

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

FACULTY:

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Religious Studies is the academic study of religion through multiple modes of critical inquiry. It does not endorse a particular creed, tradition, or religious position; rather, it creates a context for collaborative exploration of academic and personal questions about religion, ethics and society. The department provides a broad, yet nuanced, understanding of the place of religion in human experience and practice. While for many students the study of religion involves a personal journey, Religious Studies cultivates an analytical stance that enables students to encounter global religious complexity fairly and equitably.

Major in Religious Studies

Consists of ten courses:

- Three courses in Area I
- Three courses in Area II
- One elective Religious Studies course
- Junior Independent Study: RELS 40100
- Senior Independent Study: RELS 45100
- Senior Independent Study: RELS 45200

Minor in Religious Studies

Consists of six courses:

- Two courses in Area I
- Two courses in Area II
- Two elective Religious Studies courses

Special Notes

- No more than two 100-level courses may count toward the major or minor.
- Only grades of C- or better are accepted for the major or minor.

HEBREW LANGUAGE COURSES

Students may take one or both semesters of Hebrew, offered through the Religious Studies Department, to fulfill the College's foreign language requirement. Those with prior Hebrew who wish to continue it at the College must meet with the instructor to determine proper placement, which may require a placement test. Interested students should contact the Religious Studies Department.

HEBR 10100. HEBREW I

An introduction to understanding, reading, writing, and speaking modern Hebrew. Students learn the alphabet, acquire basic grammar essential for all forms of Hebrew, practice conversation, and read and write short passages. Video and audio materials all feature native speakers. While the emphasis is on acquiring the lived language of contemporary Israel, students are also introduced to the Hebrew language and Jewish civilization as it has evolved over three millennia through level appropriate words and phrases from Biblical and rabbinic texts. Students should understand that, while this class emphasizes the lived language of contemporary Israel, at this most basic level the reading, writing, and grammar skills are equally essential for learning Biblical Hebrew. Four hours per week. *Every third year. Fall.*

HEBR 10200. HEBREW II

Continuation of Hebrew 10100. Four hours per week. Prerequisite: successful completion of HEBR 10100 or equivalent placement test. *Every third year. Spring.*

RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSES

Area I: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND HISTORIES

RELS 11000. Comparative Religious Traditions: East and West

An introduction to studying religion and religions in a modern global perspective, through comparative examination in historical context of selected examples of practice and belief, and the place of religious traditions in cultures, historically and in the modern world. [C or R, AH]

RELS 11001. Comparative Religious Traditions: Near East

An introduction to studying religion and religions through comparative and historical examination of selected traditions (such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Manicheism, and Bahaimism) and their interactions in the broader cultures of the Near East. [C or R, AH]

RELS 11002. Comparative Religious Traditions: South Asia (South Asian Studies)

An introduction to studying religion and religions through comparative and historical examination of selected traditions (such as Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism) and their interactions in the broader cultures of South Asia. [C or R, AH]

RELS 11003. Comparative Religious Traditions: East Asia (East Asian Studies)

An introduction to studying religion and religions through comparative and historical examination of selected traditions (such as Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Shinto, and popular religions) and their interactions in the broader cultures of East Asia. [C or R, AH]

RELS 12000. INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL STUDIES: INTERPRETATION AND CULTURE (Classical Studies)

Introduces the examination of basic issues of reading the Bible in an academic setting. Special attention will be given to the biblical texts as resources for understanding political, social, and religious discourses in the ancient world. The student will encounter introductions to historical, literary and feminist methodologies. [C, R, AH]

RELS 13000. AMERICAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

An examination of the tension between religious power and religious pluralism in American history. *Fall and Spring.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 21600. CHINESE RELIGIONS (Chinese, East Asian Studies)

This course primarily examines Chinese “popular religions,” and the three formalized traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, as practiced both historically and in contemporary life in China, Taiwan, and Chinese Diaspora communities in Asia and the West. This course also examines the presence of other non-indigenous Chinese religions (e.g., Islam and Christianity) in China. *Annually.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 21700. AFRICAN RELIGIONS

This course explores African religious thought and practice. While the focus is on traditional African religions, it also investigates the impact of African thought and culture on Christianity and Islam on the African continent. The course includes the study of the role of religion in contemporary African culture and politics. *Alternate years.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 21800. HINDUISM (South Asian Studies)

Hindu concepts and practices as reflected in texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad-Gita and in religious practice in Indian cultures through the centuries, with attention to sects and modern reform movements. *Alternate years.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 22000. BUDDHISM (East Asian Studies, South Asian Studies)

Buddhist concepts and practices, including karma, rebirth, and devotion, as found in religious writings and as practiced through history, across Asian cultures. *Alternate years.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 22200. ISLAM IN ITS VARIATIONS

This course provides a critical study of the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, including questions about the origins of Islam and the impact of medieval developments on modern lived Islam. Course material on modern Muslim communities will focus on women’s and gender issues, the politics of “Islamic law,” reform movements, religious minorities and popular practice. *Alternate years.* [C, R, AH]

RELS 22400. HEBREW PROPHECY AS RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION (Classical Studies)

An exploration into the historical, political, and religious traditions of the Hebrew prophets within both Jewish and Christian scholarship. The prophetic books of the canon will be examined from historical, literary and feminist viewpoints. *Prerequisite: RELS 12000 or permission of the instructor. Alternate years. [R, AH]*

RELS 22500. THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS (Classical Studies)

An examination of the views, problems, and hypotheses about the identities of Jesus in the first few centuries C.E. Historical issues and religious-cultural implications of the “afterlife” of Jesus will be investigated. Attention will be given to Gnostic and Rabbinic references to Jesus. The course encourages students to develop a critical awareness about the complexities involved when we talk about Jesus in today’s world. *Prerequisite: RELS 12000 or permission of instructor. Alternate years. [W, C, R, AH]*

RELS 23000. THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF MAHATMA GANDHI (South Asian Studies)

A study of the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence as reflected in his ideas about religion, politics, economics, social work, etc., in comparison with such movements as Sarvodaya, Civil Rights, Liberation Theology, and the Women’s Movement. Also includes discussion of contemporary Gandhians and their application of Gandhian thought to their personal lives and social movements. *Prerequisite: RELS 10000 or 11000 or permission of the instructor. Alternate years. [Wt, C]*

RELS 23300. JUDAISM

Presents the Jewish religious tradition and its historical evolution, its sacred texts, practices and beliefs, and modern movements within Judaism, with particular attention to central concepts of covenant, divine authority, and the interdependence of religion and people hood. *Alternate years. [C, R, AH]*

RELS 23900. GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

Focuses on the history, theology and practice of Christianity as an international religion, especially the global zones of Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. *Alternate years. [R]*

RELS 24700. NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIONS AND CULTURES

A study of tradition and change within the historical and modern religions of various regional Native American tribal groups, including Pan-Indian activism and revitalization. *Alternate years. [C, R, AH]*

RELS 25200. THIRD WORLD FEMINIST THEOLOGY (Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)

To be human is to think about questions of meaning, transcendence, purpose and relationship. This course on Third World Feminist Theology will explore ways that women of Asian heritage are asking these questions. The course will begin with an experience of dislocation through an immersion experience in Thailand. This will provide the students with a taste of the context and experience from which Asian and Asian-American feminist theology emerges. Students’ direct engagement with the lived realities of several Thai communities forms the core of a course that will use a case-study approach. The second part of the course will take place at The College of Wooster during the regular semester. We will use the lens of sacred writing, theological discussion, and the immersion experience to better comprehend and appreciate the voice and perspectives that Asian and Asian-American feminists bring to the larger liberation conversation.

RELS 25400. THE REFORMATION: PAST AND PRESENT TRADITIONS

A study of the theological, cultural, and political issues that prompted a variety of 16th Century Protestant movements. The course connects these new traditions to their modern-day instantiations around the globe. *Alternate years. [R]*

RELS 26100. BLACK RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA (Africana Studies)

An interdisciplinary study of Black religious experience, institutions, leadership, thought, and social movements in American society, with emphasis on the work of King, Malcolm X, and the Womanist tradition. *Alternate years. [C, R]*

RELS 26700-26736. ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND HISTORIES (some sections cross-listed with: Classical Studies, South Asian Studies, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)

An in-depth study of central issues in the history of religious traditions, such as Global Catholicism in America, Asian Religions in America, Modern Jewish Identities. *[R]*

Area II: ISSUES AND THEORIES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

RELS 10000. RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND ACTION

Approaches to selected religious ideas, themes, and problems in the thought of diverse traditions, religious issues, or major thinkers of the past and the present. *Annually. Fall and Spring. [C, R, AH]*

RELS 20600. SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

An analysis of the nature of religion, religious movements and institutions, belief and ethics in religion today from the dual perspectives of sociology and religious studies. A focus on the interaction of religion, politics, and culture. *Alternate years. [R]*

RELS 20700. RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

This course explores the relationship between religious worldviews, narratives and stories and the human interaction with the natural world. It involves cross-cultural comparison of the world's major religious traditions. Included is a discussion of contemporary environmental problems and the role religion can play in creating a sustainable environmental future. *[C, R, AH]*

RELS 21900. ETHICS IN A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

A comparison of the ethical insights of a variety of Eastern and Western religious traditions as they relate to current social problems, such as war and peace, social justice, death and dying, and bioethics. *Alternate years. [C, R]*

PHIL 22100. PHILOSOPHY AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

In one part of this course we will look at traditional issues in the philosophy of religion, the nature of religious experience, classical proofs for the existence of God and the problem of evil. In the second part of the course we will focus on issues in religious language, seeing God, the place of ceremony and liturgy in religious life and religious pluralism. *Alternate years. [R, AH]*

RELS 22900. WOMEN AND RELIGION (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)

An investigation into the roles of women as depicted in sacred texts of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Goddess traditions. This course will use feminist narrative skills as the primary methodology. Using leading feminists' work from all four traditions, students will investigate what texts may have to say about women's roles in both ancient and modern religious traditions, in world religions, the lives and thoughts of prominent women in religious history, and central issues in feminist theology. *Alternate years. [C, R]*

RELS 24100. NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

An examination of America's marginal but influential religious movements. Nineteenth century groups include Mormons, Spiritualism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists. Twentieth century practices and traditions include Hare Krishnas, the Unification Church, New Age spiritualities, Scientology, Branch Davidians, and Wicca. *Alternate years. [C, R, AH]*

RELS 24300. RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This course studies the many religious purposes (e.g. the understanding of religious experience, formation of religious identity, presentation of a moral or religious ideal, social criticism) that religious autobiographies serve. Such writings also provide readers a window into individual religious lives, experiences, and cultures. Writings selected may include classic Western religious autobiographies such as Augustine's *Confessions* as well as other writings, both historical and contemporary, from a variety of religious traditions. Recommended: one 100-level Religious Studies course. *Alternate years. [Wt, R, AH]*

RELS 25100. MODERN RELIGIOUS THINKERS (Latin American Studies)

An introduction to selected religious thinkers of the 20th Century. Attention will be given to figures representative of major movements, such as neo-orthodoxy, existentialism, process theology, and third world theologies. *[W, R]*

RELS 26300. RELIGION AND LITERATURE

This course examines the ways in which modern and contemporary writers represent religious traditions and experiences, make use of religious narratives and themes and confront religious questions in their novels, short stories, and poetry. Recommended: one 100-level Religious Studies course. *Alternate years. [R, AH]*

RELS 26400. RELIGION AND FILM (Film Studies)

This course examines the interactions of religions and religious life with the electronic media technologies of film and video. Through such a course, students can arrive at better understandings of the place of religions in contemporary cultures, the aesthetics of film and video, and the place of these media as communicators of cultural phenomena such as religion. *Alternate years. [C, R, AH]*

RELS 26900-26938. THEORIES AND ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION (some sections cross-listed with: Classical Studies, Environmental Studies, South Asian Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)

An examination of one major issue involving the interface of sociological, ethical, and theoretical factors, such as Religion, Violence and Peacemaking; Interfaith Dialogue; Religion and the Environment; and Third World Feminist Theology. *Annually. Fall and Spring. [R]*

RELS 41000. ETHICS AND SOCIETY INTERN PROGRAM

Students will be placed for one semester in an agency, organization, or other context where the academic study of religion can be joined with a practical experience in dealing with ethical and religious issues in American society. Three credits, with the possibility of a fourth. (1-3 course credits) S/NC course. Prerequisite: Permission of instructor is required, and previously taken appropriate courses in the department are desirable. Annually.

RELS 40000. TUTORIAL

Individual readings and reports may be required by the instructor. The course may be given an Area I or II designation with departmental approval. (.5 - 1 course credit) Prerequisite: The approval of both the supervising faculty member and the chairperson is required prior to registration.

RELS 40100. JUNIOR INDEPENDENT STUDY

A one-semester course that focuses upon the research skills, methodology, and theoretical framework necessary for Senior Independent Study. Combines tutorial-seminar format. Spring (unless the student is studying off-campus Spring semester).

RELS 45100. SENIOR INDEPENDENT STUDY – SEMESTER ONE

The first semester of the Senior Independent Study project, in which each student engages in creative and independent research guided by a faculty mentor and which culminates in a thesis and an oral examination in the second semester. Prerequisite: RELS 40100.

RELS 45200. SENIOR INDEPENDENT STUDY – SEMESTER TWO

The second semester of the Senior Independent Study project, which culminates in the thesis and an oral examination. Prerequisite: RELS 45100.