Religious Studies

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

Religious Studies majors have the option of pursuing one of two tracks: the Regular Track or the Research Track. Students in the Regular Track must take eleven courses for the major, including at least one introductory-level (“Gateway”) course as well as a third-year Theories/Methods seminar. Students in the Research Track must also take eleven courses, including at least one introductory-level (“Gateway”) course as well as a third-year Theories/Methods seminar. In addition, students in the Research Track complete a BA thesis during two BA seminars: RLST 29800 BA Paper Seminar I and RLST 29900 BA Paper II. Students who wish to pursue the Research Track must officially declare their intention to do so with the Director of Undergraduate Studies by the end of Spring Quarter during their third year. Only students in the Research Track are eligible for departmental honors.

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 Requirement

Students in Religious Studies are required to take an introductory-level (“Gateway”) course, such as 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.

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 two 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 in the Research Track 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. Only students in the Research Track are eligible for honors. To be considered for honors, students in the Research Track must also have a 3.5 GPA or higher in the major and a 3.25 GPA or higher overall.

Summary of Requirements

Regular Track
One Introductory-level (“Gateway”) course 100
At least two courses in three major areas (Historical, Constructive, Cultural Studies) 200
Third-year Theories/Methods seminar 100
Seven additional courses in Religious Studies 700
Total Units 1100

Research Track
One Introductory-level (“Gateway”) course 100
At least two courses in three major areas (Historical, Constructive, Cultural Studies) 200
Third-year Theories/Methods seminar 100
Five additional courses in Religious Studies 500
RLST 29800 BA Paper Seminar I 100
RLST 29900 BA Paper II 100
Total Units 1100

Minor Program in Religious Studies
The minor in Religious Studies requires a total of six courses. One introductory-level (“Gateway”) course is required of all minors (e.g., RLST 10100 Introduction to Religious Studies). The remaining five 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 two 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 Program forms are available from the student’s College adviser or online (https://humanities-web.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/college-prod/s3fs-public/documents/Consent_Minor_Program.pdf).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Units</th>
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</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>
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<tr>
<td>RLST 23900</td>
<td>Buddhist Thought in India and Tibet</td>
<td>100</td>
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<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>
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Total Units 600
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 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: Winter

RLST 11004. Introduction to the Hebrew Bible. 100 Units.
The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is a complex anthology of disparate texts and reflects a diversity of religious, political, and historical perspectives from ancient Israel, Judah, and Yehud. Because this collection of texts continues to play an important role in modern religions, new meanings are often imposed upon it. In this course, we will attempt to read biblical texts apart from modern preconceptions about them. We will also contextualize their ideas and goals through comparison with texts from ancient Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt. Such comparisons will demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible is fully part of the cultural milieu of the Ancient Near East. To accomplish these goals, we will read a significant portion of the Hebrew Bible in English, along with representative selections from secondary literature. We will also spend some time thinking about the nature of biblical interpretation. Instructor(s): J. Stackert Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): JWSC 20120, BIBL 31000, NEHC 30504, NEHC 20504

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, theological 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
Prerequisite(s): Knowledge of Arabic is not a prerequisite, but general knowledge about Islam or an "Introduction to Islam" course is highly recommended. Equivalent Course(s): ISLM 30030, MDVL 10030, NEHC 30030

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 "apocalypses") 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): BIBL 32500, FNDL 28202, MDVL 12500

RLST 20100. The Fetish: Theories and Methods in Religious Studies. 100 Units.
The term fetish was coined in the 18th century by Portuguese sailors to describe the amulets or charms used by the indigenous people of Guinea. It was popularized soon after as a term used to describe the endowment of material objects with special powers among traditions deemed to be primitive. It has a long subsequent history within the Philosophy of Religions, Marxism, and Psychoanalysis, but in fact mostly disappeared from the taxonomic lexicon of scholarship within the field of Religious Studies once it was deemed a "category mistake" in the 20th century. It is thus, a term that tells the story both of the construction of Comparative Religions as a European endeavor, as well as the reverberations of that story across the social sciences. In this course we will track its history from the 18th Century to the present and consider its recent redeployments and resignifications in recent theoretical texts. Readings will include texts by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Mauss, Bruno Latour, Jacques Derrida, Sarah Kofman and others. Instructor(s): Sarah Hammerschlag Terms Offered: Spring
Prerequisite(s): This course is required for 3rd year RLST majors
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
Equivalent Course(s): CRES 20111, HIST 20111, GNSE 20111

RLST 20401-20402-20403. Islamic Thought and Literature I-II-III.
This sequence meets the general education requirement in civilization studies. Taking these courses in sequence is recommended but not required.

RLST 20401. Islamic Thought and Literature I. 100 Units.
This sequence explores the thought and literature of the Islamic world from the coming of Islam in the seventh century C.E. through the development and spread of its civilization in the medieval period and into the modern world. Including historical framework to establish chronology and geography, the course focuses on key aspects of Islamic intellectual history: scripture, law, theology, philosophy, literature, mysticism, political thought, historical writing, and archaeology. In addition to lectures and secondary background readings, students read and discuss samples of key primary texts, with a view to exploring Islamic civilization in the direct voices of the people who participated in creating it. All readings are in English translation. No prior background in the subject is required. This course sequence meets the general education requirement in civilization studies.
Instructor(s): Tahera Qutbuddin Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 20601, HIST 25610, NEHC 30601, SOSC 22000, HIST 35610, ISLM 30601, NEHC 20601, CMES 30601

RLST 20402. Islamic Thought and Literature II. 100 Units.
This course covers the period from ca. 950 to 1700, surveying works of literature, theology, philosophy, sufism, politics, history, etc., written in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, as well as the art, architecture and music of the Islamicate traditions. Through primary texts, secondary sources and lectures, we will trace the cultural, social, religious, political and institutional evolution through the period of the Fatimids, the Crusades, the Mongol invasions, and the "gunpowder empires" (Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals).
Instructor(s): Franklin Lewis Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): Taking these courses in sequence is recommended but not required. This sequence meets the general education requirement in civilization studies.
Equivalent Course(s): SOSC 22100, NEHC 30602, NEHC 20602, MDVL 20602, ISLM 30602, HIST 35615, CMES 30602, HIST 25615

RLST 20403. Islamic Thought and Literature III. 100 Units.
This class explores works of Muslim intellectuals, who interpreted various aspects of Islamic philosophy, political theory and law in the modern age. We will look at diverse interpretations concerning the role of religion in a modern society, at secularized and historicized approaches to religion and at the critique of both religious establishments and nation states as articulated by Middle Eastern intellectuals. Consequently, we will contextualize concepts like "woman," "nation," "East" and "jihad" as we follow the meanings assigned to these conceptions by different intellectuals at different historical moments. The class likewise examines the ways in which Muslim reformers synthesized cultural trends to revive the Islamic faith in face of Western economic and political hegemony. Our debate will focus on the influence of the colonial settings on the formation of these new readings and on the ways in which Muslim thinkers both appropriated and critiqued Western notions of civilization and guidance. We will consider the impact of these new ideas on political theory, and in particular on the political systems which emerged in the modern Middle East. Finally, the class will scrutinize the ways in which Muslim writers manipulated new means of communication such as the print media in order to propagate their ideas regarding the nature of their state and society. Generally, we shall discuss secondary literature first and the primary sources later.
Instructor(s): Orit Bashkin Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 25616, ISLM 30603, NEHC 30603, NEHC 20603, HIST 35616, SOSC 22200

RLST 20501. Islamic History and Society I: The Rise of Islam and the Caliphate. 100 Units.
This course covers the period from ca. 600 to 1100, including the rise and spread of Islam, the Islamic empire under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, and the emergence of regional Islamic states from Afghanistan and eastern Iran to North Africa and Spain.
Instructor(s): Fred Donner Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 25704, MDVL 20501, CMES 30501, HIST 35704, NEHC 20501, NEHC 30501, ISLM 30500
RLST 21107. Readings in 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): MDVL 25400, HJD 45400, HREL 45401, JWSC 21107, NEHC 40470, ISLM 45400, FNDL 24106, RLVC 45400

RLST 21200. Greek Philosophy. 100 Units.
The Phaedrus is one of the most fascinating and compelling of Plato's Dialogues. Beginning with a playful treatment of the theme of erotic passion, it continues with a consideration of the nature of inspiration, love, and knowledge. The centerpiece is one of the most famous of the Platonic myths, the moving description of the charioteer and its allegory of the vision, fall, and incarnation of the soul.
Instructor(s): E. Asmis Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): BIBL 31200, GREK 21216, FNDL 21005, GREK 31216

RLST 21303. Christianity and Slavery in America, 1619-1865. 100 Units.
We will be examining the relationship between Christian thought and the practice of slavery as they evolved historically, especially in the context of European enslavement of peoples of African descent in the colonies of British North America and in the antebellum South. The following questions will be addressed in some form through our readings and class discussions: Why did some Christians oppose slavery at a specific time and in a particular historical context? In other words, why did slavery become a moral problem for an influential though minority segment of the United States by the early 19th century? How and why did white evangelical Christians, especially in the South, become the most prominent defenders of slavery? What were some of the consequences of debates about slavery in regard to efforts to engage broader social reform? What role did race play in the historical development of slavery? How did people of African descent shape and practice Christianity in British North America and in the Southern States of the United States?
Instructor(s): Curtis Evans Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): RAME 42901, HCHR 42901

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 34118, MDVL 24118, NEHC 24118, CLCV 24118, CLAS 34118, BIBL 31418

RLST 22010-22011. Jewish Civilization I-II.
Jewish Civilization is a two-quarter sequence that explores the development of Jewish culture and tradition from its ancient beginnings through its rabbinic and medieval transformations to its modern manifestations. Through investigation of primary texts—biblical, Talmudic, philosophical, mystical, historical, documentary, and literary—students will acquire a broad overview of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness while reflecting in greater depth on major themes, ideas, and events in Jewish history. Note: Jewish Studies revised its civilization studies courses starting in academic year 2018–19. Students who began the requirement prior to Autumn Quarter 2018, under the previous course options, may complete it with those courses that remain available, or they may combine them with the new course options. However, students must have at least one course on the ancient/medieval period (JWSC 20120-20199 or JWSC 12000 Jewish Civilization I: Ancient Beginnings to Early Medieval Period) and at least one on the modern period (JWSC 20220-20299 or JWSC 12001 Jewish Civilization II: Late Medieval to Modern Period). Students who began the requirement in Autumn Quarter 2018 or later may only use the new sequence to meet the general studies requirement in civilization studies.

RLST 22010. Jewish Civilization I: Ancient Beginnings to Early Medieval Period. 100 Units.
Jewish Civilization is a two-quarter sequence that explores the development of Jewish culture and tradition from its ancient beginnings through its rabbinic and medieval transformations to its modern manifestations. Through investigation of primary texts—biblical, Talmudic, philosophical, mystical, historical, documentary, and literary—students will acquire a broad overview of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness while reflecting in greater depth on major themes, ideas, and events in Jewish history. The Autumn course will deal with antiquity to the early medieval period. Its readings will include works from the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, the Rabbis, Yehudah Halevy, and Maimonides. All sections of each course will share a common core of readings; individual instructors will supplement with other materials. It is recommended, though not required, that students take these two courses in sequence. Students who register for the Autumn Quarter course will automatically be pre-registered for the winter segment.
Instructor(s): J. Robinson Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): JWSC 12000, MDVL 12000, NEHC 22010
RLST 22011. Jewish Civilization II: Late Medieval to Modern Period. 100 Units.
Jewish Civilization is a two-quarter sequence that explores the development of Jewish culture and tradition from its ancient beginnings through its rabbinic and medieval transformations to its modern manifestations. Through investigation of primary texts-biblical, Talmudic, philosophical, mystical, historical, documentary, and literary-students will acquire a broad overview of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness while reflecting in greater depth on major themes, ideas, and events in Jewish history. The Winter quarter will begin with the late medieval period and continue to the present. It will include discussions of mysticism, the works of Spinoza and Mendelsohn, the nineteenth-century reform, the Holocaust and its reflection in writers such as Primo Levi and Paul Celan, and literary pieces from postwar American Jewish and Israeli authors. All sections of each course will share a common core of readings; individual instructors will supplement with other materials. It is recommended, though not required, that students take these two courses in sequence. Students who register for the Autumn Quarter course will automatically be pre-registered for the winter segment.
Instructor(s): S. Hammerschlag Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 12010, NEHC 22011, JWSC 12001

RLST 21600. Early Monasticism. 100 Units.
This course examines early monasticism from its origins among the desert fathers of the Greek and Syriac East to its development in the Latin West, especially in Italy and Spain, concluding with the Carolingian reformation of monasticism in the ninth century. We will examine such themes as monastic rules, monastic hagiography, women in monasticism, ideas of virginity, and the economics of monasticism. (A)
Instructor(s): L. Pick Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 21600, HIST 11900

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 gather 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: Winter

RLST 22800. African American Religion: Themes and Issues. 100 Units.
This course explores themes and topics that have marked the study of African American religion including but not limited to enslavement and Christianization, resistance and adjustment to slavery and Jim Crow segregation, urbanization and diversification of religious communities, and the lived experience of religious believers and practitioners. This class is a broad survey of religious beliefs and practices from the 17th century to the late 20th century.
Instructor(s): Curtis Evans Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): CRES 22800, HIST 2003

RLST 23100. Introduction to Christian Thought. 100 Units.
This course is designed to give an introduction to Christian thought by means of a historical overview. It will focus on what it is that establishes thinkers as Christian thinkers, what that does to the profile of their thought, how we ought to situate them vis-a-vis established academic disciplines (theology, philosophy and beyond), and how we can best assess their overall contribution in evaluative terms (academic, ecclesial, social, foundational). The course will deliberately reach across confessional and cultural divides. The thinkers on whom we focus are Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Kierkegaard, John Henry Newman, William James, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
Instructor(s): W. Otten Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 23100

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: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SALT 23905
RLST 23505. Environmental Ethics. 100 Units.
This course examines foundational issues of environmental ethics. What kind of values (economic, aesthetic, existence) are important? What kind of value do individual biota, humans, other species, ecosystems, humans, or inorganic entities have? What is the relationship of humans to the rest of the world? What should it be? Do religious and philosophical traditions contribute to or help address environmental degradation?
Instructor(s): S. Fredericks Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ENST 23505

RLST 23810. Guilt and Forgiveness. 100 Units.
This course will consider the nature of guilt, punishment, and forgiveness.
Instructor(s): Kevin Hector Terms Offered: Spring

RLST 24110. The Ethics of War: Reading Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations. 100 Units.
This course will involve a close reading of Michael Walzer's classic text on the ethics of war and his constructive account of the just-war tradition. Among the topics to be addressed are: moral relativism, human rights, and the ethics of various cases, e.g., terrorism, interventions, war crimes, blockades, assassinations, guerrilla warfare, reprisals, pre-emptive warfare, and nuclear deterrence. Relevant now no less than when it was first published in 1977, Walzer's work raises basic questions about the rights of nations and their moral obligations to their citizens and to others during times of war.
Instructor(s): Richard B. Miller Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): FNDL 24500

RLST 24130. Pragmatism and Religious Ethics. 100 Units.
This class will examine classical theories of pragmatic ethics, the development of pragmatic ethics in the mid to late twentieth century among religious and philosophical ethicists, and recent developments in pragmatic ethics, especially in environmental ethics. Special attention will be paid to how theories of knowledge, habit and practice, and the relationship of society and ethics inform these theories of ethics.
Instructor(s): Sarah Fredericks
Note(s): Undergraduates may enroll with permission of the instructor
Equivalent Course(s): RETH 40600

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): HREL 30200, SALC 30901, SALC 20901, DVPR 30201

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): HREL 30300, SALC 30902, DVPR 30302, MDVL 24202, SALC 20902

RLST 24251. The Bhagavad Gita: Some of the Countless Readings of a World Classic. 100 Units.
Few religious classics have been as variously interpreted as the Bhagavad G#t#, which is surely among the most often-translated works in the world. A text of long-standing importance in Hindu traditions, the Bhagavad G#t# has had an especially interesting career in modernity, having been of great significance not only for M. K. Gandhi, but also for the likes of Thoreau and Eliot, not to mention the many less widely appreciated interpreters for whom the text's martial setting has been of central significance. After taking some steps to situate this great Sanskrit text in the context of its early Indian history, this course will explore a representative range of its available interpretations. Along the way, it is hoped that we will learn something not only about the Bhagavad G#t#, but also about the very ideas of interpretation and understanding.
Instructor(s): Dan Arnold Terms Offered: Spring

RLST 24505. The Dream in Modern Thought. 100 Units.
This course will address the status accorded to the dream, its position or rank relative to other mental processes, by major thinkers situated in the modern continental tradition. Key themes will include the dream as a mode of expression, the dream as an object of analysis, and the privilege of vigilance in philosophical sources such as Descartes, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Levinas. Our discussion of philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis will also consider what discourses on dreaming reveal about contemporary configurations of the religious.
Instructor(s): Ryan Coyne Terms Offered: Spring
RLST 24550. Major Trends in Islamic Mysticism. 100 Units.
This course examines Islamic mysticism, commonly known as Sufism, through an exploration of English translations of some of the greatest masterpieces of Sufi literature in Arabic and Persian. The goal is to gain first-hand knowledge of a broad spectrum of literary expressions of Islamic spirituality in their historical context, and to understand exactly what Sufis say, and how they say it. Each of the units will comprise of lectures and close readings of excerpts from the text in Arabic/ Persian and English translation.
Instructor(s): Yousef Casewit Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): ISLM 32419

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, NEHC 35004, MDVL 15004, HIJD 35004, ISLM 35004

RLST 25703. Climate Ethics. 100 Units.
Anthropogenic climate change is the largest challenge facing human civilization. Its physical and temporal scale and unprecedented complexity at minimum require extensions of existing ethical systems, if not new ethical tools. In this course we will examine how religious and philosophical ethical systems respond to the vast temporal and spatial scales of climate change. For instance, common principles of environmental ethics such as justice and responsibility are often reimagined in climate ethics even as they are central to the ethical analysis of its effects. In the course, we will take a comparative approach to environmental ethics, examining perspectives from secular Western philosophy, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), Buddhist, and Indigenous thought. We will also look at a variety of ethical methods. Throughout the course we will focus on communication about climate change as well as articulating rigorous ethical arguments about its causes and implications.
Instructor(s): Sarah Fredericks Terms Offered: Spring

RLST 25904. Life's Big Questions. 100 Units.
This course is centered around three questions all human beings share, and that animate the world's religious and intellectual traditions: For whom are we responsible? How do we use our power? and, How do we live together? The ten-week course will be divided into three-week blocks that take up sub-questions of each of these Big Questions. One class session per week will feature a 50-minute lecture from a faculty member of the Divinity School that will reflect on the week's question through their scholarship. Each lecture will be framed by the course instructor to ensure continuity and appropriate linkages and weaving from week to week. The second weekly session will be a 75-minute small group discussion, designed and facilitated by the instructor and a graduate student TA and centered around a key text (essay or book chapter) from a contemporary or historical thinker. Participants in the course will keep a weekly reflection journal, write a 5-page midterm reflection, and a final 10-12-page paper that addresses one of the Big Questions of the course using the readings they have studied and discussed. Personal reflection is required for this course-that is, the words "I" and "We" must appear in assignments, particularly in the final paper.
Instructor(s): Josh Feigelson Terms Offered: Spring

RLST 26002. Literature and Hunger. 100 Units.
This course pursues themes of hunger the consumption of food, the formation of community, and relation to the sacred, through a sequence of readings in the Western tradition. By reading classic works (The Odyssey, selections from the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures, selections from The Divine Comedy, the Letters of St. Catherine of Siena, Paradise Lost), and modern works by Kafka, Simone Weil, and Louise Gluck, we will examine how different philosophies have imagined the acceptance or rejection of love, life, and the sacred in terms of the symbolism of food. Class work will involve close analysis of literary works, even those in translation; intensive critical writing; and secondary readings in literary criticism, anthropology, theology, and psychology.
Instructor(s): Rosanna Warren Terms Offered: Autumn
Note(s): Open to grads
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 26002, SCTH 26002

RLST 26101. Buddhism. 100 Units.
This course will survey central features of the Buddhist traditions in South, Central, and East Asia, over its roughly 2500 year history. Attention will be paid to the variety of disciplinary orientations (historical, philological, anthropological, sociological, economic, archaeological, philosophical) that may be taken to illuminate various aspects of the traditions. Consideration will also be given to the concurrent rise of distinctive Buddhist responses to modernity and the modern/ academic study of Buddhism.
Instructor(s): Christian Wedemeyer Terms Offered: Winter

RLST 26670. Religious Autobiography. 100 Units.
The decision of a person to present what they take to be their selfhood has proven to be an enduring form of human articulation, and of crucial significance to modern religious expression. This course explores the phenomena of autobiography by tracing its roots in early Christianity (Paul and Augustine), followed by readings in a range of modern authors who take the classic form of the "confession" and adapt it to their particular contexts (Rousseau, Tolstoy, Douglass, Gandhi, Nelson). We'll conclude by studying the adoption of the confessional mode in the graphic novel, which introduces not only visual representations of selfhood but a pluralism of voices (Spiegelman, Satrapi).
Instructor(s): Richard Rosengarten Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): RLVC 40020
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
Equivalent Course(s): LLSO 27250

RLST 27614. Problems in the Study of Gender and Sexuality: Gender and Religion. 100 Units.
In what ways are notions of ideas about religion and the sacred gendered and what are the consequences of this for how we live our lives? This class will be an introduction to the study of the relationships between religion and gender and the way these relationships play out in specific historical situations. Attention will also be paid to the relationships between religions and sexualities. Examples will be drawn from medieval to modern periods, and our attention will primarily be on Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
Instructor(s): Kelli Gardner Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 11008, GNSE 11008

RLST 27640. Problems in the Anthropology of Religion 1. 100 Units.
A two-quarter course sequence surveying of some of the key problems in the anthropology of religion. Topics include belief, meaning and interpretation, ideology, power, embodiment, rationality, alterity, and the politics of representation.
Instructor(s): Alireza Doostdar Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): AASR 33000

RLST 27650. Anthropology of Religion. 100 Units.
How do anthropologists study religion? This course is an introduction to classic concepts that have defined the social scientific study of religion such as ritual, taboo, transcendence, embodiment, and enchantment. To grasp how fieldwork is paired with theory, we will engage ethnographic writings on Orthodox Christianity in northern Ethiopia, Afro-Caribbean Santería in Chicago, and Islamic jinn veneration in Delhi India. We will further examine various themes in the socio-cultural inquiry of contemporary religion including asceticism, sexuality, sectarianism, and political theology.
Instructor(s): A. Heo Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 23911, AASR 34411

RLST 28206. Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov. 100 Units.
We will read and interpret The Brothers Karamazov by Dostoevsky. Among major themes are the relation to God and religion to the larger society and state; the problem of evil; and the nature of sin and how it enters into religious beliefs; human "freedom," and what the word might have meant to Dostoevsky; and love.
Instructor(s): S. Meredith Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): Required of new Fundamentals majors; open to others with consent of instructor.
Note(s): Fundamentals majors get first priority
Equivalent Course(s): REES 20200, FNDL 20200

RLST 28350. Chan and Zen Buddhism. 100 Units.
Instructor(s): Brook Ziporyn Terms Offered: Autumn

RLST 28511. Star Wars and Religion. 100 Units.
This course puts religious texts in conversation with George Lucas's popular Star Wars film franchise with an eye toward understanding the power of myth in human life. In interviews, Lucas said he took bits and pieces from a variety of religious traditions to create the mythology of Star Wars. Through close readings of the films and primary texts, students will analyze these influences and evaluate how well the films hold these religious elements together. This course is not an in-depth study of any one religious tradition, but draws elements from different traditions to shed light on the portrayal of religion within Star Wars (i.e., the Force) and the metaphysical and moral themes found in the Star Wars films.
Instructor(s): R. Johnson Terms Offered: Spring
RLST 28705. Christian Iconography. 100 Units.
In Christian culture, visual images have for many centuries played a pivotal role in ritual, devotion, intellectual thought, and religious instruction. The most important aims of this course are that students understand images convey meaning in very unique ways and learn how to decode their visual messages. The study of iconography encompasses a variety of methods used to identify the subject matter of a pictorial image, describe its contents, and analyze its discursive strategies in view of its original cultural context. We will cover some of the most important themes visualized in the arts of Christianity by analyzing imagery spanning different periods, geographical regions, pictorial media, and artistic techniques. While special emphasis is placed on the intersections of art and literature, we will also examine pictorial themes that are independent of a specific textual basis. Alongside the study of Christian iconography, this course will address broader issues of visual inquiry, such as patronage, viewer response, emotions, and gender roles. In this course, students will acquire a 'visual literacy' that will enable them to explore all kinds of works of art fruitfully as primary sources in their own right.
Instructor(s): Karin Krause Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): P/Q: This course is open to all undergraduate students who are interested in the course topic. You certainly do not need to be an adherent of the Christian faith to take this course. However, a basic familiarity with some of the foundational texts of Christianity (esp. the Bible) and its main (Biblical) protagonists is not a disadvantage.
Equivalent Course(s): ARTH 28705, ARTH 38705

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: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 23906, KNOW 28900, AASR 30501

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.

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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.