to that question, and this course provides students with an entry way into a longstanding conversation-involving insiders, outsiders, and those in between-around the meanings of a word that indexes ideas of god and the gods, of origins and ends, and of the proper places of humans (and everything else, including animals) above, in, and below the globe. Talk about religion today is, in fact, cheap: this course will aim to promote a grammatical currency (morphology, vocabulary, syntax) to enhance the value of such talk.

Instructor(s): Sarah Hammerschlag

Terms Offered: Autumn

Note(s): Required of students who are majoring in Religious Studies.
RLST 11030. Introduction to the Qur'an. 100 Units.
This course introduces the historical context, thematic and literary features, major biblical figures, and exegetical literature on the Qur'an, with a focus on the early (8th-10th century CE) and medieval periods (11th - 15th century CE). We will read select English translations from the Qur'an and its commentators, accompanied by academic secondary literature that emphasize the Qur'an's literary structure, theoretical underpinnings, historical, geographical, social, political and cultural contexts in early and medieval Islamic civilization, and the role of the Qur'an as both a fixed and a living and dynamic text in Muslim devotional life.
Instructor(s): Yousef Casewit Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): ISLM 45400, JWSC 21107, NEHC 40470, HREL 45401, HIJD 45400, RLVC 45400, FNDL 24106

RLST 12000. Introduction to the New Testament: Texts and Contexts. 100 Units.
An immersion in the texts of the New Testament with the following goals: 1. through careful reading to come to know well some representative pieces of this literature; 2. to gain useful knowledge of the historical, geographical, social, religious, cultural and political contexts of these texts and the events they relate; 3. to learn the major literary genres represented in the canon ("gospels," "acts," "letters," and "apocryphes") and strategies for reading them; 4. to comprehend the various theological visions and cultural worldviews to which these texts give expression; 5. to situate oneself and one's prevailing questions about this material in the history of research, and to reflect on the goals and methods of interpretation; 6. to raise questions for further study.
Instructor(s): M. Mitchell Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Interest in this literature, and willingness to enter into conversation with like- and non-like-minded others on the texts and the issues involved in their interpretation.
Equivalent Course(s): FNDL 28202, BIBL 32500

RLST 20505. Pagans and Christians: Greek Backgrounds to Early Christianity. 100 Units.
This course will examine some of the Greco-Roman roots of early Christianity. We will focus on affinities between Christianity and the classical tradition as well as ways in which the Christian faith may be considered radically different. Some of the more important issues that we will analyze are: 1. "The spell of Homer." How the Homeric poems exerted immeasurable influence on the religious attitudes and practices of the Greeks. 2. The theme of creation in Greek and Roman authors such as Hesiod and Ovid. The Orphic account of human origins. The Early Christian theme of Christ as creator/Avator. 3. Greek and Roman conceptions of the afterlife. The response to the Homeric orientation in the form of the great mystery cults of Demeter, Dionysus, and Orpheus. The views of the philosophers (esp. Plato). The New Testament conception of resurrection. 4. Greek and Roman conceptions of sacrifice, the crucifixion of Christ as archetypal sacrifice and early Christian reflection upon it. 5. The world of ancient magic and the Christian response.
Instructor(s): Daniel A. Arnold Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CLCV 26216, CLAS 36216

RLST 21107. Rdg: Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed. 100 Units.
A careful study of select passages in Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed, focusing on the method of the work and its major philosophical-theological themes, including: divine attributes, creation vs. eternity, prophecy, the problem of evil and divine providence, law and ethics, the final aim of human existence.
Instructor(s): James Robinson Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ISLM 45400, JWSC 21107, NEHC 40470, HREL 45401, HIJD 45400, RLVC 45400, FNDL 24106

RLST 23026. Suffering, Tragedy, and the Human Condition. 100 Units.
This course examines the various ways in which various authors have understood the nature of suffering and its role in human wisdom and human tragedy. In so doing we will gain various understandings of how the Western past and present have conceived of the human condition, especially in its relation to fate, the gods, and the Christian God and salvation.
Instructor(s): Susan Schreiner Terms Offered: Fall

RLST 23905. Is Buddhism a Religion? 100 Units.
One often hears it said that "Buddhism is not a religion, it's […]" - with the ellipsis variously filled in as (e.g.) "a philosophy," "a kind of mind science," "a spiritual practice," etc. This course will explore the origins and function of this meme, as well as the question of what, if anything, distinguishes a tradition as "religious." It is hoped that we will, along the way, learn a bit about Buddhism and/or about various Asian encounters with colonialism, empire, and modernity. And also maybe about being human in today's world.
Instructor(s): Daniel A. Arnold Terms Offered: Winter

RLST 24105. Religion, Ethics, War, and Resistance. 100 Units.
This course will look at canonical readings in the ethics of war and resistance, drawing from religious and secular sources: Augustine, Aquinas, Vitoria, Reinhold Niebuhr, Michael Walzer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi.
Instructor(s): R. Miller Terms Offered: Winter

RLST 24201. Indian Philosophy I: Origins and Orientations. 100 Units.
A survey of the origins of Indian philosophical thought, emphasizing the Vedas, Upanisads, and early Buddhist literature. Topics include concepts of causality and freedom, the nature of the self and ultimate reality, and the relationship between philosophical thought and ritual or ascetic religious practice.
Instructor(s): D. Arnold Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): SALC 30901, HREL 30200, DVPR 30201, SALC 20901
RLST 24202. Indian Philosophy II: The Classical Traditions. 100 Units.
Following on the Indian Philosophy I course, this course will survey major developments in the mature period of scholastic philosophy in India - a period, beginning a little before the middle of the first millennium C.E., that is characterized by extensive and sophisticated debate (made possible by the emergence of shared philosophical vocabulary and methods) among Buddhist, Brahmanical, and Jain philosophers. Students are encouraged (but not required) to take Indian Philosophy I before taking this course.
Instructor(s): M. Kapstein
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SALC 20902, HREL 30300, DVPR 30302, SALC 30902

RLST 25105. Readings in Ibn Tufayl's Hayy b. Yaqzan. 100 Units.
A study of Ibn Tufayl's twelfth-century philosophical/mystical romance about a boy spontaneously generated on a desert island who achieves knowledge of God through empirical study of nature. The many themes in Hayy ibn Yaqzan will be studied in relation to the philosophical literature that formed it and in light of recent modern scholarship about it.
Instructor(s): James T. Robinson
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): FNDL 25105, HIJD 35004, ISLM 35004, NEHC 35004

RLST 27250. Religious Trials. 100 Units.
The rhetoric and practice of "trial" -- as testing and as adjudication -- is central to religious thought and religious practice. This course will examine the idea and the act of "trial" comparatively, via the classics of the religious literatures of Judaism and of Christianity (Genesis 22, Job, the Gospel of Mark, "The Pilgrim's Progress," Kafka), and also cinema (Dreyer's "Joan of Arc," R. S. Elkabetz's "Gett").
Instructor(s): R. Rosengarten
Terms Offered: Winter

RLST 27650. Anthropology of Religion. 100 Units.
This course explores classic theories and methods in the anthropology of religion. We will cover core themes that have defined the field such as ethics, epistemology, language and political economy.
Instructor(s): A. Heo
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 23911

RLST 28511. Star Wars and Religion. 100 Units.
This course is an introduction to comparative religious ethics, using the Star Wars film franchise as a point of reference to discuss different conceptions of heroism. The course focuses on the role of myth-both religious and secular-and the unique power of stories to bestow meaning on human life and express that which transcends ordinary existence. Screenwriter George Lucas said that he combined elements of many religious traditions to create the world of Star Wars. This course analyzes these elements to ask what the Force and the Jedi have in common with Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions.
Instructor(s): R. Johnson
Terms Offered: Spring

RLST 28900. Magic, Science, and Religion. 100 Units.
The relationship between the categories of magic, science, and religion has been a problem for modern social science since its inception in the nineteenth century. In the first half of this course, we will critically examine some of the classical and contemporary approaches to these concepts. In the second half, we will explore a number of detailed historical and ethnographic studies about modern phenomena that call some of the fundamental assumptions behind these categories into question.
Instructor(s): A. Doostdar
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): KNOW 28900, ANTH 23906

RLST 29700. Reading/Research: Rlst. 100 Units.
No description available. Prerequisite(s): Consent of faculty supervisor and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Note(s): Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form.
Terms Offered: Autumn,Winter,Spring
Prerequisite(s): Consent of faculty supervisor and Director of Undergraduate Studies.
Note(s): Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form.

RLST 29800. BA Paper Seminar I. 100 Units.
This class meets weekly to provide guidance for planning, researching, and writing the BA paper.
Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): Consent of faculty supervisor and Director of Undergraduate Studies.
Note(s): RLST 29800 and 29900 form a two-quarter sequence that is required of fourth-year students who are majoring in Religious Studies. Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form.

RLST 29900. BA Paper II. 100 Units.
This class meets weekly to assist students in the preparation of drafts of their BA paper, which are formally presented and critiqued.
Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): RLST 29800 and 29900 form a two-quarter sequence that is required of fourth-year students who are majoring in Religious Studies. Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form.
RLST 20111. History of Death. 100 Units.
From the treatment of mortal remains to the built environment of cemeteries, tombs, and memorials, the dead have always played a role in the lives of the living. This course examines how beliefs and practices surrounding death have been a source of meaning making for individuals, institutions, religious communities, and modern nations. It will ask students to consider how examining death makes it possible to better understand the values and concerns of societies across time and space. This course will consider case studies from Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Asia, from the Middle Ages to the Vietnam War. It introduces students to the methods and debates that animate the historical study of death—coming from histories of the body, social history, and the study of slavery—and ends by asking the question: “Is it possible to have a global history of death?”
Instructor(s): K. Hickerson
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 20111, GNSE 20111, CRES 20111

RLST 21450. Coptic Bible. 100 Units.
The Coptic versions of the Bible present one of the earliest translations of Christian scripture as the new religion spread. Understanding how the Bible (canonical and non-canonical) was read and used in Egypt at this early stage implies studying the development of Christian communities in those agitated times, as well as paying attention to questions of literacy and linguistic environment, book production, Bible (both Greek and Coptic) on papyrus, and translation and interpretation in Antiquity. The course will draw on materials assembled from my work on the critical edition of the Gospel of Mark, but will also look into other materials like the Coptic Old Testament, and non-canonical scriptures such as Nag Hammadi and the Gnostic scriptures. No previous knowledge of Coptic is required. A brief introduction to the Coptic language will be part of the class, and parallel sessions of additional language instruction will be planned for those who are interested in learning more.
Instructor(s): S. Torallas
Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 24118, NEHC 34118, CLAS 34118, CLCV 24118, BIBL 31418
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

- Times was used instead of Trajan.
- Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.