

RELIGION

Overview & Learning Goals

Overview

The Department of Religion at Bowdoin engages students in efforts to understand how and why people are religious in various historical and cultural contexts, from a range of academic perspectives, and without sectarian bias. In a global context of increasing connectivity and conflict, religion courses at Bowdoin provide an unparalleled opportunity for students to have nuanced and enduring encounters with an array of religious texts, traditions, narratives, peoples, and places. In addition to our discipline's specific mission, we hold ourselves accountable to the broader mandates of a liberal arts education: to provide a first-rate education for the crafting of serious scholars, engaged citizens, and free humans. We impart to students key skills for the twenty-first century: the ability to analyze a text, report, or image; to formulate relevant questions; to craft a written argument; to recognize and provide evidence; to solve problems; to communicate ideas; to evaluate plausibility and consistency; and to research independently.

There are three common entry points into the department:

- **First-year writing seminars:** These introductory courses focus on the study of a specific aspect of religion and may draw on other fields of learning. These seminars include readings, discussions, presentations, and substantial writing assignments. Topics change from time to time and reflect emerging or debated issues in the study of religion. Recent examples include: Heretics: God and Money; and Astral Religion.
- **1000-level courses:** For students desiring a broad overview of the academic study of religion, the department offers REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion. This course often uses case studies from different religions to illustrate thematic questions in the academic study of religion. The department also offers additional 1000-level courses, such as REL 1150 Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East or REL 1115 Religion, Violence, and Secularization.
- **2000-level courses:** The bulk of the department's offerings are at this level. These courses have no prerequisites and are an appropriate first course for a student desiring a more focused examination of a religion, book(s), or theme. Recent examples include: Modern Jewish Identities; Human Sacrifice; Religion and Science; Religious Cultures of India; Islam; Religion and Politics in South Asia; and Christianity.
- **3000-level courses** study in depth a topic of limited scope but major importance, such as one or two individuals, a movement, type, concept, problem, historical period, or theme. Topics change from time to time. REL 3390 Theories about Religion is required for majors and minors and presupposes previous coursework in the department. Other advanced courses are open to any interested student.

Learning Goals

Students who major/minor in religion:

- Will engage with and understand classic and contemporary theories of religion and classical and contemporary methods for the study of religion
- Will be able to use material from their 2000-level courses to assess and analyze theories of and approaches to the study of religion
- Will be able to understand and analyze religious phenomena and texts in some (minors) or all (majors) of the following areas:

- Texts and traditions of:
 - Middle East and North Africa
 - South and Southeast Asian
 - Ancient Mediterranean
 - Modern Europe and North America
- Thematic approaches

- Will be able to explain how religion is an important human phenomenon that cannot be disentangled from categories such as (but not limited to): politics, gender, race, and society

Course Goals

Students in 1000-level courses:

- Will be able to distinguish confessional from academic approaches to the study of religion
- Will learn that not only is religion difficult to define, but also that claims of religious definition reveal the stakes of the problem
- Will recognize the presuppositions and historical contingencies that shape dominant definitions of religion
- Will become acquainted with some classic theories of religion
- Will study religious texts, phenomena, and practices to gain a deeper understanding of the precise contours and claims of various religions
- Will learn how those texts and practices are historically and socially constructed

Students in 2000-level courses:

- Study in greater depth a particular text—e.g., the Qur'an; religious tradition, e.g., Theravada Buddhism; or theme, e.g., human sacrifice—to be studied across traditions.
- Learn about methodological and theoretical approaches specific to the course's topic
- Read secondary literature—that goes beyond textbooks—on the course's topic

Students in 3000-level courses:

- Study a narrow topic in depth that includes understanding significant scholarly debates
- Write a long paper using primary sources in translation and/or a series of papers that examine certain theories of and approaches to the study of religion
- Conduct outside research beyond the readings listed on the syllabus

Options for Majoring or Minor in the Department

Students may elect to major in religion or to coordinate a major in religion with digital and computational studies, education, or environmental studies. Students pursuing coordinate majors may not normally elect a second major. Non-majors may elect to minor in religion.

Department Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/religion/>)

Faculty

Todd Berzon, *Department Chair*

Lynn A. Brettler, *Department Coordinator*

Professor: Robert G. Morrison (Middle Eastern and North African Studies)

Associate Professors: Todd Berzon, Elizabeth A. Pritchard

Assistant Professor: Claire Robison (Asian Studies)

Faculty/Staff Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/religion/faculty-and-staff/>)

Requirements

Religion Major

The major consists of nine courses.

| Code | Title | Credits |
|---|---|----------|
| Required Courses | | |
| REL 1101 | Introduction to the Study of Religion | 1 |
| REL 3390 | Theories about Religion | 1 |
| Select one course on texts and traditions in each of the following four geographic areas^{a,b} | | |
| Middle East and North Africa | | 1 |
| REL 1150 | Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East | |
| REL 2208 | Islam | |
| REL 2232 | Approaches to the Qur'an | |
| REL 2237 | Judaism Under Islam | |
| REL 3333 | Islam and Science | |
| South and Southeast Asia | | 1 |
| REL 2219 | Religion and Fiction in South Asia | |
| REL 2220 | Hindu Literatures | |
| REL 2221 | Religious Cultures of India | |
| REL 2222 | Early Buddhism | |
| REL 2223 | Mahayana Buddhism | |
| REL 2280 | Goddesses, Gurus, and Rulers: Gender and Power in Indian Religions | |
| REL 2288 | Religion and Politics in South Asia | |
| REL 2808 | Islam in Asia | |
| REL 3209 | Religion on the Move: Migration, Globalization, and the Transformation of Tradition | |
| Ancient Mediterranean | | 1 |
| REL 2213 | Fictions, Fakes, and Forgeries: How Narratives Shaped the Religions of the Ancient | |
| REL 2214 | A History of Anti-Semitism | |
| REL 2215 | The Hebrew Bible in Its World | |
| REL 2216 | The New Testament in Its World | |
| REL 2230 | Human Sacrifice | |
| REL 2235 | Gender and Sexuality in Early Christianity | |
| REL 2239 | Judaism in the Age of Empires | |
| REL 3325 | Deadly Words: Language and Power in the Religions of Antiquity | |
| Modern Europe and North America | | 1 |
| REL 2201 | Black Women, Politics, Music, and the Divine | |
| REL 2250 | Modern Christian Thought | |
| REL 2251 | Christianity | |
| REL 2252 | Marxism and Religion | |
| REL 2257 | Christian Sexual Ethics | |
| REL 2253 | Gender, Body, and Religion | |
| REL 2271 | Spirit Come Down: Religion, Race, and Gender in America | |
| REL 2500 | New Religious Movements in the United States | |
| REL 2520 | Popular Religion in the Americas | |
| REL 2530 | Jesus in the Modern Imagination | |
| REL 2540 | The History of American Christianity | |
| REL 3310 | Religious Toleration and Human Rights | |

Select two courses on thematic approaches^{a,b} 2

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| REL 2207 | Modern Jewish Identities |
| REL 2212 | Religion and Science: Couples Therapy |
| REL 2214 | A History of Anti-Semitism |
| REL 2219 | Religion and Fiction in South Asia |
| REL 2220 | Hindu Literatures |
| REL 2221 | Religious Cultures of India |
| REL 2230 | Human Sacrifice |
| REL 2235 | Gender and Sexuality in Early Christianity |
| REL 2236 | Religion, Nature, and the Environment |
| REL 2252 | Marxism and Religion |
| REL 2253 | Gender, Body, and Religion |
| REL 2257 | Christian Sexual Ethics |
| REL 2280 | Goddesses, Gurus, and Rulers: Gender and Power in Indian Religions |
| REL 2288 | Religion and Politics in South Asia |
| REL 2500 | New Religious Movements in the United States |
| REL 3209 | Religion on the Move: Migration, Globalization, and the Transformation of Tradition |
| REL 3310 | Religious Toleration and Human Rights |
| REL 3325 | Deadly Words: Language and Power in the Religions of Antiquity |
| REL 3333 | Islam and Science |

Select an elective course in religion at any level^c 1

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|----------|---|
| REL 1013 | God and Money |
| REL 1014 | Heretics: Dissent and Debate in the History of Religion |
| REL 1027 | Astral Religion |
| REL 1142 | Philosophy of Religion |

- a One course, on either texts and traditions or thematic approaches must be at the 3000 level.
- b A thematic course can, with the permission of the department chair, replace a course on a geographic area.
- c Students may select from any of the courses listed above, except for REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion and REL 3390 Theories about Religion, or one of the four courses listed below.
- Please consult the department for more information about additional courses that might satisfy these requirements. For a comprehensive list of all courses offered in the last four academic years, please consult the religion courses section of the Catalogue (<https://bowdoin-public.courseleaf.com/departments-programs/religion/#coursestext>).

Religion Minor

A minor consists of five courses.

| Code | Title | Credits |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Required Courses | | |
| REL 1101 | Introduction to the Study of Religion | 1 |
| REL 3390 | Theories about Religion | 1 |
| Select any three Religion courses | | 3 |

Additional Information

Additional Information and Department Policies

- No more than one first-year writing seminar may be counted toward the major.
- Typically, up to three courses taken at another college or university may count toward the major with departmental approval. One credit taken at another college or university may count toward the minor with departmental approval.
- With departmental approval, an independent study (intermediate, advanced, or honors) can be used to satisfy the elective course requirement for the major.
- In order to enroll in REL 3390 Theories about Religion, a major normally is expected to have taken four of the nine required courses.
- Courses that count toward the major or minor must be taken for regular letter grades (not Credit/D/Fail).
- Each religion course required for the major or minor must be passed with a grade of C- or higher.
- Majors and minors may not double-count courses with another department or program.

Honors in Religion

Students contemplating honors candidacy should possess a record of distinction in departmental courses, including those that support the project, a clearly articulated and well-focused research proposal, and a high measure of motivation and scholarly maturity. At the start of the first semester of their senior year, honors candidates enroll in REL 4050 with a faculty member who has agreed to supervise the project. If the proposal, due toward the end of the first semester, is accepted, the student goes on to enroll in REL 4051 for the second semester in order to complete the project.

Information for Incoming Students (p. 3)

Because the Religion Department at Bowdoin does not require students to take REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion in order to enroll in its intermediate or upper level courses, there is more than one entry point into the department's curriculum.

REL 1101 Introduction to the Study of Religion, is comparative in approach and lays out the theoretical contours of the field. Since it is an excellent preparation for intermediate and advanced level courses in the department, potential majors should enroll in it as early as possible. Students are introduced to a theme or topic in at least two religious traditions and to various methodologies and specialized vocabularies employed in the field.

The Religion Department has begun to offer an additional 1000-level course every year. This year, that course will be in the spring semester. Finally, first-year students are welcome to enroll in our 2000-level courses. The Religion Department at Bowdoin is one of the few departments that regularly offers courses at the 2000-level in which students closely examine a particular topic or area (e.g. Christianity, Buddhism, Bible, Islam) in any one semester, and many students do begin with a 2000-level course.

Courses

REL 1013 (c) God and Money

Elizabeth Pritchard.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

Money is frequently assumed to be antithetical to religion even as the two are utterly inseparable. This is what makes it a particularly useful category for exploring what counts as religion—concerns that are integral to the discipline of religious studies and central to humanistic inquiry more broadly. Considers money as a measure of time, as a way human communities construct relationships, as well as how it interacts with moral categories such as value, guilt, and obligation, and theological understandings of sin, debt, poverty, charity, and prosperity. Course readings and visual media consist of predominantly Christian sources with some comparison to other traditions and focus on the significance of money in modern life.

REL 1014 (c) Heretics: Dissent and Debate in the History of Religion

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Writing-intensive, focuses on readings in heretical texts, orthodox creeds, and scholarly treatments of the religious-ideological construction of heresy and orthodoxy. Fundamentally, heresy is dangerous precisely because of its proximity to orthodoxy. Examples focus on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions; attention given to categories such as dogma vs. freedom, pure vs. impure, society vs. individual. Facets of present-day debates on fundamentalism included.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2021.

REL 1101 (c) Introduction to the Study of Religion

Elizabeth Pritchard; Claire Robison.

Every Semester. Fall 2024; Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 50.

Basic concepts, methods, and issues in the study of religion, with special reference to examples comparing and contrasting Asian and Western religions. Lectures, films, discussions, and readings in a variety of texts such as scriptures, novels, and autobiographies, along with modern interpretations of religion in ancient and contemporary Asian and Western contexts..

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2023, Fall 2022, Spring 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2020.

REL 1142 (c) Philosophy of Religion

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 50.

Does God exist? Can the existence of God be proven? Can it be disproven? Is it rational to believe in God? What does it mean to say that God exists (or does not exist)? What distinguishes religious beliefs from non-religious beliefs? What is the relation between religion and science? Approaches these and related questions through a variety of historical and contemporary sources, including philosophers, scientists, and theologians. (Same as: PHIL 1442)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 1150 (c, IP) Introduction to the Religions of the Middle East

Robert Morrison.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 50.

Begins by showing how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the modern Middle East are intertwined closely with politics and with their local contexts. Case studies include modern Iran, Israel, and Lebanon. Investigates how the foundational texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were politically and socially constructed. Considers throughout the influence of other Middle Eastern religions. (Same as: MENA 1150)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2021.

REL 1188 (c, IP) Epics Across Oceans

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Introduces students to the classic Indian epics that form a core literary and cultural tradition within South and Southeast Asia: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Examines how the epics were adapted across different kingships and polities in South and Southeast Asia, becoming part of the traditional culture of almost every part of this vast region. Since the royal patrons and the heroes of these epics were often linked, the manner in which the epics were told reveals the priorities of the different regions. Drawing on film, graphic novels, and multiple performance genres, explores the continuous reworking of these epics for both conservative and radical ends, from ancient India to the present day. (Same as: ASNS 1770)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2201 (c, DPI, VPA) Black Women, Politics, Music, and the Divine

Judith Casselberry.

Every Fall. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

Seminar. Examines the convergence of politics and spirituality in the musical work of contemporary black women singer-songwriters in the United States. Analyzes material that interrogates and articulates the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality generated across a range of religious and spiritual terrains with African diasporic/black Atlantic spiritual moorings, including Christianity, Islam, and Yoruba. Focuses on material that reveals a womanist (black feminist) perspective by considering the ways resistant identities shape and are shaped by artistic production. Employs an interdisciplinary approach by incorporating ethnomusicology, anthropology, literature, history, and performance and social theory. Explores the work of Shirley Caesar, the Clark Sisters, Meshell Ndegeocello, Abby Lincoln, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Dianne Reeves, among others. (Same as: AFRS 2201, GSWS 2207, MUS 2291)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2021.

REL 2204 (c) Science, Magic, and Religion

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Traces the origins of the scientific revolution through the interplay between late-antique and medieval religion, magic, and natural philosophy. Particular attention is paid to the conflict between paganism and Christianity, the meaning and function of religious miracles, the rise and persecution of witchcraft, and Renaissance hermeticism. Note: This course fulfills the pre-modern requirement for history majors. Note: This course is part of the following field(s) of study: Europe. It also meets the pre-modern requirement for history majors and minors.. (Same as: HIST 2040)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2207 (c, DPI) Modern Jewish Identities

Every Other Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Investigates the origins, development, and current state of modern Jewish identities. We will examine both perceptions and the historical realities of Jews' positions in hierarchies through the emergence of modern movements such as Zionism, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Hasidic Judaism. Course emphasizes how members of these movements perceive themselves as integrated into or apart from the rest of society. Topics include Jews and whiteness, Judaism as ethnicity, and Judaism as a global community.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2021.

REL 2208 (c, IP) Islam

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

With an emphasis on primary sources, pursues major themes in Islamic civilization from the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad until the present. From philosophy to political Islam, and from mysticism to Muslims in America, explores the diversity of a rapidly growing religious tradition. (Same as: MENA 2208)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2021.

REL 2212 (c, IP) Religion and Science: Couples Therapy

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

As modern categories, religion and science cannot exist without each other, but the boundary has shifted over time. Traces the prehistory of these categories from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment and analyzes the conversations and arguments between religion and science in modernity. Focuses on the West with frequent comparisons to the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Pays attention to religious discussions of astrology, alchemy, and other occult disciplines. (Same as: HIST 2239)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2213 (c, DPI) Fictions, Fakes, and Forgeries: How Narratives Shaped the Religions of the Ancient

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What makes a text trustworthy? What do authority and authenticity have to do with revelation? Explores the question of what makes a story authentic and accepted within a particular religious tradition versus rejected and marginalized. Investigates stories that have traditionally been excluded from the Jewish and Christian Bible as well as other religious movements of the ancient Mediterranean such as Egyptian Hermeticism, the cult of Dionysus, and other Greco-Roman mystery cults. Includes discussions of ancient authorship, magic, canonization, heresy, and cultural history. Simultaneously discusses the ways in which these fictions, fakes, and forgeries have had (and continue to have) a great influence on the very religious traditions from which they were excluded.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2214 (c, DPI) A History of Anti-Semitism

Marilyn Reizbaum; Todd Berzon.

Every Other Year. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Introduces students to a history of anti-Semitism (and its antecedent, anti-Judaism) as discursive operations in the world. Its title reflects the approach to this topic— rather than trace a linear narrative of the history of anti-Semitism, students will investigate particular moments, cases, loci, and flashpoints of anti-Semitism via film, drama, short stories, treatises, dialogues, and scripture. Focusing on a range of forms and contexts, the course analyzes the continuities and discontinuities within the polemical discourses representing Jews and Judaism. The course will consider, for example, Biblical supersessionism; Blood Libel; The Merchant of Venice, Protocols of the Elders of Zion; Christian Zionist anti-Semitism; the Jewish Museum of London's recent exhibit Jews, Money, Myth; contemporary politics and BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions); and the rise of white nationalism. (Same as: ENGL 2903)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 2215 (c) The Hebrew Bible in Its World

Todd Berzon.

Every Other Year. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

Close readings of chosen texts in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Old Testament), with emphasis on its Near Eastern religious, cultural, and historical context. Attention is given to the Hebrew Bible's literary forerunners (from c. 4000 B.C.E. onwards) to its successor, The Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 200 B.C.E. to 200 A.C.E.). Emphasis on creation and cosmologies, gods and humans, hierarchies, politics, and rituals.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

REL 2216 (c) The New Testament in Its World

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Situates the Christian New Testament in its Hellenistic cultural context. While the New Testament forms the core of the course, attention is paid to parallels and differences in relation to other Hellenistic religious texts: Jewish, (other) Christian, and pagan. Religious leadership, rituals, secrecy, philosophy of history, and salvation are some of the main themes.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2021.

REL 2220 (c, IP) Hindu Literatures

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

In this exploration of Hindu texts, we delve into some of the most ancient and beloved literature from the Indian subcontinent. Students read major scriptural sources, including the Vedas and Upanishads. In our study of the epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad Gita), we discuss translations from Sanskrit and popular retellings of these stories into other languages and media. We discuss the Puranas, reading the story of the warrior Goddess in the Devi Mahatmyam and investigate visual representations of gods and goddesses. We also sample Sanskrit classical poetry and devotional literature to the Goddess translated from Bengali. (Same as: ASNS 2552)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2021.

REL 2221 (c, IP) Religious Cultures of India

Claire Robison.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

A view of the religious cultures of India “from the ground up,” focused on studies of lived religion beyond texts and institutional orthodoxies. With more than 1.3 billion people, India is home to an incredible diversity of religious cultures, including Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist traditions. Readings examine traditions of pilgrimage, temple worship, yoga, goddess possession, healing practices, and rites of passage, including the ordination of monks and nuns. Themes include women's lived authority in contrast to patriarchal structures and contemporary intersections between religion, class, and modernity. Religious cultures of India also exist beyond the modern nation's borders, as diaspora populations have grown around the world and traditions of yoga, gurus, and mantra meditation are popular globally. The course explores these religious cultures in relation to new media and transnational networks, including debates about the practice of Indian religions in Asia and beyond. (Same as: ASNS 2553)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 2222 (c, IP) Early Buddhism

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Introduces students to the major trajectories of Buddhist religious thought and practice. Readings include primary sources such as sermons, monastic codes, miracle tales, sutras, and poetry, as well as secondary scholarship on diverse lived Buddhist practices. Examines Buddhism's transformations in specific historical and cultural settings, from its origins in South Asia to its spread throughout Central, East, and Southeast Asia. Highlights important historical developments, including early Buddhist monastic communities, philosophical traditions, the development of Buddhist art and architecture, Tibetan Buddhist traditions, devotion to the Lotus Sutra, Pure Land practice, and Chan/Zen traditions. Focuses on varied Buddhist practices and goals; dynamics of lay and monastic relations; debates about gender and ethnicity in Buddhist communities; and the interplay of everyday and transcendent concerns. (Same as: ASNS 2554)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2023, Fall 2020.

REL 2230 (c) Human Sacrifice

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Uses the practice of human sacrifice to investigate the relationship between religion and violence. As an act of choreographed devotion, sacrifice implicates notions of debt, transformation, exchange, purification, sacredness, death, and rebirth. It is a ritual designed to destroy for an effect, for an explicit if often intangible gain. On the one hand, human sacrifice involves all of these same issues and yet, on the other, it magnifies them by thrusting issues of agency, autonomy, and choice into the mixture. Must a sacrificial victim go peaceably? Otherwise, would the act simply be murder? Investigates the logic of human sacrifice. How have religions across history conceptualized and rationalized the role and status of the human victim? Considers a diverse range of examples from the Hebrew Bible, Greek tragedies, the New Testament, science fiction, epics, missionary journals and travelogues, horror films, and war diaries.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2021.

REL 2232 (c, IP) Approaches to the Qur'an

Robert Morrison.

Every Other Spring. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Explores a variety of approaches to and interpretations of the Qur'an, the foundational text of Islam. Special attention will be paid to the Qur'an's doctrines, its role in Islamic law, its relationship to the Bible, and its historical context. While the Qur'an will be read entirely in English translation, explores the role of the Arabic Qur'an in the lives of Muslims worldwide. (Same as: MENA 2352)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2020.

REL 2235 (c) Gender and Sexuality in Early Christianity

Todd Berzon.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

Investigates the ways in which gender and sexuality can serve as interpretive lenses for the study of early Christian history, ideas, and practices. Can the history of early Christianity—from the apostle Paul to Augustine of Hippo—be rewritten as a history of gender and sexuality? In answer to that question, addresses a range of topics, including prophecy, sainthood, militarism, mysticism, asceticism, and martyrdom. In addition, by oscillating between close readings and contemporary scholarship about gender, feminism, masculinity, sexuality, and the body, looks beyond the world of antiquity. Aims to show how theories of and about sexuality and gender can fundamentally reorient understandings of Christian history. (Same as: GSWS 2231)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2236 (c, IP) Religion, Nature, and the Environment

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Environmental degradation and climate change have become matters of deep concern to the leaders, institutions, and practitioners of many religious traditions. Practitioners and leaders' words and actions have a history in how nature has been understood as a space in which humans might learn about themselves, about the divine, and about their ethical responsibilities. Sometimes nature has been understood as divine, sometimes independent of divine control, and sometimes just as God's creation. With case studies taken from Christian, Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions, this course surveys changes in religions' views of nature and humanity's responsibilities to nature and, more recently, the environment. This course pays special attention to groups on the racial, socioeconomic, and political margins. (Same as: ENVS 2236)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2022.

REL 2237 (c) Judaism Under Islam

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Since the rise of Islam in the early seventh century C.E., Jews have lived in the Islamic world. The historical experience of these Jews has shaped their religious traditions in ways that have touched Jews worldwide. Places developments in Jewish liturgy, thought, and identity within the context of Islamic civilization. Answers the question of how Jews perceive themselves and Judaism with regard to Muslims and Islam. Analyzes the significance of the Jewish experience under Islam for current debates in Judaism and in Middle East politics.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

REL 2239 (c) Judaism in the Age of Empires

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

How did the Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian empires shape Jewish history? Investigates how ancient Judaism and Jewish society materialized under the successive rule of ancient empires. Analyzes both how the Jews existed as a part of and yet apart from the culture, religion, and laws of their imperial rulers. Readings include a cross-section of literature from antiquity—including the books of the Maccabees, the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic literature, the "Mishnah," and early Christian anti-Jewish polemic—to understand the process by which the Jews created Judaism as a religion in opposition to Christianity and Greco-Roman traditions.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2251 (c) Christianity

Every Other Fall. Enrollment limit: 35.

An introduction to the diversity and contentiousness of Christian thought and practice. Explores this diversity through analyses of the conceptions, rituals, and aesthetic media that serve to interpret and embody understandings of Jesus, authority, body, family, and church. Historical and contemporary materials highlight not only conflicting interpretations of Christianity, but also the larger social conflicts that these interpretations reflect, reinforce, or seek to resolve.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

REL 2257 (c) Christian Sexual Ethics

Elizabeth Pritchard.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

An examination of the historical development, denominational variety (e.g. Catholic, Evangelical, Mormon), and contemporary relevance of Christian teachings and practices regarding sex and sexuality. The course is designed to acquaint students with the centrality of sex to Christian notions of sin and virtue as well as with the broader cultural impact of Christian sexual ethics on the understanding and regulation of gender, the rise of secularization and "family values," and public policy regarding marriage, contraception, reproductive technologies, sex work, and welfare. In addition, students will have opportunities to construct and test moral frameworks that address sexual intimacy and assault, the stigmatization of bodies (with regard to race, class, size, sexuality and disability), and the commoditization of sex and persons. Materials are drawn from the Bible, Church dogmatics, legal cases, contemporary ethicists and documentary film. (Same as: GSWS 2252)

REL 2271 (c) Spirit Come Down: Religion, Race, and Gender in America

Every Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines the ways religion, race, and gender shape people's lives from the nineteenth century into contemporary times in America, with particular focus on black communities. Explores issues of self-representation, memory, material culture, embodiment, and civic and political engagement through autobiographical, historical, literary, anthropological, cinematic, and musical texts. (Same as: AFRS 2271, GSWS 2270)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

REL 2280 (c, IP) Goddesses, Gurus, and Rulers: Gender and Power in Indian Religions

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Provides a historical perspective on how gender and power have intertwined in the diverse religious traditions of India. Explores ideas about femininities, masculinities, and genderqueer identities in religious texts and premodern religious communities, analyzing the influence of monastic ideals, economic patronage, and gendered notions of divine authority. Readings examine mythology, rituals, and ideas about gender and social power in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim traditions; including gender roles in family and culture; transgender identity and religion; and, in the latter part of the course, the impacts of colonialism, nationalist politics, and migration on gender and religion. (Same as: ASNS 2740, GSWS 2292)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2020.

REL 2286 (c, DPI, IP) Karma and Liberation: Violence in South Asian Religions

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

The course provides a historical perspective on forms of violence in several south Asian religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. It explores the role of violence by reading primary sources and reflects upon the significance of religious violence in their sociohistorical contexts. The course content will examine Vedic sacrifice in comparison with sacrifice in other early civilizations, ascetic violence among Buddhist renunciators, the philosophical justification and legitimization of violence in Mahayana and Tantra, and finally the religious violence in anticolonial and nationalist movements in India and Sri Lanka. (Same as: ASNS 2588)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024.

REL 2288 (c, IP) Religion and Politics in South Asia

Claire Robison.

Every Other Year. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

An introduction to religion and politics in a region that is home to about one-fourth of the world's population, with a focus on India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Topics include religious nationalism, religion and violence, and the role of religion in legislative debates about sexuality and gender. Over the past few decades, the region has seen the growth of religious nationalisms in India and Pakistan, a civil war in Sri Lanka that divided citizens along religious and ethnic lines, and the militarization of Kashmir. But South Asia is also home to shared religious shrines and communities whose identities are "neither Hindu nor Muslim," resisting easy categorizations. Pride parades are held in Indian cities, but debates ensue on the role of religion in legislating sexuality. Questions include: How is religion related to national identity? Should religion have a place in democratic legal systems? Can Buddhist monks justify the use of violence in times of war? (Same as: ASNS 2555)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

REL 2305 (c, IP) Voicing the Divine: Religious Modes of Listening and Sonic Embodiment

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

This course explores the complex relationship between language, sound, and hearing in a myriad of religious traditions. Positioning sound and music as our primary lens of inquiry, we examine primary sources and ethnographic studies in our attempt to grapple with the variegated ways religious or mystical experiences are experienced and interpreted. A central component to this course is a focus on practices of listening and it will place in conversation relevant discourse from the fields of voice studies, ethnomusicology, religious studies, and sound studies. Students will engage in methods of vocal analyses and religious studies methodologies on performativity and embodiment. Weekly topics and their affiliated readings will include, but are not confined to Islam and El-Ghayb; spiritualism; African-American sermon traditions; Hindu mysticism; American evangelicalism; Jewish aniconism. (Same as: MUS 2306)

Prerequisites: REL 1101 or MUS 1100 - 1399 or MUS 2100 - 2399 or MUS 3100 - 3399.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 2385 (b, DPI) Muslims in American Society

Hakim Zainiddinov.

Discontinued Course. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

This course explores Muslim Americans' experiences in the US and is intended to enhance students' knowledge about Islam and Muslims to overcome common myths and misconceptions associated with this racial /ethnic and religious minority group. Some of the topics covered during the course include the history of Muslims on American soil, disassociating Islam from the Abrahamic triad of Judaism-Christianity-Islam, diversity aspect of the Muslim American population, assimilation of Muslims to larger society, gender issues ("saving" Muslim women), discrimination and prejudice, Islamophobia, Islam and terrorism (meaning of jihad), depiction of Muslims in American media, and sharia (Islamic law) myth. To gain a better understanding of the historical and contemporary social integration of Muslims in the US, students will explore several key theories, such as orientalism, labeling theory, Muslim feminism, the Blauner hypothesis, and the Noel hypothesis. (Same as: SOC 2385)

Prerequisites: SOC 1101.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 2500 (c) New Religious Movements in the United States

Elizabeth Pritchard.

Every Other Year. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

The word "cult" conjures all sorts of stereotypes which obscure more than they reveal. This class aims to peel back the misapprehensions, prejudices, and biases relating to New Religious Movements in the U.S., analyze how and why they form, and what they tell us about religion in the modern world. This course will focus on a variety of movements including Mormonism, Heaven's Gate, The People's Temple, and Pastafarianism.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2020.

REL 2520 (c) Popular Religion in the Americas

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What makes a particular religious practice “popular,” and what does “popular” religion indicate about the future of religion in America? This course explores the relationship between institutional religion and popular religion—sometimes labeled “lived” or “vernacular” religion—in the Americas. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which popular religious practices challenge or complement institutional religion in the lives of practitioners. Readings will focus on social, economic, and political aspects of popular religious practices, examining the ways they challenge or reinforce categories like class, race, and gender. Topics may include the Mexican saint of death (Santa Muerte), the emergence of the designation “spiritual but not religious,” Sherlock Holmes fan culture, and the veneration of science and scientists.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

REL 2530 (c) Jesus in the Modern Imagination

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

How has media shaped modern perceptions of the figure of Jesus? How do these representations fit or clash with the Jesus of the Bible and other ancient texts? Explores the narrative behind the Jesus movement and the countless stories about it told through a variety of media—texts, films, artwork, songs, etc. Investigates how these depictions are formed and how they shape cultural understandings of Jesus and Christianity. Includes discussions of historical Jesus, authorial intent, modern “forgeries,” comedy and religion, gender and sexuality, and pop theology.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

REL 2540 (c) The History of American Christianity

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

In this course, we seek to understand the ways in which Christianity intertwines with the histories of colonization, settlement, slavery, progressivism and globalization that continue to shape life in the modern United States. In addition to introducing students to the denominations that both drove and were transformed by these histories (e.g. Catholicism and mainline Protestantism), we will examine the novel forms of Christianity that emerged in and are frequently identified with peculiarly American projects of individualism, work, self-help, and prosperity (Mormonism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism). Rather than simply focus on Christian theologies and doctrines, we will consider how ordinary Christians use their beliefs and practices to navigate these challenging periods in American history.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

REL 2544 (c) Religion in the United States South

Discontinued Course. Enrollment limit: 35.

For many Americans, conservative, evangelical Christianity and the U.S. South are coextensive. And yet, for most of the colonial period and even into the Early Republic the south was not particularly religious. This course will seek to understand what changed in the early 1800s. We will trace the co-development of evangelicalism, English honor culture, slavery, and free market capitalism in the antebellum period in order to better understand the rise of Jim Crow. In addition, we will consider the distinct religious elements of the Civil Rights movement and the Catholic, immigrant, and secular dimensions of the Nuevo South.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

REL 3209 (c) Religion on the Move: Migration, Globalization, and the Transformation of Tradition

Claire Robison.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 16.

Contemporary migration and globalization trends have transformed where and how religious traditions are practiced, radically altering the landscape of local religion around the world. But religion in practice is always changing, and what we consider “timeless traditions” are also reframed by individuals and communities in every generation. While migration has been integral to the development of many religions, this course considers how contemporary migration and the global spread of practices like yoga and meditation have led to the creation of new religious identities, diversifying where religions are practiced around the world. Readings highlight debates about religious identity in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, and transnational communities, including the rise of mega gurus in India and the US, the global popularity of Buddhism, and the relationship between race, religion, and authority among American Muslims. (Same as: ASNS 3831)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

REL 3325 (c) Deadly Words: Language and Power in the Religions of Antiquity

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, speech was fraught with danger and uncertainty. Words had enormous power—not just the power to do things but a tangible power as things. Words attached themselves to people as physical objects. They lived inside them and consumed their attention. They set events in motion: war, conversion, marriage, death, and salvation. This course investigates the precarious and deadly presence of oral language in the religious world of late antiquity (150 CE to 600 CE). Focusing on evidence from Christian, Jewish, and pagan sources—rabbinic literature, piyyutim, curse tablets, amulets, monastic sayings, creeds, etc.—students will come to understand the myriad ways in which words were said to influence and infect religious actors. For late ancient writers, words were not fleeting or ethereal, but rather quite tactile objects that could be felt, held, and experienced. It is the physical encounter with speech that orients this course. (Same as: CLAS 3325)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2022.

REL 3390 (c) Theories about Religion

Todd Berzon.

Every Fall. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

Seminar focusing on how religion has been explained and interpreted from a variety of intellectual and academic perspectives, from the sixteenth century to the present. In addition to a historical overview of religion’s interpretation and explanation, also includes consideration of postmodern critiques and the problem of religion and violence in the contemporary world.

Prerequisites: REL 1101.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2020.