

# Requirements: Religious Studies

## Humanities Division

We understand the study of religion as a crucial element in the larger study of culture and history. We consider the study of religion to be inherently interdisciplinary and a necessary component for intercultural literacy and, as such, essential to the liberal arts curriculum. Our goals include helping students to recognize and examine the important role of religion in history and the contemporary world; to explore the wide variety of religious thought and practice, past and present; to develop methods for the academic study of particular religions and religion in comparative perspective; and to develop the necessary skills to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the nature and role of religion. Our courses require no commitment to a particular faith.

Since the phenomena that we collectively call "religion" are so varied, it is appropriate that they be studied from a variety of theoretical perspectives and with a variety of methods. The diversity of areas of specialization and approaches to the study of religion among our faculty members ensures the representation of diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. Our courses investigate the place of religion in various cultures in light of social, political, historical, economic, philosophical, psychological and artistic questions. We encourage religious studies majors to take relevant courses in other departments. The religious studies department maintains close relationships with interdisciplinary programs including African diaspora studies, American studies, Asian and Middle East studies, environmental studies, international studies, and women's and gender studies.

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## The Curriculum

The curriculum mirrors the diverse areas of expertise of the faculty. We offer courses in Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, American religions, East Asian religions and South Asian religions. Religious studies majors are required to take courses in at least three of these areas. In our courses we emphasize work with primary sources, both textual and non-textual. To this end, students are encouraged to study relevant languages and to spend at least part of their junior year abroad in an area of the world relevant to their particular interests.

Our 100-level introductory courses are designed especially for students new to the study of religion. RLST 101, 102 and 103 are introductions to the discipline of religious studies. RLST 101 is a regular lecture/discussion class; RLST 102 covers the same material in the format of a seminar limited to first-year students; RLST 103, also a first-year seminar, covers equivalent material with a focus on religion, gender and sexuality. All other 100-level courses are introductions to distinct religious traditions or the religions of distinct geographic regions. Students who enroll in any one of these and wish to fulfill their humanities requirement with religious studies courses may do so by taking any other course in the department for which they are eligible.

Our 200-level courses are advanced courses in distinct religious traditions or the religions of distinct geographic regions. These courses further a student's understanding of a given religion or a given geographic area's religious life. Our 300-level courses focus on themes important to the study of religion or on influential theoretical and methodological approaches in the discipline of religious studies. Aside from those courses listing specific prerequisites, there is no required sequence in which our courses must be taken. However, we encourage those new to the study of religion to start with courses at the 100 level.

## Requirements for the Major

Students majoring in religious studies are required to take a total of at least 10 courses. The courses should include the following:

## I. Required courses for all majors

- RLST 101, 102 or 103
- At least one 200-level course
- At least one theory/methodology course at the 300-level
- RLST 490: Senior Seminar
- Any other six courses in the department

II. Of the 10 courses required for the major, three should be courses covering distinct religious traditions or religions of distinct geographic regions. These courses may be drawn from any three of the seven areas listed below. They may be taken at the 100- or 200-levels.

- Buddhism
  - RLST 160: Buddhist Thought and Practice
  - RLST 265: Zen Buddhism
  - RLST 272: Modern Buddhism
- Christianity
  - RLST 120: Faith of Christians
  - RLST 123: Medieval Christianity
  - RLST 125: New Testament
  - RLST 217: Christianity in the Global South
  - RLST 219: Christian Mysticism
  - RLST 255: Parting of the Ways
- Islam
  - RLST 140: Islam's Diverse Paths
  - RLST 285: Voices of Contemporary Islam
  - RLST 290: Seminar on Sufism
  - RLST 295: Islam in North America
- Judaism

- RLST 110: Creating Judaism
- RLST 115: The Bible and Its Interpreters
- RLST 165: Jew-ish in a Modern World
- RLST 205: Jewish Magic, Mysticism, and Kabbalah
- RLST 224: Jews and Empire
- RLST 255: Parting of the Ways
- American Religions
  - RLST 130: Religion and Society in America
  - RLST 135: African Spirituality in the Americas
  - RLST 242: African American Religions
  - RLST 252: Rastafari
  - RLST 280: Religion and Popular Music in the African Diaspora
- East Asian Religions
  - RLST 166: East Asian Religions
  - RLST 265: Zen Buddhism
- South Asian Religions
  - RLST 150: Hinduism in its Religious Context
  - RLST 160: Buddhist Thought and Practice

### Checklist for Majors

### **Senior Capstone**

The Senior Capstone in religious studies consists of two components:

- Senior paper: A 15- to 20-page paper on a religious studies related topic of the student's choosing. The paper is drafted as part of the "Senior Seminar" (taken during the fall semester of senior year) and then revised and submitted early in the spring semester. This paper forms the core of the student's presentation during the senior conference.

- Senior conference: The conference consists of panels of students who discuss one another's senior papers. All departmental faculty attend the conference, and other students and guests may be invited. All attendees have a chance to engage in discussion with students on their senior papers.

### **Senior Paper**

Each senior is required to write a 15-20 page paper on a topic of their particular interest. A draft of the senior paper will be written during the course of the fall semester in the Senior Seminar course (RLST 490). A final version of the paper will be submitted early in the spring semester. The Senior Paper should be a revised version of the essay submitted in the Senior Seminar.

The student will work in tandem with a faculty mentor, chosen because of their relevant expertise and knowledge of the topic, and the Senior Seminar professor. A student may elect, where appropriate, to have two faculty mentors for the Senior Paper. In this case, the student must decide early in the fall semester which mentor will be considered the primary mentor. The faculty mentor(s) for the Senior Paper does not have to be the student's faculty advisor. Students must have completed course work that prepares them to write on the topic they propose.

After the conclusion of the Senior Seminar in the fall semester, the mentor(s) continues to work with students on revisions, but the Senior Seminar instructor (having completed the course and having assigned a grade) does not. In the event that the Senior Seminar instructor is also a student's faculty mentor on the Senior Paper, that person will continue to serve in the role of mentor for the paper, even after the Senior Seminar has ended. In January, all faculty members will have access to the paper drafts and are invited to comment on the papers produced for the senior seminar. Students are obliged to be responsive to all feedback. In the event that students receive conflicting feedback, it will be the responsibility of the mentor to help the student integrate the feedback.

The mentor decides whether the paper passes. In the event that a student has two faculty mentors for the paper, the primary mentor decides whether the paper passes. All faculty will take their assessment of the quality of each paper into consideration when voting on who receives distinction on the capstone. Students should take into account the guidance and feedback received from the Senior Seminar instructor and from the faculty mentor(s).

All students are expected to use element(s) of theory and methodologies learned in religious studies courses to illuminate their topics. All members of the religious studies faculty will evaluate Senior Papers on the basis of the following factors:

1. the clarity of the thesis,
2. demonstration of careful research,
3. organization and cohesive argument, including polished articulation of ideas and careful attention to English grammar and style,
4. proper citation, and
5. intellectual ambition.

Throughout the process, students must consult with their faculty mentor(s). The final version of the paper will be due in early February.

### **Senior Conference**

In preparation for the Senior Conference, which is held in February, seniors will read the papers of their fellow majors and formulate questions and discussion points. The conference consists of panels of three to five students. Panelists are encouraged to work together to prepare for their panel discussions. At the conference, the panelists are expected to engage in a conversation focused, in succession, on each paper under discussion. Individual students will be given an opportunity to briefly introduce their topic. This is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of the Senior Paper, but, rather, a statement of the thesis and how the paper is either a culmination of or a contribution to the student's work in religious studies. After the panelists complete their comments, other seniors and faculty members may join the discussion.

Evaluation of a student's work in the Senior Conference is based on the following factors:

- thorough preparation for critical discussion of all the papers treated on one's panel;
- competence in answering questions about one's own work;
- ability to address relevant connections between one's own work and the work of other panelists and;
- thoughtful reflection on the papers' contributions to the study of religion.

Senior majors are required to attend the panels. Attendance is highly encouraged for majors and minors in the department. Panelists are also encouraged to invite friends and fellow students to attend the conference.

### **Evaluation**

Given the incremental nature of the Senior Capstone project, in particular the work on the Senior Paper, the departmental faculty finds it highly unlikely that a student would fail the Senior Capstone. In the unlikely event that, after the Senior Conference, the faculty determines that a student requires further work on the Capstone, the student will be provided a revise and resubmit plan by their mentor. Implementation of this plan will take place during March and April of the spring semester and will involve careful steps aimed at addressing the weaknesses of the paper. The student will then participate in an oral discussion with their mentor and another faculty member at the conclusion of the revise and resubmit period. The student will then be judged to have passed the Senior Capstone requirements.

### **Distinction**

Distinction on the Senior Capstone is awarded based on the overall quality of the Senior Paper and by thoughtful and productive engagement in the Senior Conference as judged by all members of the department faculty.

### **Honors**

Students with a minimum grade-point average of 3.33 overall and of 3.5 in religious studies courses are eligible to submit a proposal for an honors project. Honors candidates select a field of concentration entailing two courses of advanced research and writing under the supervision of one or more faculty members.

Students with an overall collegiate grade-point average of 3.25 or better and 3.50 or better in religious studies courses are eligible to submit a proposal for an honors thesis by the end of the second week of the fall Senior Seminar course. The proposal must include a thorough research plan, bibliography, a list of relevant coursework, and identify the primary sources and research methods used in the project. The religious studies faculty will read and evaluate the proposal before deciding whether a student may continue with the honors track. Should the faculty determine that a student cannot continue with the Honors track, the student will revert to the regular Senior Seminar process. Honors candidates will not write the Senior Paper, but a complete chapter of the Honors project, due in December, will substitute. Honors candidates will present this chapter in the Senior Capstone conference in February.

In the spring, honors students will enroll in RLST 498 Senior Honors and continue work on the thesis under the supervision of their faculty mentors(s). Research will culminate in a thesis of 60-100 pages (typically 2 or 3 chapters and an introduction). The finished thesis is due at the beginning of April. An outside examiner in the field of religious studies will read the thesis and will conduct an hour-long oral examination with the candidate for Honors, late in April or early in May. The outside examiner will determine whether the thesis is awarded the distinction of honors, high honors, highest honors or no honors. The criteria for evaluation is as follows:

**Highest Honors:** Student demonstrates rigorous use of primary and secondary sources, notably strong analytical and interpretative skills, and demonstrates the exemplary crafting of a coherent and compelling argument. The writing is excellent.

**High Honors:** Student makes more than competent use of primary and secondary sources, displays sound analytical and interpretative skills, and demonstrates the crafting of a coherent argument. The thesis is very well-written and of even quality.

**Honors:** Student makes competent use of primary and secondary sources, displays adequate analytical and interpretative skills and shows some evidence of a coherent argument. The thesis is well-written but of uneven quality.

**No Honors:** Student fails to use primary and secondary sources competently and does not construct and sustain a clear argument.

If you intend to propose Honors, please be in touch by the end of your junior year with both the chair and the faculty mentors(s) most likely to be overseeing your independent research.

Students wishing to pursue Honors are advised to begin research over the summer. If interviews with human subjects are required, students must obtain [IRB](#) approval prior to conducting research.

### **Requirements for the Minor**

The religious studies minor is designed to expose students in a systematic way to the study of religion, while simultaneously giving them some degree of more advanced knowledge in at least one religious tradition. A total of five courses are required for the minor in religious studies. The following are the minimum requirements:

- RLST 101, 102, 103 or one 300-level course, all of which serve to introduce students to multiple religious traditions as well as various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion
- Any other four courses in the department

There are multiple pathways to fulfilling the minor requirements.

- Students who desire to learn about a variety of religious traditions, themes and theoretical questions, can choose widely from the available course offerings.
- Students desiring to focus on a single religious tradition or geographic region, should arrange to meet with the relevant faculty to devise a course plan. Those who focus on

one particular tradition or region are qualified to claim specialization (such as a minor in Jewish studies or American religions) on resumes/curriculum vitae. In these cases, a 100-level course in a tradition or region that the student is not specializing in may serve as a substitute for the 101/102/103 or 300-level course requirement.

### **Transfer Credit Policy**

A maximum of two courses taken abroad or as transfer credit may be counted toward major requirements. Religious studies majors who wish to use these courses to satisfy requirements for the major must discuss them with their advisor and department chair before taking the course. (For information on non-departmental courses that may count toward the religious studies major, consult the department chair.)

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## Courses Religious Studies

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### **Encountering Religion in Its Global Context: An Introduction**

RLST 101 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course includes brief introductions to four or five major religious traditions while exploring concepts and categories used in the study of religion, such as sacredness, myth, ritual, religious experience and social dimensions of religion. Traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism and Native American traditions may be presented through important texts and practices. This counts toward the 100-level introduction to religious studies course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every semester.

### **First-Year Seminar: Encountering Religion**

RLST 102 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course covers the same material as RLST 101 and is open only to first-year students, giving first-years the opportunity to experience the rigorous and intimate seminar setting as they work through the topics and themes of the religious studies department's introductory course. This counts toward the 100-level introduction to religious studies course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Encountering Religion: Gender and Sexuality

RLST 103 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course presents an introduction to the study of religion similar to RLST 101 but uses the lens of gender and sexuality as a category of analysis. Students examine constructions of the body, sexuality/celebrity, control and agency of marginalized persons, issues of fertility and purity, and gender performativity. A variety of religious traditions are explored, as well as gender and religious studies theorists. Students learn how to read theory and write a religious studies term paper. This counts toward the 100-level introduction to religious studies course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Encountering Religion: Race, Ethnicity and Culture

RLST 104 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course offers an introduction to the academic study of religion, focusing on race and ethnicity as categories of analysis. Students examine the emergence and performance of racial and ethnic categories and their relationship to religious phenomena in various historical contexts and through the lenses of diverse disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities. The course explores the genealogies and trajectories of race thinking in our contemporary society along with test cases from various religious traditions. Current debates among various critical approaches and methods of the academic study of religion are also part of this course. This counts toward the 100-level introduction to religious studies requirement for the major. No prerequisite.

## Creating Judaism

RLST 110 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course introduces the process by which Judaism became a religious tradition, particularly in the late ancient and medieval world. This period marked the rise of rabbis as an authoritative source of Jewish knowledge, tasked with updating biblical laws for their contemporary communities after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. This course explains how rabbis created the major features of present-day Judaism — holidays, kosher and Sabbath laws, gender roles, charity/tzedakah, liturgy, and Jewish identity — and created their own power and authority at the same time. Attention is paid to Jewish debates, Jewish-Christian discourses, Jews as post-colonial subjects within historically contextual empires, and the ways ordinary Jews navigated rabbinic and non-Jewish power. By the end of this course, students have a sense of how "traditional Judaism" was created. No prior knowledge of Hebrew or Judaism is necessary. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Judaism. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## The Bible and Its Interpreters: Context and Reception of the Tanakh/Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

RLST 115 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course is an introduction to the context and reception of the books that make up the core of all Bible canons. We examine the Bible's textual formation and historical context and the role memory played in the compilation and editing of its final form. Several key texts are traced in their reception to Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources, paying special attention to the ancient scribal process of "rewriting the Bible." We analyze techniques for textual interpretation, study how interpretive communities change over time and examine the imaginal world of biblical stories. Open to students of all levels and recommended for students passionate about literature. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Judaism. No prerequisite. Offered every one to two years.

## Faith of Christians

RLST 120 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores the rich history and diverse traditions that are part of the Christian heritage. Close to 2 billion people today call themselves Christians. Who is a Christian? What are some of the differences among their traditions? How do Christians define — and how have

they defined — the identity of Jesus? Why do Christians have different canons for their sacred scriptures? What is salvation, and how is it achieved? Where is Christianity growing and decreasing in the world today? What attitudes have Christians shown toward gender, wealth, poverty, science, art and other issues? Over a span of 2,000 years, Christians in different parts of the globe have answered these questions in an amazing variety of ways. It is not an exaggeration to speak about Christianities or the faiths of Christians, considering the ever-changing networks of movements, beliefs, practices and forms of identification that we can appreciate as part of the long trajectories of the world Christian movement. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Christianity. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## New Testament: Formation, Reception and Debates

RLST 125 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course is an introduction to the literature of the New Testament. We engage the social, political and religious contexts of various texts from the first and second centuries of the Common Era. We reflect on issues such as the material culture of the ancient world; the cultural and political background of early Christian literature; the role of women in the Jesus movement; competing forms of Christianity in the ancient world; the relation between Christian movements and the Roman Empire; the interactions between different trends in Judaism and the development of different Christian trajectories; and the process of biblical canon formation. We also engage different methodologies currently practiced in biblical exegesis, ranging from form criticism and redaction criticism to historical criticism and literary criticism. Special attention is devoted to the reception history of the New Testament in pre-modern and modern contexts through a variety of media (literary sources, material culture, art, cinema and others) and geographical settings. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Christianity. Offered every two years.

## Religion and Society in America (U.S.)

RLST 130 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores the religious history of the United States, with an emphasis on the relationship between religious beliefs/values and broader social and political processes. We first examine the attempt of European immigrants to establish church-state compacts in New

England and Virginia, while the middle colonies adopted a more pluralistic approach. Next, we survey the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War, looking at the separation of church and state, the growth of religious pluralism and the continued existence of the "Peculiar Institution." We then look at how various social forces shaped religion in the United States from the Civil War to World War II: immigration: urbanization: prejudice and the Social Gospel; expansionism and missions; and modernism and fundamentalism. Finally, we examine the shaping of the American religious landscape from World War II to the present through such forces as religious revitalization, activism for personal and civil rights, new waves of immigration and new communication media. This counts toward the religions of distinct geographic regions requirement as American. No prerequisite. Offered every other fall.

## African Spirituality in the Americas

RLST 135 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores the contours of the religious expressions of the African diaspora in the Americas. It surveys various Orisha traditions in Cuba, Brazil, the United States and Trinidad and Tobago; Regla de Palo and Abakua in Cuba; Kumina in Jamaica; Vodou in Haiti and the United States; Afro-Christian traditions in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana; and Rastafari in Jamaica and beyond. The course pays close attention to the social history of these traditions, their understanding of the universe, their social structure and their rituals and ceremonies. This course provides students with an understanding of the formation and history, major beliefs and ceremonies, leadership and community structure, and social and cultural significance of these religious traditions. This counts toward the religions of distinct geographic regions requirement as American. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Islam's Diverse Paths: An Introduction to the Islamic Tradition

RLST 140 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course serves as an introduction to the religion of Islam, a diverse tradition that includes more than a billion adherents and is a dominant cultural element in a geographical region that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. This course focuses primarily on the development of Islam and Islamic institutions from the time of the Prophet Muhammad through the emergence of the Sufi tradition as a primary expression of Muslim piety in the late medieval period. Special

attention is given to the rise and development of Sunni, Shi'i and Sufi pieties as distinctive responses to the event of the Qur'anic revelation throughout the history of Islam. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Islam. No prerequisite. Offered every fall.

## Trials, Debates and Controversies

RLST 141 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course aims at an in-depth exploration of controversial issues that marked turning points in Western religious history — issues that resulted in trials and/or significant national debates. Each offering of the course engages some combination of the following: the trial of Galileo, the English Reformation, the trial of Anne Hutchinson in Puritan New England, the abolition debate leading up to the American Civil War, and contemporary controversies over abortion and same-sex marriage. (Other trials, debates or controversies may be introduced from time to time.) The course is built upon the pedagogical approach called "Reacting to the Past," developed by Barnard College history professor Mark Carnes. Students separate into at least two competing factions as well as a group of indeterminates (or persuadables). Each student is assigned a role based on a historical person or a composite of ideas that informed the particular issue. Students assume, research and re-enact the roles of the various participants in these controversies. The goal is to persuade others, especially the indeterminates, to vote for the outcome that one's role specifies. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Hinduism in its Religious Context: An Introduction to South Asian Religions

RLST 150 CREDITS: 0.5/4

The South Asian subcontinent has been the home of a fascinating array of religions and religious movements. Focusing on Hinduism, this course examines the development of religious practice in South Asia and the interaction of competing religious ideas over time. The course may include discussions of Indus Valley religion; Vedic Brahmanism; Jainism and Buddhism; the Upanishads; classical Hinduism; Bhakti; South Asian Islam; modern Hinduism; and Dalit religion. This counts toward the religions of distinct geographic regions requirement as South Asian. No prerequisite.

## Buddhist Thought and Practice

RLST 160 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Buddhism has been one of the major connective links among the varied cultures of South, Southeast and East Asia for over two millennia, and over the past 100 years it has established a presence throughout the world. This course surveys the ideas and practices of Buddhism with a focus on Buddhist ideas as they developed in South Asia within the first millennium of Buddhist history. Readings include ancient Buddhist texts, contemporary commentaries and scholarship, and a contemporary memoir. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Buddhism. No prerequisite. Offered every fall.

## Jew-ish in a Modern World

RLST 165 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course introduces the changes in Judaism and Jewish life wrought by the advent of modernity and the Jewish Enlightenment (the Haskalah). We first discuss developments in modern Jewish thought and the ways Jewish movements (such as Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructing and Renewal Judaism) interacted with the classical Jewish tradition. We also examine the tensions and challenges to Judaism as a normative category in modernity, including intermarriage, conversion, the South American/African/Chinese Jewish diaspora, “cultural” Jews, Chismukkah, the formation of the state of Israel and secularism. Throughout the semester, we ask: What makes someone a Jew? What are the relationships between power, tradition and non-Jewish culture that shape modern Jewish practice? Will Judaism survive modernity? This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Judaism. No prerequisite. Offered every one to two years.

## East Asian Religions

RLST 166 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course surveys the religions of East Asia, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Christianity and the shamanic practices of China, Korea and Japan. We read primary literature in its conceptual and historical contexts and study major themes that cross national and religious boundaries, such as gender, space and landscapes, ritual and political power. This

counts toward the religions of distinct geographic regions requirement as East Asian. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Jewish Magic, Mysticism and Kabbalah

RLST 205 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Jews from antiquity to modernity have sought to control and defend themselves against unseen forces teeming around them. Whether through the crafting of amulets and spells, mystical incantations to ascend to heaven or bind angels to their will, or powerful knowledge of divination and talismans, Jews have dabbled in the enchanted as a defense against the darkness in their world. This course examines the Jewish magical tradition from antiquity through the Middle Ages and investigates how it survived and underwent transformation in the modern world. We examine different Jewish definitions of magic and ritual power to analyze the occasions when such practices were deemed acceptable or wholly outside normative Jewish practice. This course interrogates conceptions of mysticism and magic, and their relationship with “religion” and “philosophy”; contextualizes Jewish magical practices alongside their neighbors; and concludes by examining the reception of Jewish mysticism into the modern West. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Judaism. Permission of instructor required. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Christianity in the Global South

RLST 217 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores the political, social, cultural and demographic shifts that make the Global South (Africa, Latin America and Asia) a key center of the world Christian movement. The course engages historical and regional surveys by examining test cases with an interdisciplinary outlook, emphasizing the richness and diversity of what we can call "World Christianities." The students gain a sense of Christianity as a cluster of polycentric and culturally diverse traditions and of the challenges that Christians in the Global South face in the contemporary world. The advanced course devotes special attention to the emergence of new Christian movements, the development of liberation theologies, colonial and postcolonial struggles, and the complex processes of identity formation of Christians in the Global South. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Christianity. No prerequisite.

## Christian Mysticism

RLST 219 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores the evolution and development of mystical traditions in Christianity from its early context and origins to its global presence today. We engage the Greco-Roman philosophical background of ancient Christian mysticism and the development of monasticism, as well as popular and ecstatic mystical practices across different Christian traditions and denominations. As part of our discussion we problematize the term "mysticism" and trace its linguistic and philosophical development through the 19th and 20th centuries. We give special attention to these questions (and others that emerge during the term): Is mysticism a solitary or a communal experience? What types of experiences are privileged when we explore "classical" examples of mysticism? What do different interpretations of embodied expressions of mysticism (such as copious weeping, bleeding or fasting) tell us about their social contexts? How does mysticism engage the entanglements between race, gender, sexuality, health, class and ecology in different contexts? What does mysticism look like today? This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Christianity. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Yearning for Zion: Hopes and Realities

RLST 222 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course offers an examination of some aspects of the vast and complex Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism. Encounters between Jews, Palestinians and Arabs serve as a thematic current throughout our study. Resources include primary and secondary sources, poetry, fiction, photographs, film and music. An array of voices from the 19th and early 20th centuries serve to demonstrate the discontent and alienation that led to the development of Zionism in Europe. We then consider Jewish writers who expressed caution and concern, anticipating barriers to peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs even decades before the dream of a Jewish state became reality in 1948. Today, Jews and Palestinians continue to grapple with many unresolved issues, and we turn our attention to their voices in the last five weeks of the semester. This is an elective course for the major. Permission of instructor required. No prerequisite.

## Jews and Empire

RLST 225 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Judaism emerged as a distinct religious tradition under the shadow of Empire. The small province of Judaea was passed among conquerors — first the Babylonians, then Persians, Greeks and, finally, Romans. The Jews who dwelled therein had to adapt to each new set of imperial constraints. This course surveys the history of ancient Judaism from 586 B.C.E. until the advent of Islam in the 7th century C.E. We read ancient Jewish novels, Dead Sea Scrolls, Midrashic Bible interpretation, and rabbinic teachings from the Mishnah and Talmuds in order to appreciate the ways Jews resisted and accommodated Empire and assess the legacy of what endured to shape modern Jewish practice. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Judaism. Permission of instructor required. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Caribbean Religions

RLST 242 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course familiarizes students with the diverse histories of religious traditions in the greater Caribbean. This class focuses on the diversity and complexity of religious life, particularly what Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz called transculturation, the unequal cultural exchanges, interactions, and combinations between different groups in a society. Ortiz exemplified this with the Cuban dish *ajjaco*, a stew that brings together African, European, indigenous American, and Asian ingredients. With this in mind, we focus specifically on Afro-Atlantic, European, Indigenous, and Asian American traditions in the Caribbean and ways in which their practitioners have adapted to the often times violent circumstances of European colonialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the indentured labor scheme, and their aftermaths. Examples may include *Santería* or *Lucumí*, Hinduism, Vodou, popular forms of Christianity, and *Palo Monte*, among other religions. We study the ways in which peoples from all over the world came or were forced to come to the Caribbean and had to make new lives in new places with one another and the cultural and material resources they had available to them. The course explores themes such as slavery, colonialism, and resistance, diversity, racialization, and religious racism, race and policing, authority and popular culture, religious freedom and the law, and

migration and diaspora. This course counts toward the religious geographic region requirement for the major as American religions. No prerequisite.

## Zombie Religion

RLST 247 CREDITS: 0.5/4

The zombies, ghosts, and ghouls that go bump in the night have still living human histories behind them. Taking examples primarily from the religious history of the Americas, this course examines the diversity and complexity of narratives and rituals surrounding spirits and dead and not-quite-dead bodies and their intimate entanglements with histories of social inequality. The course tracks the complex interrelations, influences, and commentaries between narratives of unquiet spirits, animalistic transformations, and living-dead bodies and the histories of slavery, colonization, and economic exploitation. This course introduces students to a variety of grass roots religious traditions of the African and Asian diasporas in the Caribbean such as Vodou, Palo Monte, and Hinduism, and the politics of their representations in popular media around the world. We analyze such traditions, their stories and their related practices through the approaches of history, anthropology, film and literature studies. This allows us to raise questions about the ways in which histories of violent exploitation still haunt the present and why and how monsters have been so good form humans to think with. This course counts toward the religious geographic region requirement for the major as American religions. No prerequisite.

## Rastafari: Movement of the Jah People

RLST 252 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Emerging from an alienated and marginalized people trapped in the underside of Jamaica's colonial society, the early Rastas drew inspiration from the crowning of Haile Selassie I to sever cultural and psychological ties to the British colonial society that for centuries had disparaged African traditions and sought to inculcate European mores in Jamaicans of African descent. Furthermore, the early Rastas made the newly crowned potentate the symbol of their positive affirmation of Africa as their spiritual and cultural heritage. From its humble beginnings, the Rastafari movement has cemented itself in the religious and cultural life of Jamaica and has extended its influence around the world, garnering adherents in most major cities and in many outposts around the world. This course exposes students to the identity creation of Rastafari via

the espousal of a particular view of the world and the fashioning of a distinctive lifestyle. It also explores the internal dynamics of the movement, its spread to disparate parts of the world, and its influence on cultural expressions in the Caribbean and beyond. This advanced course emphasizes close reading, analytical writing and guided discussion. We make use of videos (video clips) and reggae music to elucidate aspects of the topic. This counts toward the religions of distinct geographic regions requirement as American. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Parting of the Ways: The Formation of Judaism and Christianity

RLST 255 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course examines the formation of Judaism and Christianity in the ancient Mediterranean, focusing on their shared developments, tensions and relationships. What aspects of their religious worlds did Jews and Christians share? What were the continuities and disruptions on their stances on issues such as communal authority, scriptural interpretation, ritual action and tolerance? How did they confront social issues like gender, ethnicity, legal power and poverty? We explore these and other questions by focusing on a variety of approaches, including from “lived religion,” material culture and contemporary readings of critical theory. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Christianity or Judaism.. No prerequisite. Offered every two to three years.

## Zen Buddhism

RLST 265 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This advanced course covers the central ideas and practices of Zen Buddhism in China, where it originated and is called Chan; Japan, where it has influenced and been influenced by many aspects of Japanese culture and from where it was exported to the West; and the United States. Readings include primary texts, secondary studies and a memoir. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Buddhism or the religions of distinct geographic regions as East Asia. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Modern Buddhism

RLST 272 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course explores key Buddhist people, concepts and movements around the world from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Topics of study may include: how Buddhism in traditionally Buddhist cultures has been shaped by modern political and social forces; how colonialism and its aftermath have influenced Buddhist institutions and practices; the application of Buddhist ideas to theories of race, gender and sexuality; the intersections of Buddhist practices and concepts (particularly meditative practices) with scientific and psychological discourses; and Engaged Buddhism movements. Our focus is on primary texts, supplemented by secondary readings. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Buddhism. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Religion and Popular Music in the African Diaspora

RLST 280 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Religious spaces, ideas and practices have exerted a formative influence on the cultures of the people of African descent in the Americas. Nowhere is this more evident than in the musical traditions of the African diaspora. This course examines the relationship between African diaspora religious expressions and popular music in the United States and the Caribbean. It focuses primarily on the African American (U.S.) musical traditions, rara from Haiti, calypso from Trinidad and Tobago, and reggae from Jamaica. Special attention is given to the religious roots of these musical expressions and their social functions in shaping identity and framing religious, cultural and political discourses. Readings, videos/DVDs and CDs, along with presentations and discussions assist us in the exploration of the various facets of our topic. This counts toward The religions of a distinct geographic region as American. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Voices of Contemporary Islam

RLST 285 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This advanced course explores some of the crucial issues and debates in the contemporary Muslim world. Issues to be examined include the compatibility of Islam with democracy, the connections between Islam and political violence, the role of Wahhabism and Salafis in the construction of contemporary Islamic movements, feminist movements within Islam, LGBTQ issues in the Islamic world, Islam and pluralism, and Sufism in the contemporary context. The

course focuses on primary sources, including writings by a diverse array of modern and contemporary Muslim authors like Khaled Abou el Fadl, Amina Wadud, Usama bin Laden and Cemalnur Sargut. This is an intensive seminar course that fulfills the advanced seminar requirement for the Islamic Civilization and Cultures concentration and is especially suitable for upper class students in AMES and international studies wishing deeper insight into the Islamic world. Some background in the study of Islam or Islamic history is recommended. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Islamic. No prerequisite.

## Seminar of Sufism

RLST 290 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This advanced course examines some of the important ideas, personalities and institutions associated with Islamic mysticism. Students read and discuss important primary and secondary sources on such topics as the development and organizations of Sufi tariqahs, mystical poetry, the nature of the Sufi path and Sufi psychology. A crucial aspect of the course is an examination of the role of the veneration of "holy persons" in Islamic piety. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Islamic.. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Islam in North America

RLST 295 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This advanced course examines Islam in contemporary North America and Canada. It explores such topics as the religious diversity of the Muslim community; the relevance and practice of Islamic law in a secular society; the problem of Islamophobia; and issues of race, ethnicity and gender among North American Muslims. This counts toward the religious traditions requirement as Islamic. No prerequisite.

## God's Money: Charity, Philanthropy and the Poor

RLST 312 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course examines the history of charitable aid and the theoretical positions informing the politics of aid. Recognizing the discursive properties of poverty as a category, we trace the identification of "the poor" along with systems of charitable aid through four periods of history, emphasizing the role religion played in the development of ideas and institutions. We study the

Hebrew Bible's justice traditions, the emergence of "the poor" as a distinct social category in the late Roman Empire, the charity revolution in the Medieval period, and the institutionalization of aid and philanthropy in recent American history — analyzing the ways people with power talk about the poor. With careful attention to artistic and textual primary sources, students consider the role politics and religion play in who counts as "the poor." This counts toward a theory/methodology course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two to three years.

## Meanings of Death

RLST 330 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This seminar explores the symbols, interpretations and practices centering on death in diverse religious traditions, experiences, historical periods and cultures. We engage religious texts from various traditions, art, literature and memoirs. We also explore various approximations to the study of death and dying, including ethnographic, psychological, philosophical and anthropological studies. As part of our inquiry, we pay special attention to various social issues ranging from the memorialization of the transatlantic slave trade, death and self-formation, illness and writing, and contemporary ecological threats. This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Religion and Violence in the Modern World

RLST 335 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course examines questions of the role of religion as an authorizing discourse for violence and the place of modernizing projects in delineating religion as a sphere of life and intensifying the possibilities for violent conduct. We discuss theories of violence and its haunting aftereffects. We explore the place of religious traditions in armed resistance to colonization and issues surrounding the ethics of war. We look at the phenomenon of religious nationalism and its influence on state violence and the repression of minoritized communities. We examine the relationship between stories of ghosts, war, and capitalism. Throughout the semester, we read and discuss texts on non-violent anti-colonial movements and Hindu nationalism in India, Buddhist nationalism and war in Sri Lanka, the afterlives of war in Vietnam, slavery and resistance to colonization in the Caribbean, Christian white supremacy in the US, and more.

This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every other fall.

## Religion for Robots: Cyborgs, Sci-Fi and Posthumanism

RLST 345 CREDITS: 0.5/4

Most recognized religions originated millennia before human discovery of electricity, let alone computer technology, and many predate printing, photography, radio and even writing. They also fundamentally center humans as the primary subject of concern. This course imagines how a redefinition of humanity's place in the world by both the technological and the biological continuum upsets or reframes religion as a category. We ask: What does it mean to be human? How have various changes in technology and media affected the practices and meanings of religion? What role would religion play in a posthuman present/future? The course reads recent work in post/transhumanist theory along with science fiction in order to interrogate the categories of religion and humanness. This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

## Religion and Nature

RLST 350 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This seminar examines various religious perspectives on the meaning and value of the natural world and the relationship of human beings to nature in different time periods and traditions. We look at different trends in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Indigenous religions. Special attention is given to recent debates on religion and anthropocentrism, intellectual trajectories in ecocriticism, environmental ethics, animal studies, the Anthropocene, the contacts between liberation theology and ecology, and decolonial ways of knowing. This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. Prerequisite: any 100- or 200-level course in religious studies or permission of instructor. Offered every three years.

## Religious Social Imagination and Activism

RLST 360 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course considers the passionate thinking, imagining, and social organizing of religious social visionaries. Religious social visionaries are those who call upon the ideas, texts,

practices, communities, interpretive tools, and powers of their religious traditions to help them imagine society differently and engage in organizing to change society. Students read writings of and about religious visionaries and activists mainly from Buddhist, indigenous Chinese, Christian, and Native American textual, communal and political traditions. We ask: What imaginative ideals guide these religious dreamers and activists? What tools from their traditions do their religious imaginations draw upon? How do their social contexts shape their interpretive approaches to their traditions? And how do they organize their communities to work together toward their goals? We also consider case studies of social reactionaries, or those who seek to retrench an imagined lost ideal society, as well as anti-religious social visionaries, those whose dreams of a new society require leaving religion behind. This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. No prerequisites.

## Approaches to the Study of Religion

RLST 390 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course acquaints students with major theoretical approaches to the academic study of religion. The course covers phenomenological, psychoanalytical, sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. Authors to be discussed include Frazer, Marx, Freud, Weber, Durkheim, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, Geertz, Turner and Orsi. This counts as a theory/methodology course for the major. This course also fulfills the methods requirement for international studies. No prerequisite.

## Senior Seminar

RLST 490 CREDITS: 0.5/4

This course is designed as a capstone experience in religious studies for majors in the department. Themes vary according to the instructor. Past themes have included religious autobiography, religion and cinema, and new religious movements. Religious studies minors are encouraged to enroll, provided there is space. This is a required course for all senior majors. No prerequisites. Majors only. Senior Standing. Offered every fall.

## Individual Study

RLST 493 CREDITS: 0.25-0.5/2-4

The department reserves individual studies to highly motivated students who are judged responsible and capable enough to work independently. Such courses might entail original research, but usually they are reading-oriented, allowing students to explore in depth topics that interest them or that supplement aspects of the major. Students may pursue individual study only if they have taken all the courses offered by the department in that particular area of the curriculum. An individual study course cannot duplicate a course or topic being concurrently offered. Exceptions to this rule are at the discretion of the instructor and department chair. Students must secure the agreement of an instructor to provide guidance and supervision of the course. The instructor and student agree on the nature of the work expected (e.g., several short papers, one long paper, an in-depth project, a public presentation, a lengthy general outline and annotated bibliography). The level should be advanced, with work on a par with a 300-level course. The student and instructor should meet on a regular basis, with the schedule to be determined by the instructor in consultation with the student. Individual studies may be taken for 0.25 or 0.5 units, at the discretion of the instructor. A maximum of 0.5 units of IS may count toward major or minor requirements in the department. A student is permitted to take only 0.5 units of IS in the department (one 0.5-unit course or two 0.25-unit courses). A student must present a petition with compelling reasons in order to obtain special permission to take an additional IS course. Because students must enroll for individual studies by the end of the seventh class day of each semester, they should begin discussion of the proposed individual study by the semester before, so that there is time to devise the proposal and seek departmental approval. Prerequisite: GPA of at least 3.0. Exceptions (e.g., languages not taught at Kenyon are granted at the discretion of the instructor, with the approval of the department chair.)

## Senior Honors

**RLST 498 CREDITS: 0.5/4**

Students approved for departmental honors take this course spring of the senior year. See Course Catalog for more information.